

BM: Which meant, again, that the locals and the people here who were working out of a different poetic essentially, had some trouble fitting into the UBC creative writing department. It was exclusive and off on its own.

JB: It was regarded with derision. There were people like yourself who were in it who were writers but—

BM: I was drawn downtown.

JB: You were a member of it, but you weren't part of the poetic, I don't think, really. [laughter]

BM: No. That's why I had trouble there. I was reading and I was studying. I wasn't going to buy any notion that you had to ignore your own landscape in order to reach the cosmos. I think they said, he's here, and he's not going to screw our department up, so leave him alone. Two years of being left alone.

JB: Right. Yates must have been a good person to be the poetry person that you were relating to.

BM: Because he left me alone entirely.

JB: If he'd been a bad poet then you would have a problem because he would have been trying to correct your stuff.

BM: No, there was none of that going on. I've re-thought Yates's poetry. I think Belford writes with that kind of seriousness and drama, but it comes more out of the Williams notion of the particular to the universal, and I think that's the one link that those guys didn't pay much attention to. Yates didn't have a good musical ear. That was my problem with him—not so much the content and what he was saying. It was a technical problem. He's full of philosophical content, and I like meaning in poetry, I really do.

JB: For a long time many of the people who studied under Yates began to write in the triad form that he was using. Is that what it was called? The three line verse, and in fact the best thing that the creative writing department ever did for Talonbooks was that it sent Ken Belford to us, and I recognized Belford right away despite the fact that a lot of poetry in that book—I think all of it that got published was in the triad form or the 3 line stanzas.

BM: He revised the original poems into that 3 line form, apparently.

JB: Yes. But at that point that was probably good. He probably needed to meet someone with as much discipline as Michael Yates, because he hadn't gone through some of the things that we'd gone through—and the good thing about Michael Yates is that he would do things like that. He would say, “well look, I met this guy Belford and you should get together.” He wasn't selfish, I don't really feel.

BM: No, you're right.

JB: So he sent Belford. But in those days it was like the Yankee fans and Dogers fans as to what school of poetry you belonged to. It hardly seems relevant in the 80s...the war of the word. When Ken Belford came to see me I immediately recognized it as the very best manuscript that I had anything to do with.

BM: You must have told David Robinson that this was one guy he had to print, no matter what—or something like that, because David was never quite sure...

JB: No, he had to be told. That's why we were a good team. When I took my year's leave of absence, he acquired a whole bunch of lackeys who told him what I had been telling them, only they were wrong. [laughter] He was good at following up. He is a tireless worker. He'd work all night stapling things together, and I'd say gee, I guess we've got to get that stapling done and he'd say, “no it's all done.” [laughter]

BM: So that would leave you time to take drugs and chase women and study poetry. [laughter]

JB: Well, you know, from 1967 to 1970—they were my golden years, from the time that I got the Belford book out. I don't know if you've noticed it, but the Belford book and *If There are Any Noahs*, the first two Talon/Very Stone House books stapled in the back, are stapled in such a way as to give the impression—now this is getting down to the nitty gritty of the economics of publishing—[of perfect binding] with this wrap around folded cover, which cost me a lot of money—so I could sell these for more money and they sold fairly well. And the Belford book has this great cover [holds up a copy]. This is a distorted print that I saved but you can still see him here lighting the cigarette, but everything is out of register.

BM: I loved these things, and was absolutely envious of the notion of—finally a real book at last.

JB: Well you see we didn't go to what's called perfect binding until about a year later when we ran into a company, I think it was called Blaine Trade Bindery or something, who quoted us a price to do this that was cheaper than it was to do this, and we hadn't been able to find that price. Also the number of copies that we were doing went up. There were 750 of these Belford and Brown books. The Belford book got recognition for an unknown poet who had never even published in *Talon* magazine up until that point—the book was out before his first poem in a magazine ever appeared.

BM: Are you sure about that?

JB: Well, Ken might tell us that he had a publication here or there, but he didn't have more than you can count on one hand.

BM: I'll tell you a little anecdote about Ken. I went to Prince George in 1969. He showed up that fall and he phoned me about midnight and said, "Barry?" and I said, "yes" and he said, "my name is Ken Belford, you probably haven't heard of me..." I said, "no, I have, I have." [laughter] He said, "I've been reading your poetry."

JB: Well, you see, people were reading it.

BM: I'm sure I read him in *Talon* magazine. I'll have to check that. It could have been *Fireweed* that I'd read. But that moment in my life proved the other value of the little magazine. Not only does it give a writer legitimacy, but it gives you your contacts and in this case, it becomes a life long contact—long friendships that developed out of this stapled little magazine.

JB: Exactly! Mimeo heaven. [laughter]

BM: So this started a long friendship. We sat up that first night until 6 or 7 in the morning talking. He was the first poet I met up in Prince George who was familiar with Vancouver and the seriousness of writing, the seriousness of the kind of writing we were trying to do. And of course David Phillips, a similar situation—meeting him at your place in the fall of 1967.

JB: You see, David Phillips was someone who published in *Talon* because I was involved and we had mutual friends in society. David had a rich

heritage in that he'd known bpNichol (they were very good friends) and he'd been to Coach House Press.

BM: He was, I think, one of the first western writers to have a Coach House book, called *The Dream Outside*. After the Belford book, the next important thing for Talonbooks was that magic happened through David Robinson's hard work in getting money for grants. I remember David and I going to meet Naim Kattan from the Canada Council at the Bayshore Inn. David was coaching me because our talents worked off of each other, and he was coaching me—now look, this guy is a French Canadian journalist!...he probably publishes in a very prestigious newspaper (we didn't even know the name of it) and anyway, here's a guy who's sympathetic. He realizes this great rift and he realizes the resentment, but he doesn't understand it. David said, one of the things he'll probably ask is "why is there so much resentment? Why do west coast people resent the east so much? Why is there so much animosity?" And he did indeed ask us that, and we were the perfect people for the situation.

BM: Where was the grant money going? Mostly to the east.

JB: I think that's probably what I said, although I can't come up with a quote on that. I think I said, "well, the resentment is due to the fact that we're not getting published" and David said that it's absolutely necessary that a real west coast publishing house be established. Through that meeting money started to trickle to Talonbooks. Ken Belford's book and my book were produced by my own personal money, and I never got a cent back from it at all—it all went into the company. I worked in a liquor store 3 days a week and I had a full load at university, and I produced them. It's my one really benevolent act. I did it, and I've never resented it. It was an accomplishment.

BM: You were working in the liquor store so, no problem! [laughter]

JB: Well some guys in the liquor store were pretty goods guys. I was known as the poet laureate of the L.C.B., and I wrote poems about the liquor store and about the working situation and I sold quite a few books at the liquor store. [laughter] The whole idea in the 60s was trying to make poetry palatable to the people, wasn't it?

BM: I think so. To make it part of experience.

JB: Instead of being something that your aunt read and you didn't. So that was the stage where Talonbooks did its best work. We produced bill

bissett's *awake in the red desert*, and we produced a book by Jamie Ried, *The Man Whose Path Was on Fire*. We distributed a Pierre Coupey book, *Circle Without Centre*, which Pierre had done on his own. Distribution was a big reason why Very Stone House and Talon collaborated for awhile. For quite some time Pat Lane and Seymour Mayne were very helpful to us. We got a book of David Phillips's together. We did a book by Helene Rosenthal. We eventually did Peter Trower's first book with the great illustrations by Jack Wise. Then we set upon the monster thing *West Coast Seen*. We stopped producing *Talon*. It seemed to have lost its relevancy and we had been called to a greater task. We were publishers! We didn't have a little toy magazine anymore—and in fact, the magazine had served its purpose, I think. As I'm going to say in 10 minutes or so, I think that *Talonbooks* at one point served its purpose. We did a lot of good books at that point, and I became associated with the music department at UBC. We were into multimedia productions; poetry readings were aided by a 500 watt amp and speakers and light shows. We produced 3 records; one of bissett, one of myself, and one of international artists including Lionel Kearns and bpNichol, and so within the period of time from 1967, in the fall when we produced the Belford and the Brown book, through to 1969 when I was not associated with UBC, we accomplished more than any small press had ever accomplished in Canada in that short period of time.

BM: The records, of course, were a whole other dimension of publishing. I don't know how that works, but I can imagine getting recording time in studios—the expense of all that.

JB: Well Barry, it was the greatest pleasure of my life. My lifelong friendship with Ross Barrett had given me access to a brand new recording studio, and an electronic music room that they built at the UBC music building. And for the bissett production—I knew that bissett was not being recognized in Canada because nobody could hear him. The only people who heard him were people who got to his readings, and some people would be scared off, so I knew that we had to produce a record of bissett whether we produced anything else or not, and to do this I formed a company called See/Hear productions, which incorporated Ross Barrett and Wayne Carr, who works at the sound studio at SFU, and that gave me unlimited access—in fact, I made friends with a person called Courtland Halpberg, not on a personal basis but to the point where he saw I was not doing anything with his equipment that was endangering it because it was his baby, and we set up the bissett recording session. As we envisioned it there was going to be bissett, and Ross was going to be looping voices so that we could have some variety. Wayne was going to be making synthesized sounds on a machine called the Buchla Box, which was a forerunner of Moog. And

bissett was going to bring a band called the Mandan Massacre. The Mandan Massacre got lost somewhere between bissett's house above the Salvation Army on 4th Avenue and UBC, and they got totally wrecked on the way. By the time they got to UBC, we were totally ready for them. I tell you, if you're going to record somebody, be ready—and they came in; Greg Simpson set up his drums, a guy who died was playing the electric guitar. There was an acoustic guitar. There were 3 or 4 people beating on things. A couple of girls were there. Martina was there. And so bissett had himself, his strong powerful voice and a band, and so it just happened. The session went along. We managed to get bill to proceed at the point where he'd let us make loops of his voice so that you can get these over-rhythms and under-rhythms and his chanting. We beat the band back occasionally and put baffles up so that they weren't too loud—and the academic guy, Wayne, who was at that point being drawn out of his academic electronic music, managed to produce music that went with bissett in a way which I've never heard anything else go with him. It was a GO session and it went solidly from 2 in the afternoon until 6 or 7 at night, and there's some good cuts.

We had an experience with Al Neil a few weeks later where it just didn't work. We had him in a perfect room and we had a 16 track tape recorder, 16 microphones. We had Al Neil's trio and lots of time to set up. In fact, they set up for 8 hours and they never got started. Al didn't ever want any of the stuff released. We released one cut on one of the records and it doesn't represent the dynamic qualities of the Al Neil trio at all. It was a failure. It was partly an oversight on our part. We were much more ready for the bissett situation. We made sure when the recording session was happening that everything was a go. In the case of Al Neil we left it up to him because he was a musician; he wasn't just a writer. And he probably would have liked it better if we just said "do this and do that." [laughter] Al might disagree with that. And as for the other recording—mine, *Oh See Can You Say*, I did a lot on some equipment I had.

BM: Your record seemed to be the most engineered and polished of them all—the cleanest.

JB: Well you see I was working directly with the two musicians Ross Barrett and Wayne Carr, and many of the things that are on my album are actually compositions by Wayne or Ross based on my spoken voice. And the way that was done was I would go in and read the poem onto a tape; they would take the voice and alter it, and only in a couple of instances am I actually reading live. There were tapes for me to read with at rock concerts where the background would be recorded for me. Sometimes I'd write part of the music, but basically the musicians would write the music. Mostly

the very good productions are actually compositions where they took my voice and treated it like an instrument, and I think there is a lot to be gained by that sort of thing; it isn't strictly, per se, poetry. It's going beyond, which is what I was trying to do. I was trying to go beyond it every way that I could for those years.

BM: We've got See/Hear productions with Barrett, and then you've got down here in your notes—"getting away from it."

JB: Talonbooks had been really struggling, as I say. After the meeting with Naim Kattan we had a trickle of money. And I went in January of '69—this could be the wrong date, but it was January of some year, I believe it was 1969—to Montreal. Victor Coleman and myself were invited to a meeting of Canadian publishers and I got there two days early to this big old hotel in Montreal, the Windsor hotel I think. I rattled around in there thinking, gawd, somebody's got to show up here sooner or later, and nobody did, so I went out and got the flavour of Montreal and it was a wonderful experience. I hadn't been able to get back east because I didn't have the dough, and so there I was. Finally the meeting happened. I went into the room and there were 14 or 16 individuals all in dark suits, with dark ties, white shirts and briefcases, and then there was this bearded guy sitting down at the end and I thought, that's got to be Victor. I went down and shook hands with him. I had a beard too and an old brown tweed jacket, and he said "let's get outta here." We went up to his room and got acquainted and went back down to the meeting and of course the way people shuffle paper back east it wasn't started yet; we didn't miss anything. We were given an opportunity to tell those 14 or 16 guys who were the guy from McClelland and Stewart, Ryerson, big presses in Canada no matter how commercial or non-commercial that they were, we were able to tell them why we thought we should get money, because they had their own dossiers already to tell the council what they should get, and they were surprised about how well prepared we were, to some extent. They expected a couple of spaced-out hippies and we were anything but that, even though we had long hair and beards. It was a pretty important meeting because at that meeting there was the big discussion: should bill bissett be given his fourth Canada Council grant and the 14 or 16 guys all said "no" because that would mean that bill bissett would become a welfare poet and it would be established that the Canada Council was basically funding poets who never had to be any good, that they could simply sluff off and collect their welfare.

BM: In bissett's case that kind of thinking shouldn't apply.

JB: Well no, but you see, these people not only probably hadn't read *bill bissett*, but if they had they would have been offended. He didn't fit into the eastern conception of publication, and so the thing that is really important about that meeting is that we were given as good and fair treatment as we could. The other issue that was mentioned, and it wasn't brought into play, was how should the money be allocated? We felt that it should be allocated to small presses to do what they wanted to do; if they were going to be granted so much money per book then the council should tell us how many books we could do and give us the money.

BM: And autonomy.

JB: Well, the question of autonomy was starting to come up. The other publishers were quite willing to submit their books to the Canada Council and if the Canada Council didn't want to fund this book or that book—they were large commercial operations and they could weather that. When it was suggested to us that we would have to submit our manuscripts to the Canada Council, and that someone on the Canada Council could say "no" we rebelled against that—probably tactfully because I don't remember there being any bare-knuckly situations or anything.

BM: It's quite simple. If you are the editor of the press, then you make editorial decisions about the manuscripts you solicit or receive. You can't send them to a peer group or people on a committee somewhere to make editorial decisions. But that's the way it finally worked out with the block-grant system. Maybe all that's changed now.

JB: You see, at that point I said that I did not want to accept money from the Canada Council that would create that situation, and I said that you've got to realize that there's a difference between our presses and these other presses. We have been doing these things without money, without monetary motive, whereas publication in the rest of Canada is tied to the dollar value and these people are probably going to publish these books anyway—we're going to publish them anyway, but the danger will be that small presses, and not my press or Victor's press, will start submitting manuscripts and only publishing the ones that are accepted by the Canada Council. Back in Vancouver, people who had heard about this meeting when I got back, had already become, as the Vancouver scene tends to, very very paranoid and schizophrenic about this. People said, *that's what's going to happen*. The Canada Council is going to become the editor for small presses—and it did happen. It happened to my press. I took a year's leave of absence in 1970. I went out to write a novel. I produced the novel, took it in. The press was cooking along. We had accepted the manuscript for

The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, which was the first Talonbook that made money. My novel manuscript was submitted to the Canada Council, it was refused, and it was refused by Talonbooks.

BM: Your own publishing company!

JB: Yup. The two copies in existence, one in the Talonbooks file, and one in David Robinson's file, disappeared. The big falling out came over that issue. I said that it should be published because we had accepted it.

BM: So, you took this year off to write a novel...

JB: I accepted my book. [laughter] And David, as happened in the past, wasn't sure about it, but he had not been sure about other things. In fact I was as much the editor and he the publisher as you can get.

BM: It's too bad that wasn't clearer in the relationship. His literary judgement always seemed to depend on some other person's judgement.

JB: That's a bit harsh. His taste in things differed somewhat from mine. He published people like Helene Rosenthal and John Hulcoop, who had been contributors to *Talon* and definitely were writing poetry, but I didn't feel that they were part of what I could call the main thrust of poetry in Vancouver.

BM: Let me be clear on this. I think that what started with you, the connection with Belford, Phillips, bpNichol and others—a particular group who were, who could have been, in the same way that Coach House has its list of writers, Talonbook's writers—that those were the ones you support and publish.

JB: But you see, David had his own conception of Talonbooks and, as I say, we tended to do one for you and one for me. I would say, "well we *have* to do this book," and he would say, "we *have* to do this book," and for a long time that worked. I think it worked through the 60s. When it came to my novel manuscript I had submitted a rough draft. Why not? We were told that we could submit outlines to the Canada Council. Well, they rejected this. They said, "this isn't finished work." Well, it wasn't a rough draft. I was working on it. Anyway, somehow in the confusion, that novel got lost. I no longer had a copy of it—and we'll leave that for a minute because we want to stay chronological—but that has a play in the sourness that has developed between myself and the company that I founded.

Anyway, at this point, *By the Light of the Silvery McLune* had been

produced by Lionel Kearns and we agreed to do a thing like Very Stone House had done—put our imprint on the inside of it, and help him distribute it. We'd done that with Pierre Coupey. At that point we were pushing *Moving Through the Mystery*, by Peter Trower and Jack Wise, which cost a lot of money. It sold well, but not well enough. We had a debt. We were struggling with a debt at this time and I was off taking my sabbatical. David had taken one. And I figured that I could do that but what I didn't realize was that there was probably a hell of a lot of work going on at Talonbooks and I wasn't doing any of it. I still wanted to be the editor—and you can't do that. I'm not saying that I was right—to look back on it. Also the girl who had been doing all of my typing, she and I broke up, and she was still part of Talonbooks. I think I got weaned away from it. It didn't need me and I didn't need it. The last book that I accepted for publication was *Still Water* by bp Nichol, and as you know, it did the best that you can do in Canadian poetry. It might have been the first fringe press group that won the Governor General's Award. I accepted that manuscript out here after a reading at SFU. Barrie showed it to me and I said, "right—well I guess you don't want us to do any editing on it." It has very few words in it, it's pages in a box. David really liked that project. I think that David did recognize some of the stuff. It's just that I don't think he recognized what was, like you say, the stable of Talon writers who were going to be writing and continuing to get better and better.

Also David had always been involved with drama. It was totally up to David to get *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, and I think he had to do some footwork to get it. It was the best thing that he or anybody ever did in terms of money for Talonbooks. All of a sudden Talonbooks had a seller. We did a James Reaney play and it didn't do what the George Ryga play did. It cost a lot of money and James Reaney is a good writer, but it didn't work the magic and the money. So my book comes back rejected by the Canada Council and I take a hard line on it. Well if that is *it* then I'm not the editor, David, and you're not the editor; some anonymous writer employed by the Canada Council—in fact it could be Michael Yates, it could be Irving Layton, it could be Fred Cogswell—we don't know who it is. We know somebody in the writing community has said no, and if we don't produce this book, that's it. THAT was my issue. We don't produce this book, THAT'S IT. And at the same time, as a writer I realize that if I—well it's a danger you could run into in your life if you stay too close to that group of people who are all writing and publishing—that you don't do anything else, so that you don't have anything to write about ultimately. Because I wanted to write prose I felt that I needed to get out there somehow, and so I allowed myself to be weaned away from Talonbooks. I see Talonbooks from 1967 to 1971 as being a poetry publishing company. I see Talonbooks from that period on as being mainly a play and a general publishing company.

It's done very well for Canada in play publishing, but it represented a change in spirit from the original conception. The original conception was along the line of Very Stone House—to produce books by new poets and give them their start in life, and the difficulty with that is that you can't make money doing it. David has done well in choosing certain books that he's produced. One good thing about Talonbooks is that they've continued to publish bill bissett. I've got *plutonium missing* at home. I've got 2 or 3 books by bill that I thought they did a pretty good job on.

BM: No doubt about it. They started to match that kind of Coach House Press quality.

JB: Talonbooks was a catalyst idea that David and I had, and made into a publishing house and struggled through the difficulties of that. I didn't. I was lucky. I wanted to be a writer and in a way you can even look at it as a cop-out on my part because it was all very easy for me to say, "well, if the Canada Council was the editor, I don't want any part of this." It would have been harder for me to stay there and do something with it.

The next phase in my involvement with publishing in Vancouver is that I managed to feed a few projects through the Talonbook's mill. I got a project that was produced as loose pages in a batik bag called *The Mission Fair Book*, which was the most different book that I ever edited. I insisted that they finish *West Coast Seen*, which was being put on a back burner to some extent. At one point it wasn't being distributed. It was sitting printed. I went down to that place they had below Hastings Street and I said, "well, how come *West Coast Seen* isn't in the bookstores?" And he said, "we've got boxes of them. We can't see it." And I said, "but it's the most important anthology to ever come out of the west coast, the only real anthology of west coast poetry," and for some reason, through some committee decision or something, it wasn't being distributed very well. *West Coast Seen* is basically a giant issue of Talon, but it's like a collection. We took the best poems by each person and put them all together whether they'd been published here, there, or anywhere. The *Still Water* production was definitely produced after I was a force—it was something that I had accepted. I did that book called *Some Useful Wild Plants*, edited by Dan and Nancy Jason and illustrated by Robert Inwood, who is an important illustrator. David liked that project; it's quite different and it's certainly not poetry. Around then it got to be emotionally impossible to associate. I had a Scottish temper and when things weren't happening I would unleash it and it's not a good thing to bring into business—so I have my own faults. My next publishing venture was Blue Mountain Books. I had the books printed at Intermedia. The goal was to produce 5 books of Canadian Literature and to qualify for a grant so that I

could start my own little press. There again it would have been a hobby publishing house. I no longer had the energy to do what David is doing or used to do. It's a hell of a lot of work.

BM: I hear David is publishing cookbooks now.

JB: Well you know, maybe that's the evolution of small presses and somebody like Karl Siegler comes along and wants to get in there—and does a good job.

BM: It's common with small presses that there is a short life-span, whether it's one year or 10 or 15.

JB: But with Talon books that hasn't happened to it and that's probably been the best thing about it. People like Warren Tallman—Warren didn't espouse our poetic at all at Talon, but he was always a supporter. When they had legal problems...it was for bill bissett and Talonbooks—Warren organized a terrific set of readings. They had something like 1,200 people out to some of those readings and they had a band, which is to my way of thinking. A poetry reading should be fun. I remember going to bissett's reading and Ginsberg's and I saw the one with Victor and Barrie Nichol and bill, and that was pretty good. So Talonbooks in 1987, if it's still producing books, will have lasted for 20 years, and as the kindling spirit of Talonbooks I have to be proud, unquote! [laughter]

BM: I guess that's it for this interview! [laughter]

JB: Well Barry, I believe in the spirit of freedom. People who write poetry are not the kind of people who are about to be subjected to regimentation, and if the Canada Council died, something else would pop up and create a situation which would help writers in Canada. The reason for small presses is because the writer is not ready to produce something which is going to sell 100 thousand copies or even 10 thousand copies, or even 100 copies. The writer needs that—he needs to sow his wild oats. He needs to get out there and make mistakes and make successes, and I'd be willing to devote another 10 years of my life working with other small presses and probably will, just so there is a climate in Canada for writers to get a chance.

BM: Give them a chance.

JB: Why not? Somebody gave us our chances. It's important to note that Al Purdy and Earl Birney were major forces in helping young writers, and they supported us at every step of the way along the path, particularly them,

and lots of other people. And they wrote some damn fine poetry of their own, and when they weren't doing that they could have hogged the glory to themselves and they didn't, not as far as I ever sensed.

Just to end this, I'd like to mention the workers at Talonbooks in the early days: Judith Finch, Anne Cook, and Janie McElwie, the girls who bent, stapled, typed, and mailed things out. Gordon Fidler did our light shows, became our printer and put up with a lot of abuse. Gordon's photography and design also played a part. Arnold Saba, Gordon's partner in filmmaking and the *Majenta Frog* magazine which we printed. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson who supported us and at times let their house become our office and warehouse. Louis Atkinson and Francis Brown, my devoted typing ladies and personal source of inspiration. Sandra Cruickshank who married Ross Barrett and did a lot of the art work on my early books and covers for *Talon* magazine. Without these devoted helpers, David and I could not have done what we did.



Jim Brown, cover of *Toward a Chemistry of Reel People* (1971)

“Desperation Filters Up Through the Positions”:
Two Letters from the Talonbooks Archive

Tucked away in the massive archives of Talonbooks, dating back 20 years to its beginnings, are a pair of unique letters dating back to July 19, 1977. Filed as they are with other correspondence dealing with the day-by-day affairs of a busy literary press, they leap out of that mundane enclosure—first, as an instance of a moment in midstream when the pressure of inconsistency and contradiction occasioned the need to write; and secondly, as documents that reflect the tenuous ground of literary publishing in Canada some 10 years ago. Since Karl said yes to the request from *Line* to reprint these letters written to and from “Mr. Siegler,” we visited him at his office on E. Cordova to have him recall what prompted him to speak to and about his various publishing selves.

Line: Karl, didn't you have something more important to do than write to yourself on that morning of July 19th?

KS: No. In fact writing to myself that way was the only thing I could have done that morning. Things had reached a certain kind of crisis level around the issues the letters discuss—actually had become absurd and Talonbooks was in deep trouble. We had to get these absurdities resolved if the press was to survive.

Line: It really seems as if you were on the verge of role suicide. Why not just stick to publishing literary books, period? Why get wrapped up in all those publishing associations?

KS: Yes, exactly. What I wanted those letters to portray was exactly that, a kind of public absurd role suicide. You can't in Canada “just publish literary books,” for a variety of economic reasons that I can't go into in detail here. Basically the Canadian book market is too small to sustain a publishing industry as long as our book prices are determined by our American competitors who work in a market twelve times the size of the Canadian English language book market—a market dominated at a level of

about 77% by foreign books, mostly American. I realized way back in 1974 when I joined Talonbooks as business manager that some form of government support was needed if Canadians were going to have their own books, authors and publishers. That's why I got heavily involved right from the beginning in these publishing associations. In fact, I co-founded two of them—the Literary Press Group (LPG) and the B.C. Publishers Group (BCPG) in 1974-75. I saw this as part of my job—i.e. to make the company as lean and as efficient as possible, and since that was not enough to sustain it, to work on an adequate cultural policy from both the federal and provincial governments, which would allow us to survive. Now, what was happening in 1977 was that the federal support programs in publishing had eroded since 1971 when they were started to the point that they were only providing about 50% of the total support needed by publishers to continue. This situation was exacerbated if you: a) published for a small specialized cultural market (literature for example) and b) were located outside the province of Ontario which at the time was the only English language province in Canada providing provincial support to publishers in addition to the federal support we were all receiving. Since the overwhelming majority of Canadian publishers were located in Ontario (82.5%), most of the members of the national association, the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP), were not feeling the pinch as much as we were, publishing literature in B.C. That's why I co-founded the LPG and the BCPG—to draw attention to the fact that if somebody didn't do something about getting either provincial support to publishers outside Ontario or additional federal support to those publishers we wouldn't have any non-Ontario publishers left in the country, especially if they were specializing in things like literature.

Line: The title we've chosen for the letters was written by you in the corner of the first letter.

KS: Yes, well I wrote that in the corner after I finished the letters as a comment to myself about the whole exercise. You see, while my colleagues in the national association understood my rational arguments on the subjects of literary and regional publishing—that they were declining due to funding inequities—most of those colleagues were in Ontario, so the whole thing was just an abstract problem to them that they could ignore. So like all associations, if you want something done, you get a committee going and work on it. The only problem was I seemed to be the only one willing to take this problem seriously, so I did all the work on it in the national association. But instead of getting the national association to take this problem seriously and work on it with some solidarity, I ended up simply having this dialogue with myself as the guy at the national

association responsible for the type of problem plaguing my company. And it was getting totally absurd. So I wrote these letters and circulated them in the associations to point out to people how absurd the situation had become. And it did work—in a way that all my reasoned arguments had not. The ACP wrote briefs to the Canada Council, we got somewhat more effective regional and literary consideration, and in 1978 the Department of Communication (DOC) started doing things. Now I'm not saying these letters did all that, but they helped. People finally started taking these issues seriously.

Line: Has the situation changed? Are the contents of your letters no longer relevant—that is, properly now domiciled in the archive?

KS: No things haven't changed at all—in fact they've gotten worse. Now all English language provinces have some form of sophisticated program to assist publishers in their jurisdictions, except B.C. which is still largely ignoring us except for a few token gestures here and there. We've gotten around that for the last several years in a way by exploiting the DOC's program which is based on sales, with our cookbooks. But of course everybody realized the absurdity of that program and for 1987 the DOC program has changed and we're right back to where we were 10 years ago—it's almost unbelievable. I think the feds have gone as far as they can to make up for the province's incompetence and negligence. It's really up to B.C. now to finally get off its ass and do something for writing and publishing here.

Line: Nevertheless, we'd like to congratulate Talonbooks for 20 years of high quality publishing! Any reflections to share with our readers as you look back?

KS: Yes, we've been very very lucky for a number of reasons: we've always had very good people here—bright, idealistic and committed and so on. And although the terrible struggles of the past 20 years have really burned out a lot of those wonderful people, someone else has always come in to take up the torch so to speak. The other thing is that we've been bailed out three times in our history, at times when, no matter what we could have done, we were going down. Yeah, so it's been very brutal but someone or something has always shown up in the nick so to speak. But then those were the times too. We're talking about the 60s and 70s when idealism, commitment, sacrifice, culture, all those things, were writ very large. When I look down the road at the next 20 years, I don't see that happening again. But that doesn't mean I'm not looking forward to the next 20—it's always the writing that fascinates and I can't wait to see what our

authors are going to do next or what new authors are going to show up next—that's really what keeps you looking forward.

TALON BOOKS LTD.

**201/1019 East Cordova, Vancouver, British Columbia
U6A, 1M8 (604) 255-5915**

July 19, 1977

9:00 A.M.

Mr. Karl Siegler
Chairman, B.C. Publishers Group
1622 West 7th Ave.
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Mr. Siegler:

I am writing to you formally on the matter of the survival of my company, because it seems that despite all of my verbal harangues over the past three years, no progress has been made either by the B.C.P.G., the L.P.G. [Literary Press Group], or the A.C.P. [Association of Canadian Publishers] to stem the tide of policies both in government and the private sector which are designed (probably consciously, since those policies have only escalated despite three years of fairly rational argument) to erode and ultimately phase out publishing centres in Canada which are not located in either Ontario or Quebec.

We have witnessed, over the last five years, a rapid multiplication of programs designed to assist publishers in these two provinces, over and above what is available to all Canadian publishers "equally" from the federal government. All of these programs were and are based mainly on the findings of the Ontario Royal Commission which studied the Canadian publishing industry ten years

ago. At that time, the Canadian publishing industry was the Ontario publishing industry almost exclusively (in the English language), a situation which no longer prevails. The Ontario Royal Commission identified three major reasons why the Canadian publishing industry was being eroded by the tide of publications flowing over our borders from the big competitor to the south.

- 1) Loss of the indigenous educational market.
- 2) Lack of access to capital (no grants, loans, interest subsidies or other forms of capital assistance).
- 3) Disadvantageous location in a much smaller market.

One of the major developments to emerge from this study was the I.P.A. [Independent Publishers Association], an association of publishers committed to turning the tide identified by the Royal Commission by working towards programs to assist the thus disadvantaged Canadian publishing industry.

My point is quite simple. Substantially the same situation now exists within the Canadian publishing industry when one considers the relation of Ontario publishers to those publishers based outside of Ontario, as the one identified by the Royal Commission ten years ago, having considered the relation of U.S. publishers to those publishers based outside of the U.S. (in Canada).

I presume that the B.C.P.G. is playing the role of the I.P.A. in this scenario, championing the interests of the B.C. publishing industry in our province and abroad. With one major twist--our "competitors" are, according to their own constitution, supposed to be on our side. That's why we all belong to the national organization now called the A.C.P. (formerly the I.P.A., remember

them) which is supposed to be looking after the interests of everyone, right? Wrong. The latest example of the A.C.P.'s disregard for the publishers in the hinterland is their executives' approval of the "new, improved" C.C. [Canada Council] Book Purchase Plan. Doesn't the A.C.P. realize that:

- 1) there was a motion passed at their annual general meeting designed specifically to prevent such a program from ever receiving any industry sanction, and
- 2) what the effects of such a program will be on publishers not based in the land where the milk and honey flows so fast into open mouths that the first thing mothers teach their children is how to swallow in double time so as to prevent themselves from drowning?

But then, to expect the A.C.P. to understand and remain vigilant concerning the problems in B.C. is like expecting the American Publishers Association to understand what those "radicals" in the I.P.A. (A.C.P.) have been raving about for years (or for that matter, the International Publishers Association understanding the A.C.P.'s problems--don't they still recognize the C.B.P.C.?).

You however, as chairman of the B.C.P.G., are obliged to understand me, one of your members. Specifically on the Book Purchase Plan, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that we have always relied on the money from book purchase to get out our Fall list (always late because payment is so damn slow). We do this because we have no other access to cash input than the Federal Block Grant and Book Purchase programs. No loans, no provincial grants, no operating credit, no promotion funds which could be temporarily diverted, nothin'. (Aside from sales, of course.) I.E. that's what we used to do. Last year, our book purchase money was used to pay off Spring '76

production, after which I bullshit our printers about an "impending loan guarantee program" which you assured us was in the works, and because I have an honest face they went ahead and printed our Fall list (most of our '76 list, in fact), and they didn't get their money until our 1977 Block Grant arrived. That wasn't even enough. We had to borrow some money on the short term from a bunch of loan sharks to pay off the rest. It's because I was trying to make the payment to the sharks that I couldn't attend the last round of meetings in my capacity as C.C. committee member to prevent the disaster from occurring in the Book Purchase plan.

So for us underfunded jerks in the boonies, the Book Purchase program is a vital and sensitive one. It's our only other "source". We can't abide any tampering with this program which will change it in such a way that we are no longer sure how much if anything is forthcoming in the Fall.

However, the Book Purchase thing is just another specific problem which adds to my realization that survival for our company in B.C. is a real and current problem. We have produced one 1977 title (CRUEL TEARS, which has a national run this year, so is mostly likely to make the most amount of money. Besides it's based on Othello, and is a C.W. musical, so it will appeal to all of our colonial, reverse racist, chauvinist, redneck tastes.) We don't have the capital to produce the other 15 titles we are contractually committed to this year. July is almost over. We've got nowhere to go without some kind of provincial or whatever program. Why don't you get off your ass and do something. If I weren't you, I'd do something about it myself. But since I am you, I can't even make any pleas to anyone outside of yourself (whom I am) without getting into a conflict of interest situation.

Surely you must realize that as president of Talon Books Ltd., my primary responsibility lies with our

company and its authors, and when it comes to the crunch, I'm going to have to make you disappear by withdrawing membership in your association and striking out on my own (if you'll pardon the pun) with that great Canadian Mac & Stew option? (Which is nothing more than imported Horatio Alger with a "canned in Ontario" label anyway.)

What continues to amaze me is that the A.C.P. does not seem to be able to deal with the same situation in our own country, that gave rise to their association in the first place.

I expect a prompt answer to my pressing problems.

Respectfully,

Karl H. Siegler,
President, TALON BOOKS LTD.

british columbia publishers group

P.O. Box 48417, Station Bentall
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1A2
(604) 734-1611

July 19, 1977
11:00 A.M.

Mr. Karl Siegler
President, Talon Books Ltd.
201 - 1019 E. Cordova Street
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Mr. Siegler:

Thank you for your letter of July 19th. I must say that it is the most insulting, paranoid, and arrogant letter I've ever received from any of our members. I will, nevertheless, try to respond to your more rational queries:

A) Current publishing policies in both the public and private sector do not consciously discriminate against publishers located outside of Ontario and Quebec. They are liberal policies, the one overriding characteristic of which is that they ignore the particular circumstances of any particular situation you might care to identify, in the interests of being inpeccably and abstractly FAIR in the context of the largest generality accessible to the minds of the policy makers. They thus only appear to be consciously discriminatory to the perceptions of those paranoids, like yourself, who have not the mental capacity to imagine the scope of the generalities being considered by those policy makers. However, whether those policies are consciously discriminatory or not, I accept your point that they are discriminatory and concede that something must be done about them. That's why I am the Chairman of the B.C.P.G., make no mistake about it!

B) Your comparison of the situation within Canada to the one which the Ontario Royal Commission identified constitutes argument by false analogy:

1) B.C. publishers never had access to the B.C. educational market in the first place.

2) If you, as a director of a B.C. publishing house, have personal assets, you can mortgage them to the hilt to support your company. You can also, if you choose not to abide by the rules of our associations, try to apply for a whole range of "emergency grants", something which you yourself have done once successfully, right?

3) You don't have to stay in B.C., right? I mean you could either move or sell to Ontario, if the only concern you are entertaining is the survival of your company. You'd still be "Canadian", wouldn't you? You wouldn't even have to worry about F.I.R.A. [Foreign Investment Review Agency],

right? And just think, you could attend even more meetings with our "parent" organization, right? Maybe they'd even make you president? For behaving just like the B.M.C. [Bureau of Management Consultants] report says every good Canadian publisher should behave?

C) Your comparison of the functions of the B.C.P.G. to those of the I.P.A. is a little more to the point. May I remind you that I have spent the last three years as the B.C.P.G. government relations officer, and in those three years have submitted over 27 pounds of briefs to the departments of Economic Development, Education, and Recreation and Leisure Services? That in that time I have seen 8 cabinet ministers come and go, imported numerous industry and federal government experts to help argue our case, and have gotten absolutely nowhere? Now I know that physicists define "work" as the application of "force" to move a "mass" over a specific, measurable "distance", and by that definition I suppose I have been sitting on my ass for the past three years, accomplishing no "work" on your or anyone else's behalf in B.C. The only explanation I can offer is that perhaps N.D.P. and Socred governments constitute "masses" not subject to the conventional laws of physics. (As opposed to Liberal or Conservative governments which are, if anything, "conventional".)

D) On the matter of the "new improved" Book Purchase Program:

1) On the matter of the A.C.P. executive having apparently forgotten the motion made at the annual general meeting; I have already drawn this to their attention in my capacity as a C.C. committee representative, and since I am he and he is you, you already have that document in your possession.

2) Your second point, concerning the effect on cash flow this new program might have on publishers

disadvantageously located in Canada, has been clearly stated in your letter to me, so I will simply forward this document on to Mr. Siegler, the provincial policy co-ordinator of the A.C.P., for his consideration. (Along with several other letters from B.C. publishers, both members and non-members of the B.C.P.G., on similar topics.)

E) Details of your internal management problems, and the fact that they prevent you from attending important meetings are hardly my concern, unless you can demonstrate that like strikes, acts of God, or parliament, they are caused by factors outside of your control. Since I feel you have done so, I can now go to my last point.

F) I have asked Sally Bryer to request of the A.C.P. that they send Harald Bohne out to B.C. to meet with the Honourable Sam Bawlf, minister responsible for cultural affairs in this province, to argue the case for your particular company. You quite rightly state that I cannot argue your case without creating a conflict of interest. I must remind you however, that as chairman of the B.C.P.G., I will only allow Mr. Bohne to use your company in an exemplary fashion, and will not allow him to plead for any special concessions for your company alone. I will continue to act in such a fashion until you have made me disappear by withdrawing your company's membership from the B.C.P.G. That meeting will take place on August 22nd, so hang tough. (Just as an afterthought, why don't you sell out to Ontario before that? Then we can all safely point to you like we did to Gage and Ryerson 10 years ago and say, "SEE?" That would be much better for the interests of the group on the whole, in the long run.)

In closing, please let me say that I do not appreciate the slanderous aspersions you cast in your letter on our parent, the A.C.P. That organization has, after all, decided to give priority this year to provincial matters such as

yours, and appointed Mr. Siegler to be in charge of such affairs, to whom, incidentally, I am referring all of this correspondence.

Best regards,

Karl H. Siegler
Chairman, B.C.P.B.



Cover, Talonbooks catalogue, 1975; photo for *The Evelyn Roth Recycling Book*.

TWENTY YEARS OF TALONBOOKS

A Bibliography: 1967 - 1986

Compiled by Jean Cockburn and Mary Schendlinger

All books from *Two police poems*, *The man whose path was on fire*, and *Colours in the dark* in 1969, through to *Walsh* in 1973, were printed on Talonbooks' Addressograph-Multigraph 350 press, with these exceptions: the covers for *Crabdance*, *Listen to the wind*, *Rinse cycle*, and *Parking lots* in 1972; and *Apple butter*, *Songs my mother taught me*, and the cover for *The Clallam* in 1973. Talonbooks' Zenith 25 press was used for the entire 1974-75 production except for *Blown figures* and the cover for *Hosanna* in 1974; and *The Evelyn Roth recycling book* and the covers for *En pièces détachées*, *Mrs. Blood*, *transcanadaletters*, *Lulu Street*, *Fifteen miles of broken glass*, *Jacob's wake*, *Bonjour, là, bonjour*, *Three plays*, *Tish No. 1-19*. All of the books printed on Talonbooks' press were done by Gordon Fidler. The last book he printed was *Grounds* in 1976, although by that time most of the production was sent out to be done.

Unless otherwise noted, the books were printed in black ink on white paper, and perfect bound in quality paperback. Where format specifications are not indicated for successive printings, they are the same as for the first printing.

* 1967 *

Belford, Ken. *Fireweed.*

Poetry. Stapled, dust cover. Yellow paper. Unpaged, 15 x 22 cm.

Brown, Jim. *If there are any Noahs.*

Poetry. Etchings by Sandra Crickshank. Stapled, dust cover. Coloured and black and white illustrations. Unpaged, 17 x 23 cm.

Coupey, Pierre. *Circle without center.*

Poetry and collage. Black and white illustrations. Unpaged, 13 x 20 cm.

* 1968 *

bissett bill. *Awake in th red desert.*

Poetry. Record and book. Book: Green and white paper. Black and white illustrations. Unpaged, 18 x 25 cm. Record: 12 in. stereo LP. Joint publication of Talonbooks and See/Hear Productions.

Hulcoop, John. *Three ring circus songs.*

Poetry. Black and white photographs. Dust jacket. Purple paper. Black and white photos. 86 p., 17 x 25 cm.

Rosenthal, Helene. *Peace is an unknown continent.* Poetry. 70 p., 17 x 25 cm.

* 1969 *

Bowering, George. *Two police poems.*

Poetry. Stapled. Red and blue ink. Unpaged, 12 x 15 cm.

Brown, Jim. *Forgetting.*

Poetry. Stapled. Heavy, grey paper. Unpaged, 17 x 26 cm.

Brown, Jim. *O see can u say.*

Poetry. Record and book. Book: folded sheets stapled at one corner. Yellow paper. Unpaged, 21 x 36 cm. Record: 12 in. stereo LP. Joint publication of Talonbooks and See/Hear Productions.

Brown, Jim and David Phillips, eds. *West coast seen.*

Poetry anthology. Green paper. 212 p., 21 x 28 cm. Original title: *West coast 68.*

Kearns, Lionel. *By the light of the silvery McLune: media parables, poems, signs, gestures, and other assaults on the interface.*

Poetry. Hard cover and paper bound. Hard cover has dust jacket. 80 p., 14 x 23 cm. Paper bound: 13 x 21 cm. Joint Publication of Talonbooks and Daylight Press.

Reaney, James. *Colours in the dark.*

Drama. First three printings jointly with the Macmillan Company of Canada. Green paper. 90 p., 13 x 21 cm. 2nd and 3rd printings: 92 p. 4th printing Talonbooks alone: white paper. 127 p.

Reid, Jamie. *The man whose path was on fire.*

Poetry. Beige paper. 43 p., 15 x 23 cm. Errata slip with 16 corrections.

Trower, Peter. *Moving through the mystery.*

Poetry. Drawings by Jack Wise. Hard cover and paper bound. Hard cover has dust jacket. Unpaged, 25 x 25 cm. Paper bound: same as hard cover.

* 1970 *

Belford, Ken. *The post electric cave man.*

Poetry. Recycled grey paper. Unpaged, 14 x 22 cm. Released Spring 1971.

Davey, Frank. *Four myths for Sam Perry.*

Poetry. Green paper, green and orange ink. Unpaged, 15 x 23 cm. Released Spring 1971.

Nichol, bp. *Still water.*

Poetry. Book in a box. Black box, silver mylar cover. Unpaged, 13 x 13 x 1 cm. Look of Books Design Award.

Phillips, David. *Wave.*

Poetry. Grey paper, blue and green ink. Unpaged, 15 x 23 cm. Original title: *Sea wall.*

Ryga, George. *The ecstasy of Rita Joe.*

Drama. First six printings: 90 p., 13 x 21 cm. 7th printing: 122 p., 15 x 22 cm. Subsequent printings: 126 p., 13 x 21 cm.

* 1971 *

bissett, bill. *Drifting into war.*

Poetry. Blue, black, and pink ink. Unpaged, 16 x 21 cm.

Brown, Jim. *Chemical change.*

Poetry. Stapled. Yellow paper, green ink. Unpaged, 14 x 21 cm.

Brown, Jim. *Toward a chemistry of reel people.*

Poetry. Yellow paper. Unpaged, 16 x 23 cm.

Gardiner, Dwight. *A book of occasional.*

Poetry. Dust cover. Grey paper. Unpaged, 14 x 15 cm. Released Spring 1972.

Geddes, Gary. *Rivers inlet.*

Poetry. Hard cover. Black and white photos. Unpaged, 14 x 16 cm.
Released Spring 1972.

Jason, Dan and Nancy, with Dave Manning. *Some useful wild plants.*

Non-fiction. Illustrations by Robert Inwood. 2 editions. 1st edition: 2 printings. Yellow paper, brown line drawings. 83 p., 12 x 18 cm. 2nd edition, revised and enlarged: 5 printings; 4 printings, 174 p.; 5th printing, 180 p.

McKinnon, Barry. *The carcasses of spring.*

Poetry. Brown paper. Unpaged, 15 x 22 cm.

Nichol, bp. *Monotones.*

Poetry. Cream paper, red ink. Black and white photos. Unpaged, 16 x 12 cm.

Pass, John. *Taking place.*

Poetry. Blue and green ink. Unpaged, 14 x 15 cm. Released Spring 1972.

Phillips, David. *The coherence.*

Poetry. 2 editions. 1st edition: 2 printings. 1st printing: Stapled. Recycled paper. Unpaged, 13 x 19 cm. This printing never released. 2nd printing: Unpaged, 14 x 22 cm. 2nd edition: Yellow paper. Unpaged, 16 x 24 cm.

Rosenberg, David. *Paris and London.*

Poetry. Pink paper, red and grey ink. Illustrations. Cover designed and printed by Coach House Press, Toronto. Unpaged, 17 x 22 cm.

Ryga, George. *Captives of the faceless drummer.*

Drama. 2 editions. 1st edition: 78 p., 13 x 21 cm. 2nd edition: 2 printings. 1st printing: added material, preface and appendices, 117 p. 2nd printing, revised June 1974, 119 p.

Stevens, Peter. *A few myths.*

Poetry. Orange paper, brown ink. Drawings. Unpaged, 16 x 23 cm.

Walker, Doug. *Forehead nite.*

Poetry. Stapled. Green paper. Unpaged, 15 x 21 cm.

Webb, Phyllis. *Selected poems 1954-1965.*

Edited with an introduction by John Hulcoop.

Poetry. 3 printings. 1st printing: Hard cover. 2nd printing: paperbound with dust jacket. 3rd printing: paperbound. 1st and 2nd printings: unpagged, 16 x 24 cm. 3rd printing: 130 p., 15 x 22 cm.

* 1972 *

Coleman, Victor. *Parking lots.*

Poetry. Illustrations. Cover by Coach House Press, Toronto. Unpagged, 22 x 16 cm. Look of Books Design Award.

Crossland, Jackie and Rudy Lavallo. *Rinse cycle.*

Drama. Unpagged, 15 x 23 cm. Released Spring 1973.

Davey, Frank. *King of swords.*

Poetry. Dust jacket. Unpagged, 11 x 17 cm. Reprinted May 1973 with an errata slip.

Piffer, Phil. *The air I dance thru.*

Poetry. Grey and black ink. Unpagged, 16 x 23 cm. Released Spring 1973.

Rosenthal, Helene. *A shape of fire.*

Poetry. Black and white photos. Unpagged, 12 x 28 cm. Released Spring 1973.

Reaney, James. *Listen to the wind.*

Drama. 2 editions. 1st edition: 2 printings. Dust jacket. Beige paper. 119 p., 14 x 21 cm. 2nd printing: no dust jacket. 2nd edition: no dust jacket. 142 p.

Simons, Beverley. *Crabdance.*

Drama. 3 printings. 1st printing: revised from In Press edition. 103 p., 13 x 21 cm. 2nd printing: 119 p. 3rd printing: 122 p.

Stevenson, Sharon. *Stone.*

Poetry. Dust jacket. Grey paper. Unpagged, 15 x 23 cm. Released Spring 1973.

Watmough, David. *Ashes for Easter and other monodramas.*

Drama. Dust jacket. 182 p., 14 x 21 cm. Released Spring 1973.

Barbour, Douglas. *Songbook.*

Poetry. Blue and pink ink. Unpaged, 16 x 22 cm.

bissett, bill. *Pass th food, release th spirit book.*

Poetry. Drawings by bill bissett. Unpaged, 20 x 26 cm.

Davey, Frank. *The Clallam.*

Poetry. Cover printed by C. Hurst at A Space, Toronto. Unpaged, 19 x 15 cm.

Geddes, Gary. *Snakeroot.*

Poetry. Black and white photos by Gary Geddes. Unpaged, 25 x 20 cm.

Hardin, Herschel. *Esker Mike and his wife, Agiluk.*

Drama. 86 p., 14 x 22 cm. 2nd and 3rd printings: 90 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Lachance, Bertrand. *Cock tales.*

Poetry. Blue ink. Unpaged, 13 x 21 cm.

Pollock, Sharon. *Walsh.*

Drama. 112 p., 15 x 22 cm. 2nd and 3rd printings: 116 p. Revised edition (1983): 129 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Reaney, James. *Apple butter and other plays for children.*

Drama. Yellow paper, brown ink. 193 p., 21 x 28 cm.

Robinson, J. Lewis and Walter G. Hardwick. *British Columbia: one hundred years of geographical change.*

Non-fiction. Cartography by Karen Ewing. 62 p., 27 x 21 cm.

Ryga, George. *Sunrise on Sarah.*

Drama. Stapled. 73 p., 15 x 22 cm.

Scobie, Stephen. *Stone poems.*

Poetry. Book in a box. Unpaged, 13 x 13 x 1 cm. Released Summer 1974.

Thomas, Audrey. *Songs my mother taught me.*

Fiction. Hard cover and paper bound. Cream paper, brown ink. 232 p., 15 x 20 cm. 2nd printing: Mass market paperback, 206 p.

Bowering, George. *At war with the U.S.*
Poetry. Unpaged, 15 x 15 cm.

Bowering, George. *Imago 20.*
Poetry magazine. 100 p., 18 x 29 cm.

Brissenden, Connie. *The Factory Lab anthology.*
Drama. Newsprint paper. 316 p., 19 x 25 cm.

Bromige, David. *Spells and blessings.*
Poetry. Stapled. Unpaged, 13 x 21 cm.

Coleman, Victor. *Speech sucks.*
Poetry. Unpaged, 21 x 23 cm.

Freeman, David. *Battering ram.*
Drama. 110 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Freeman, David. *You're gonna be alright Jamie boy.*
Drama. 138 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Gilbert, Gerry. *Skies.*
Poetry. Drawings and collage. Unpaged, 21 x 27 cm.

Gurik, Robert. *API 2967.*
Translated by Marc F. Gelinas.
Drama. 74 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Gurik, Robert. *The trial of Jean-Baptiste M.*
Translated by Allan Van Meer.
Drama. 125 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Marlatt, Daphne and Robert Minden. *Steveston.*
Poetry and photographs. 89 p., 20 x 23 cm.

Nichol, bp. *Love: a book of remembrances.*
Poetry. Black and white drawings by bpNichol. Unpaged, 15 x 22 cm.

Ryga, George. *Hungry hills.*
Fiction. Hard cover and paper bound. Dust jackets.
2nd edition: mass market paperback, 163 p.

Stanley, George. *The stick.*

Poetry. Unpaged, 15 x 22 cm.

Thomas, Audrey. *Blown figures.*

Fiction. Hard cover and paper bound. 547 p., 15 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Les belles soeurs.*

Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco. Drama. 114 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Hosanna.*

Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco.

Drama. Black and white photographs. 102 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Watson, Scott. *Stories.*

Fiction. 49 p., 17 x 22 cm.

* 1975 *

Cook, Michael. *Jacob's wake.*

Drama. 141 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Davey, Frank, ed. *Tish No. 1-19.*

Poetry magazine reprint. 433 p., 15 x 23 cm.

Gold, Artie. *Even yr photograph looks afraid of me.*

Poetry. Unpaged, 15 x 23 cm.

Hendry, Tom. *Fifteen miles of broken glass.*

Drama. 127 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Henry, Ann. *Lulu Street.*

Drama. 132 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Kiyooka, Roy. *transcanadaletters.*

Correspondence. Black and white photos. Unpaged, 22 x 28 cm.

Langley, Rod. *Bethune.*

Drama. 152 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Nicol, Eric. *Three plays by Eric Nicol.*

Drama. 229 p., 21 x 28 cm.

Roth, Evelyn. *The Evelyn Roth recycling book.*
Non-fiction. 76 p., 28 x 21 cm.

Rule, Jane. *Theme for diverse instruments.*
Fiction. 185 p., 15 x 20 cm.

Simons, Beverley. *Preparing.*
Drama. Black and white photographs. 127 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Thomas Audrey. *Mrs. Blood.*
Fiction. 220 p., 15 x 23 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Bonjour, là, bonjour.*
Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco.
Drama. 93 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Forever yours Marie-Lou.*
Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco.
Drama. 86 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *En pièces détachées.*
Translated by Allan Van Meer.
Drama. 111 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Wah, Fred. *Pictograms from the interior of B.C.*
Poetry. 42 p., 21 x 17 cm.

* 1976 *

Blais, Marie-Claire. *Dürer's angel.*
Translated by David Lobdell.
Fiction. 105 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Blais, Marie-Claire. *The execution.*
Translated by David Lobdell.
Drama. 103 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Cook, Michael. *Tiln and other plays.*
Drama. 111 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Dorn, Ed. *The poet, the people, the spirit.*
Poetry lecture. Stapled. Brown paper. 29 p., 15 x 23 cm.

Fennario, David. *On the job.*

Drama. 110 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Gifford, Barry. *The boy you have always loved.*

Poetry. Cream paper, brown ink. 70 p., 15 x 23 cm.

Gilbert, Gerry. *Grounds.*

Poetry. Unpaged, 15 x 23 cm.

Hardin, Herschel. *Great wave of civilization.*

Drama. 121 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Hay, Julius. *Have.*

Translated by Peter Hay.

Drama. 137 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Herbert, John. *Some angry summer songs.*

Drama. 103 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Lambert, Betty. *Sqrieux-de-Dieu.*

Drama. 122 p., 14 x 21 cm.

McNaughton, Duncan. *A passage of Saint Devill/Una passaggia di San Diabolo.*

Poetry. Cream paper. Unpaged, 16 x 24 cm.

Persky, Stan. *Wrestling the angel.*

Poetry. 183 p., 13 x 20 cm.

Ryga, George. *Ballad of a stonepicker.*

Fiction. Mass market paperback. 142 p.

Ryga, George. *Night desk.*

Fiction. Mass market paperback. 123 p.

Tremblay, Michel. *La Duchesse de Langeais and other plays.*

Translated by John Van Burek.

Drama. 125 p., 14 x 21 cm.

bissett, bill. *Pomes for Yoshi.*

Poetry. Unpaged, 14 x 21 cm.

Bowering, George. *A short sad book.*

Fiction. 191 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Fawcett, Brian. *Creatures of state.*

Poetry. Cream paper. 126 p., 13 x 20 cm.

Fennario, David. *Nothing to lose.*

Drama. 144 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Findley, Timothy. *Can you see me yet?*

Drama. 176 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Hopkins, Elisabeth Margaret. *The painted cougar.*

Children's book. Hard cover. Full page illustrations, coloured, by author.

Unpaged, 22 x 28 cm.

Mitchell, Ken and Humphrey and the Dumptrucks. *Cruel tears.*

Drama. Black and white photographs. 145 p., 14 x 21 cm.

O'Hagan, Howard. *The school-marm tree.*

Fiction. 245 p., 14 x 21 cm.

O'Hagan, Howard. *The woman who got on at Jasper Station and other stories.*

Fiction. 132 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Sonnets to Orpheus.*

Translated by Karl Siegler.

Poetry. Unpaged, 14 x 21 cm.

Rule, Jane. *Desert of the heart.*

Fiction. Mass market paperback. 251 p.

Ryga, George. *Ploughmen of the glacier.*

Drama. 80 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Ryga, George. *Seven hours to sundown.*

Drama. 112 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Salutin, Rick. *Les Canadiens.* Assist: Ken Dryden.
Drama. Black and white photographs. 194 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Woodcock, George. *Two plays.*
Drama. 112 p., 14 x 21 cm.

* 1978 *

Baker, Jane Howard. *A teacher's guide to theatre for the young.*
Non-fiction. 80 p., 14 x 21 cm.

bissett, bill. *Sailor.*
Poetry. Unpaged, 14 x 21 cm.

Bruyere, Christian. *Walls.*
Drama. 136 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Deverell, Rex. *Boiler room suite.*
Drama. 96 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Doolittle, Joyce and Zina Barnieh. *A mirror of our dreams.*
Non-Fiction. 224 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Foon, Dennis. *Heracles.*
Drama (Children's). 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Foon, Dennis. *Raft baby.*
Drama (Children's). 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Foon, Dennis. *The Windigo.*
Drama (Children's). 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Hill-Tout, Charles. *The Salish People.*
Edited by Ralph Maud.
Non-fiction. Four volumes: Vol. I: 167 p., 14 x 21 cm. Vol. II: 163 p.,
14 x 21 cm. Vol. III: 165 p., 14 x 21 cm. Vol. IV: 181 p., 14 x 21 cm.

O'Hagan, Howard. *Wilderness men.*
Fiction. 192 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Reaney, James. *Apple butter.*
Drama (Children's). 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Reaney, James. *Geography match.*
Drama (Children's). 72 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Reaney, James. *Ignoramus.*
Drama (Children's). 72 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Reaney, James. *Names and nicknames.*
Drama (Children's). 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Rudkin, David. *Ashes.*
Drama. 104 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Watts, Irene. *A chain of words.*
Drama (Children's). 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Wiesenfeld, Joe. *Spratt.*
Drama. 112 p., 14 x 21 cm.

* 1979 *

Butts, Mary. *Imaginary letters.*
Fiction. Afterword by Robin Blaser; drawings by Jean Cocteau. 80 p.,
13 x 21 cm.

Magarty, Britt. *Prisoner of desire.*
Fiction. 296 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Horovitz, Israel. *Mackerel.*
Drama. 128 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Horovitz, Israel. *The primary English class.*
Drama. 160 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Mitchell, Ken. *The con man.*
Fiction. 224 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Shepard, Sam. *Angel city, curse of the starving class & other plays.*
Drama. 246 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Shepard, Sam. *Buried child & other plays.*
Drama. 164 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Thomas, Audrey. *Latakia.*
Fiction. 172 p., 14 x 21 cm.

* 1980 *

bissett, bill. *Selected poems: beyond even faithful legends.*
Introduction by Len Early.
Poetry. 160 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Bowering, George. *Selected poems: particular accidents.*
Edited with an Introduction by Robin Blaser.
Poetry. 160 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Charlebois, Gaëtan. *Aléola.*
Drama. 112 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Chudley, Ron. *After Abraham.*
Drama. 112 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Davey, Frank. *Selected poems: the arches.*
Edited with an Introduction by bpNichol.
Poetry. 112 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Fennario, David. *Balconville.*
Drama. 128 p., 13 x 21 cm.

French, David. *Jitters.*
Drama. 144 p., 13 x 21 cm. Revised edition (1986): 175 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Griffiths, Linda. *Maggie & Pierre.*
Drama. 99 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Hulme, George. *The Lionel touch.*
Drama. 136 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Marlatt, Daphne. *Selected writing: net work.*
Edited with an Introduction by Fred Wah.
Poetry. 144 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Mendelson, Susan. *Mama never cooked like this.*
Non-fiction. Cerlox-bound paper, 128 p., 15 x 22 cm.

Murrell, John. *Waiting for the parade.*
Drama. 101 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Nichol, bp. *Selected writing: as elected.*
Edited with an Introduction by Jack David.
Poetry. 144 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Nichol, James W. *Saint-Marie among the Hurons.*
Drama. 80 p., 13 x 21 cm.

Wah, Fred. *Selected poems: Loki is buried at Smoky Creek.*
Edited with an Introduction by George Bowering.
Poetry. 128 p., 13 x 21 cm.

* 1981 *

bissett, bill. *Northern birds in color.*
Poetry. Unpaged, 14 x 21 cm.

Brown, Lennox. *The twilight dinner & other plays.*
Drama. 128 p., 14 x 21 cm.

hagarty, britt. *Sad paradise.*
Fiction. 320 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Meigs, Mary. *Lily Briscoe: a self-portrait.*
Non-Fiction. 264 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Thomas, Audrey. *Real mothers.*
Fiction. 176 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Damnée manon, sacrée Sandra.*
Translated by John Van Burek.
Drama. 48 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *The fat woman next door is pregnant.*
Translated by Sheila Fischman.
Fiction. 256 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *The impromptu of Outremont.*
Translated by John Van Burek.
Drama. 88 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Sainte-Carmen of the main.*

Translated by John Van Burek.

Drama. 80 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Wah, Fred. *Breathin' my name with a sigh.*

Poetry. 88 p., 14 x 21 cm.

* 1982 *

Boucher, Denise. *The fairies are thirsty.*

Translated by Alan Brown.

Drama. 72 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Fawcett, Brian. *Aggressive transport.*

Poetry. 136 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Fawcett, Brian. *My career with the Leafs & other stories.*

Fiction. 192 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Garrard, Jim. *Cold comfort.*

Drama. 96 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Gray, John with Eric Peterson. *Billy Bishop goes to war.*

Drama. 104 p., 14 x 21 cm. Winner of the 1982 Governor-General's Award for Drama.

Maud, Ralph. *A guide to B.C. Indian myth and legend.*

Non-fiction. 218 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Menghi, Umberto with John Bishop and Marian Babchuk.

The Umberto Menghi cookbook.

Non-fiction. Cerlox-bound paper, 192 p., 17 x 25 cm.

Webb, Phyllis. *Selected poems: the vision tree.*

Edited with an Introduction by Sharon Thesen.

Poetry. 160 p., 13 x 21 cm. Winner of the 1982 Governor-General's Award for Poetry.

* 1983 *

bissett, bill. *Seagull on Yonge Street.*

Poetry. Drawings by bill bissett. 136 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Blaser, Robin. *Syntax.*
Poetry. 48 p., 13 x 21 cm.

hagarty, britt. *The day the world turned blue.*
Non-fiction. Black and white photographs. 264 p., 15 x 22 cm.

Kennedy, Dorothy and Randy Bouchard. *Sliammon life, Sliammon lands.*
Non-fiction. 176 p., 22 x 22 cm.

Marchessault, Jovette. *Saga of the wet hens.*
Translated by Linda Gaboriau.
Black and white photographs. Drama. 136 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Meigs, Mary. *The Medusa head.*
Non-fiction. 162 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Robinson, J. Lewis. *Concepts and themes in the regional geography of Canada.*
Non-fiction. 342 p., 15 x 22 cm.

Robinson, J. Lewis. *The physical environment of Canada and the evolution of settlement patterns*
Non-fiction. 48 p., 15 x 22 cm.

Schernbrucker, Bill. *Chameleon & other stories.*
Fiction. 160 p., 14 x 21 cm.

* 1984 *

Arnason, David. *The circus performers' bar.*
Fiction. 160 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Davey, Frank. *Margaret Atwood: a feminist poetics.*
Non-Fiction. 178 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Fawcett, Brian. *Capital tales.*
Fiction. 204 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Gardiner, Dwight. *The New York book of the dead & other poems.*
Poetry. 54 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Jamieson, Ian R. *Triple 'O' seven.*
Fiction. 216 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Mundwiler, Leslie. *Michael Ondaatje: word, image, imagination.*
Non-fiction. 160 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Scobie, Stephen. *bpNichol: what history teaches.*
Non-fiction. 154 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Remember me.*
Translated by John Stowe.
Drama. 64 p., 14 x 21 cm.

* 1985 *

bissett, bill. *Canada gees mate for life.*
Poetry. 128 p., 15 x 22 cm.

Fawcett, Brian. *The secret journal of Alexander Mackenzie.*
Fiction. 206 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Glick, Judie and Fiona McLeod. *The Granville Island Market cookbook.*
Non-fiction. 192 p., 17 x 25 cm.

Glover, Douglas. *Dog attempts to drown man in Saskatoon.*
Fiction. 126 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Kitagawa, Muriel. *This is my own: letters to Wes & other writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948.*
Edited with an Introduction by Roy Miki.
Non-fiction. Black and white photographs. Hard cover and paper bound.
Hard cover has dust jacket. 302 p.,
15 x 22 cm. Released in February 1986.

Lill, Wendy. *The fighting days.*
Drama. 96 p., 14 x 21 cm.

McClure, Michael. *Specks.*
Poetry. 92 p., 13 x 20 cm.

Ryga, George. *In the shadow of the vulture.*
Fiction. 283 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Wasserman, Jerry, ed. *Modern Canadian plays.*
Drama. 412 p., 25 x 30 cm. Revised in 1986.

* 1986 *

Blaser, Robin and Dunham, Robert, eds. *Art and reality: a casebook of concern.*
Non-fiction. 240 p., 15 x 22 cm.

de Barros, Paul. *Big plans: North American stories and a South American journal.*
Fiction. 191 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Fawcett, Brian. *Cambodia: a book for people who find television too slow.*
Fiction. 208 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Hughes, Kenneth James. *Signs of literature: language, ideology and the literary text.*
Non-fiction. 229 p., 14 x 21 cm.

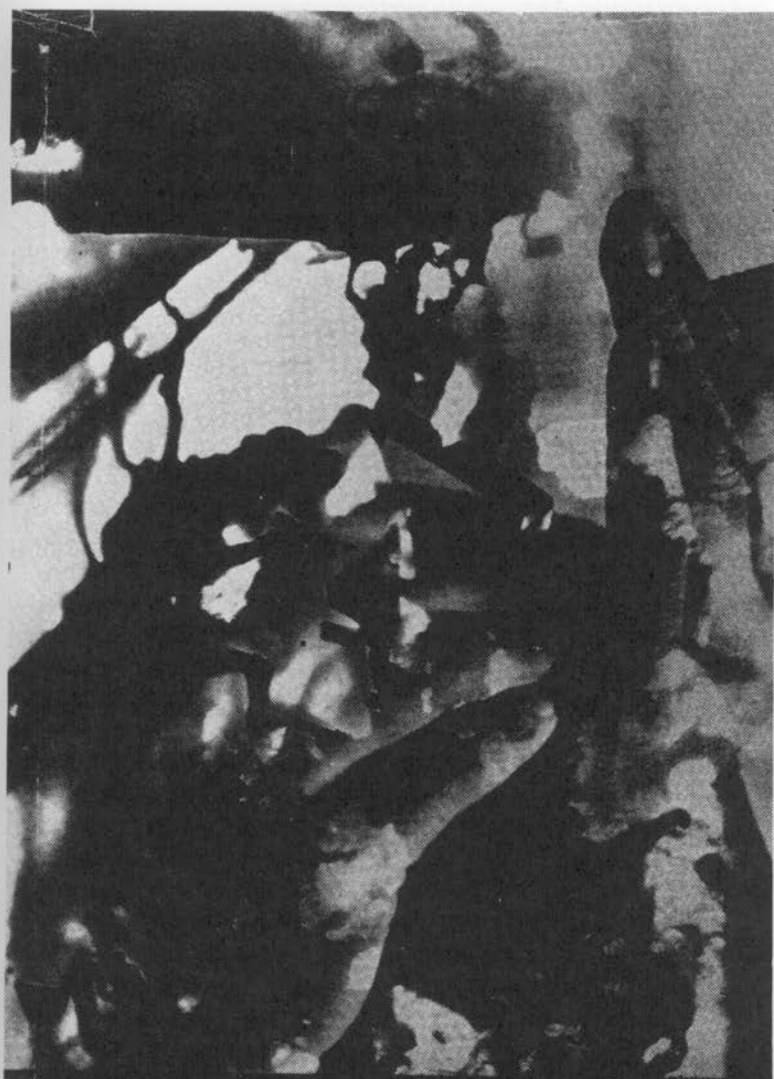
Jiles, Paulette. *The late great human road show.*
Fiction. 193 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Mercer, Michael. *Goodnight disgrace.*
Drama. 115 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Pinder, Leslie Hall. *Under the house.*
Fiction. 183 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Posse, Luis. *Free the shadows.*
Edited with an Afterword by Robert Dunham; Introduction by Robin Blaser.
Poetry. 189 p., 14 x 21 cm.

Tremblay, Michel. *Albertine, in five times.*
Translated by Bill Glassco and John Van Burek.
Drama. 76 p., 14 x 21 cm.



fireweed ken belford

Cover, Ken Belford's *Fireweed* (1967).

If There are any
NOAHS



poems - Jim Brown
etchings - Sandra Cruickshank

Title page, Jim Brown's *If There are Any Noahs* (1967).

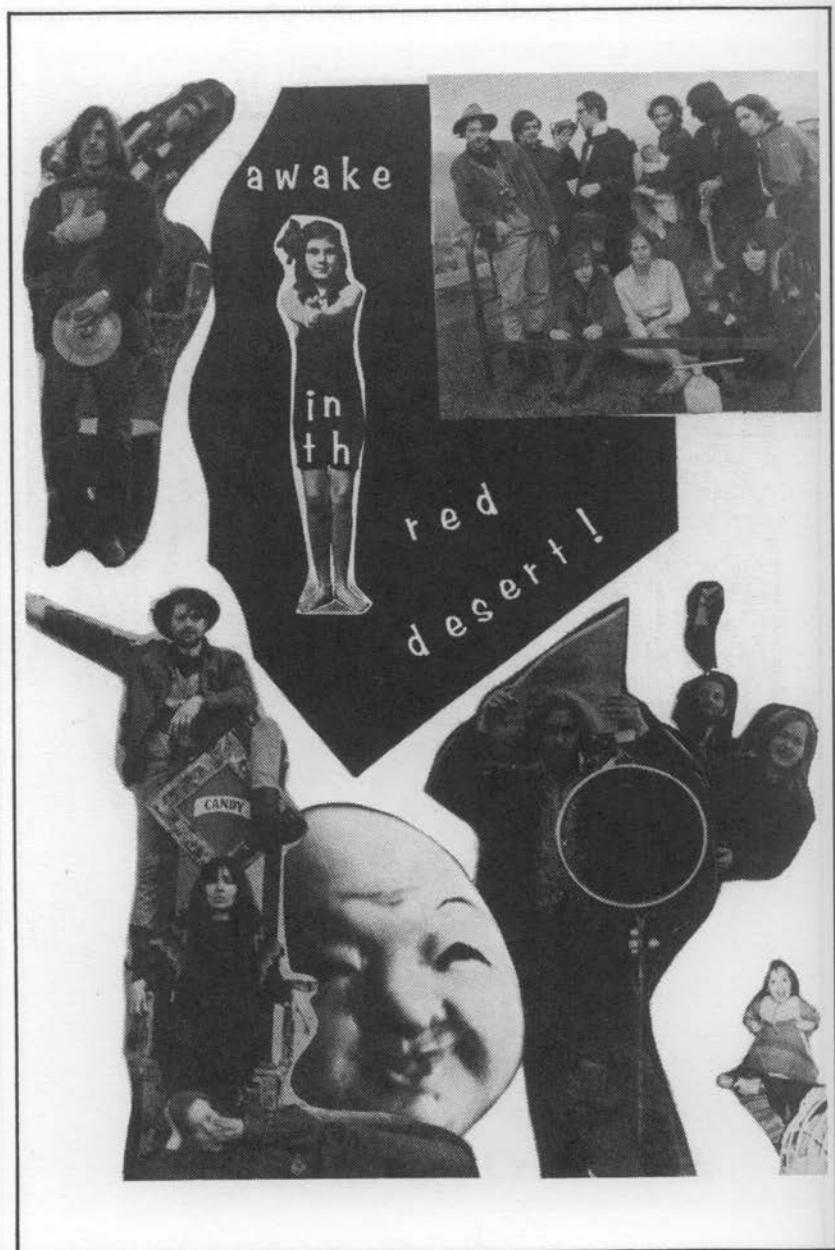
**PIERRE
COUPEY**

**CIRCLE
WITHOUT
CENTER**

**POEMS &
COLLAGE**



Title page, Pierre Coupey's *Circle without Center* (1967).



Title page, bill bissett's *awake in th red desert* (1968).

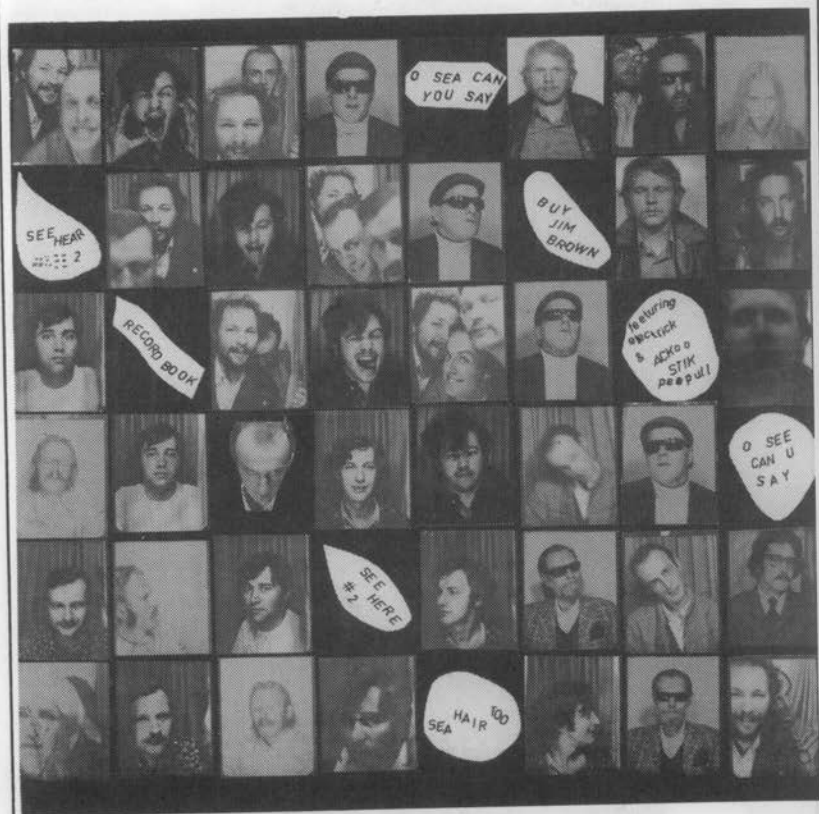
.95

TWO
POLICE
POEMS

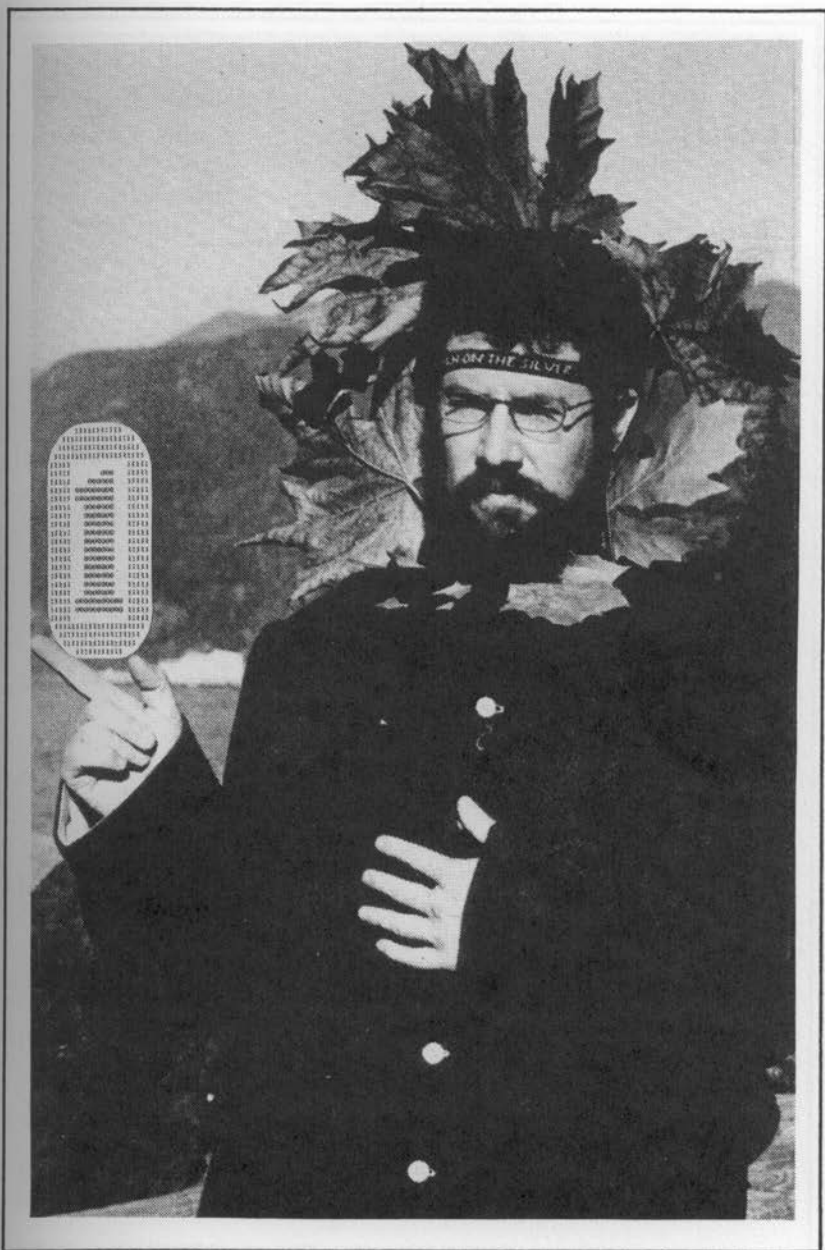
by
George
Bowering

ARRESTING
OFFICER →

Cover, George Bowering's *Two Police Poems* (1969).



Album cover, Jim Brown's *O See Can U Say* (1969). From bottom, row 2: fr. left, Jim Brown, Gordon Fidler, David Robinson. Top, 3rd fr. right, bpNichol.



Lionel Kearns, back cover of *By the Light of the Silvery McLune* (1969).

other books in print

if there are any noahs
poems by jim brown
2.50

fireweed
poems by ken elford
2.50

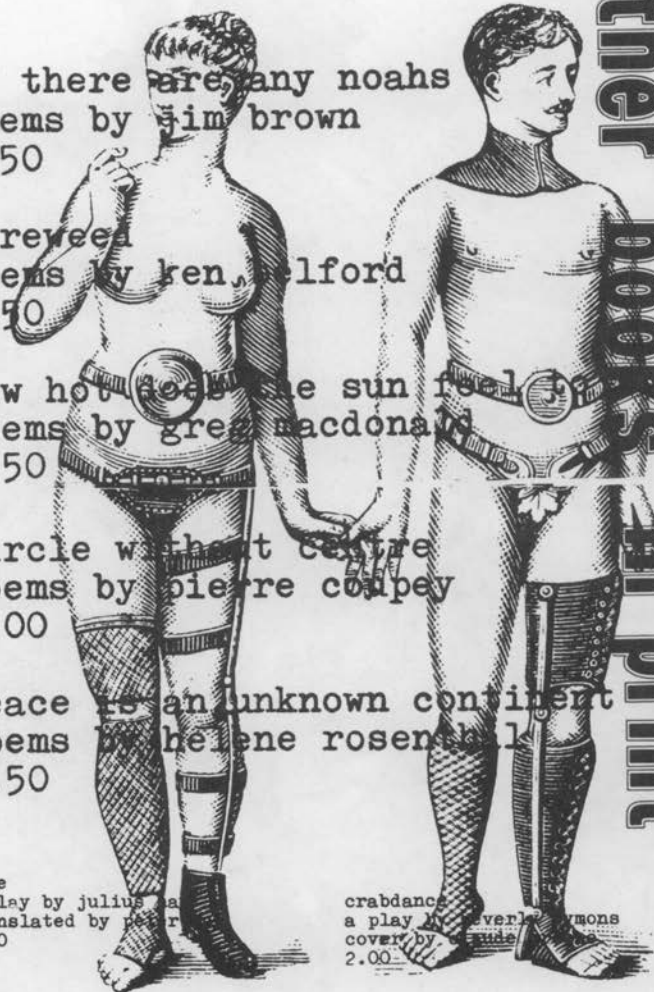
how hot does the sun feel
poems by greg macdonald
3.50

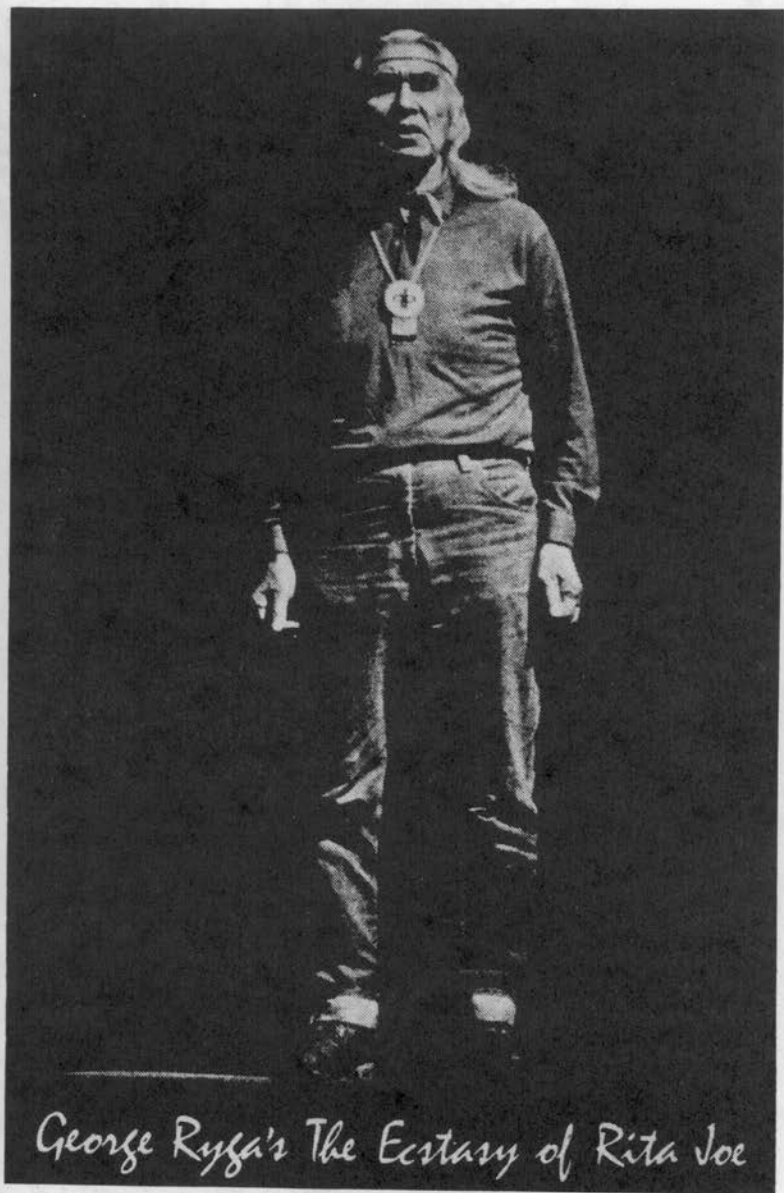
circle without centre
poems by pierre coupey
2.00

peace is an unknown continent
poems by helene rosenbalk
2.50

have
a play by julius caesar
translated by robert
2.00

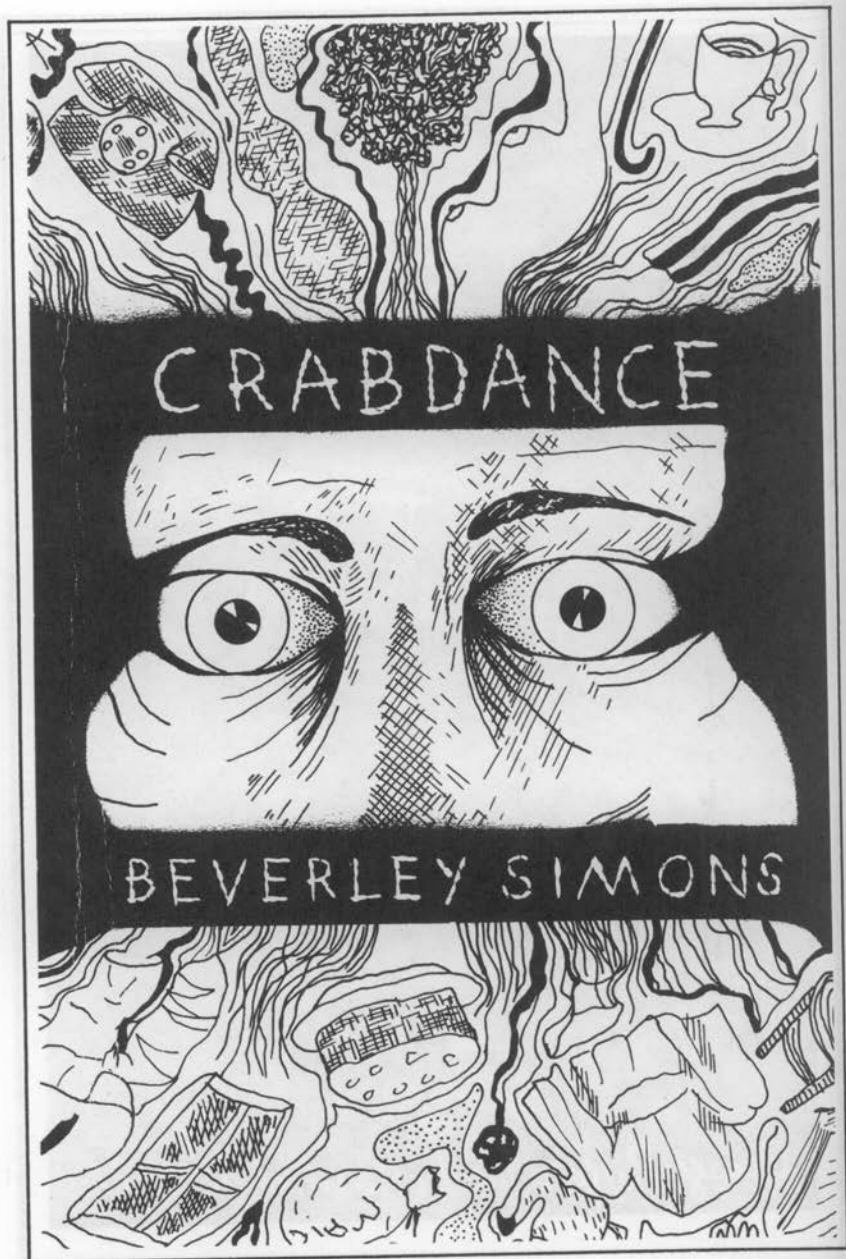
crabdance
a play by everett roymons
cover by g. r. m. m.
2.00





George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*

Cover, George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1970).



Cover, Beverley Simons' *Crabdance* (1972).

STEVESTON

Daphne Marlatt
& Robert Minden



Cover, *Steveston* (1974) by Daphne Marlatt and Robert Minden.

Voicing Prairie Space: Interview with Dennis Cooley

Born in 1944, Dennis Cooley grew up in Estevan, Saskatchewan and currently teaches English at St. John's College, University of Manitoba. He has published three books of poetry: Leaving (Turnstone, 1980), Fielding (Thistledown, 1983) and Bloody Jack (Turnstone, 1985). All three books reveal his interest in formal departures from the tyranny of orthodox running rhythm and the left hand margin. Progressively from Leaving to Bloody Jack authority is released from its traditional formal and ideological bastions—including the author—and placed in the mind and heart of the reader. All three books, especially Bloody Jack, are pleas for flexibility, knowledge and tolerance. All three search to voice that large sparsely populated and neglected Canadian prairie space.

DL

St. Paul's College
January 17, 1986

DANIEL LENOSKI: Karyl Roosevelt in a review of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* comments that Michael Ondaatje uses different forms of perspective, and in doing so, gains an in-depth insight into the inner being of Billy the Kid.¹ Doug Fetherling has said virtually the same thing about Ondaatje's portrayal of the American west.² Obviously your book bears a remarkable resemblance to Ondaatje's Billy and Buddy books.³ I was wondering whether you think that such comments are fair comments about the effect of Ondaatje's work or of *Bloody Jack*?

DENNIS COOLEY: Well, I'm not sure that my character is a character in the traditional way. I didn't particularly think of building a character, though there is one there that one could extract from the book. The point is it's probably more true of what Ondaatje has done with Billy the Kid. You

have a greater focus upon that figure. There are almost no entries in *Billy the Kid* that don't, in one way or another, deal with Ondaatje's Billy, whereas in *Bloody Jack*, there are all kinds of sections that never mention Jack Krafchenko, and require some effort on the part of the reader to integrate them into the book as a whole, to consider: What's this doing here? how is it connected with the rest of the book? Still, the similarities with *Billy the Kid* I would think would be pretty strong. It's one of my favorite books ever written by anybody; it's just an astonishing book.

DL: Are you then, perhaps trying to re-define character, because certainly there's a difference between Jack and either Billy or Buddy. Krafchenko is a much more loosely developed character. In fact, there's an incredible ambiguity about him.

DC: Well, yes. A lot of contemporary theory, as you well know, is very dubious about the notion of character—in fact, would suggest that character as we normally think about it is roughly a phenomenon of 18th and 19th century novels, that it's an invention of a certain point in history. There's a reason to suppose that not only need we not have character that way, but people aren't that way either. There isn't a simple coherence to either character or people in our time.

DL: So your concern here isn't merely stylistic and structural with regard to the re-definition of character, but epistemological as well?

DC: Oh, yeah! If I could turn it around this way: My sense was that I wasn't writing a book about Krafchenko. It was more a collision of a whole series of discourses and there *were* and *are* various ways of thinking about them. We have discourses of authority *and* discourses that we might put in opposition to them and that particularly centre on that Krafchenko figure. He's as much symbol as character. He embodies, in many ways, a kind of verbal defiance, a snubbing of the nose, at the discourse which is approved, official or proper, and that includes not simply the language of those who are well-to-do economically or have positions of influence, but even those who would invoke certain academic or literary uses of language as the "proper" ways to use it. So, I'm thinking of that in a Menippean way that the Kristeva epigraph might alert one to.⁴

DL: Well, are you, then, on the side of the so-called "improper" use of language?

DC: Yeah. That's my sense. Now whether that's the case with the readers is another matter. As we were discussing a few moments ago, I think

Bloody Jack is an immensely permissive text and a text that you could read in any number of ways. I think you can locate and re-locate pretty flexibly in the text.

DL: The position you've just elaborated is basically a position that undercuts what is proper, orthodox, traditional, and there certainly is all kinds of evidence of undercutting in the book—you undercut just about everything that exists, including yourself. In that way, the book—and this is not an oblique reference to your waistline—is very flabby. It's not hard to understand what you're against. But what are you *for*?

DC: There are no apolitical positions; there are no neutral positions; there are no positions outside matters of definition and evaluation and there are important centres in the book where I think you can locate authorial presence or measure. One of these is living life with some joy and intensity, wit, playfulness, affection, a sense of open possibilities, of distrust of settled or hardened authority. That openness and play is a very erotic sort of thing. I really think of this as an erotic book. I suppose other people think of it that way and don't like it.

DL: What do you say to people who consider this to be not merely an erotic book, but a crude and obscene book? People like Agnes Klassen who is a character in the book, but who really exists too. There are lots of Agnes Klassen. Many of us here in the English Department have even received a letter from one of them.

DC: Well, they enter the discourse. They're responsible for their reading. I'm responsible for my writing. That response is not a view of the world that much attracts me. I find that kind of tight-lipped disapproval repellent. That's not the way I'd like to go through the world or, I would hope, that anyone would go through the world. But apparently there are a lot of people prepared to do that.

DL: You seem to identify this reaction to your writing as crude and obscene with Christianity, let's say with a religious point of view. The major objector in the book is the Mennonite Agnes Klassen. The girls from St. Mary's Academy discriminate against Jack, are cruel to him. God, when he appears, is the most disgusting character in the book. Do you have an anti-religious bias?

DC: I don't think so. The systems of authority in *Bloody Jack* also tend to be largely of British derivation and eminently middle class. Almost all the authority figures tend to be people who would invoke the privilege of the

law, the press, or the Church, or whatever, in which they are beneficiaries. My sympathies in the book are with those who are in the margins as a lot of people on the prairies are. This [the Prairie Provinces] is a world where many of us identify with those on the outside or edge because historically that's where we have been put. I'm disturbed by a series of institutions that are inflexible, or have gone dead, which is not necessarily a comment on law or the legal system, or even religious belief, though as you know, I think of myself as neither Christian nor religious.

DL: You do, then, see yourself as the voice of the underprivileged, the down-trodden, the discriminated against, in this book and in *Fielding* and in *Leaving*?

DC: Yes, but one thing that I really want to guard against is a view of my work as didactic or schematic. I like to think of the resistance and the celebration of resistance as a creative thing, and it involves a joy in language. Language, in fact, is the real radical measure here. You use a different language here, a language of carnivals—

DL: —also, though, for the most part in this book, the language of the common man. There are other languages, but the book is full of the vernacular, full of misspellings, language that has a great deal of energy, but not much order, and it seems to me that that identifies you as the spokesman for an oral culture rather than necessarily a literary or print culture.

DC: Well, yes. There's a terrible irony in this though. You've put your finger on part of what I had in mind while I was doing *Bloody Jack*, of drawing on oral models and celebrating them, of trying to tap into these voices that have not been permitted into literature, or if they were permitted, were permitted often in demeaning ways, as the cause of laughter or foolishness, rather than with a certain dignity or celebration of life that they may represent. But, I perceive a print culture closing in on an oral world. Krafchenko is an oral hero coming out of an oral world. The institutions that ensnare him and finally bring him to his death are all part of print culture. I tried to work that very much into the book and I'm glad you noticed that and brought it up. The irony is, what does Cooley do...he writes a book, doesn't he?

DL: —in which Jack Krafchenko objects that the real Jack exists between the lines, not in print.

DC: So, you have it both ways, or you try to have it both ways. If you're going to be literary in our world, that overwhelmingly, almost exclusively, means that you've got to work on the page. About all you can do is move oral discourse into a written culture. It is going to be altered in doing that, so I realize I'm caught in a kind of crazy tension here that might create energy in the book, but I don't know where that takes you as reader, how you would understand that.

DL: In several poems that tension enriches and energizes the poem. I'm thinking in particular, for example, of "train song," where you use two Ukrainian slang words for genitals, and a local joke that is part of the oral culture of the region.⁵ And yet at the same time, "train song," is a shape poem that functions partly because of the train tracks proceeding across pages 156 and 157. The visual/auditory tension there produces something that is funny and entertaining, rooted in a particular prairie space, yet at the same time rather meaningful. What, in fact, you've done is given us the sound and the shape of Manitoba and maybe the shape of Canada right in the middle of the page. Those two railway tracks may represent two different cultures, oral and written, French and English, male and female. You seem to be trying for the same kind of richness in those poems that quite definitely use the literary tradition, and at the same time the vernacular sound. I'm thinking of a poem like "glad gonads grinning," which is very oral and at the same time, very literary. It contains allusions to Chaucer, Yeats, Hopkins, maybe Lewis Carroll as well, that a non-academic wouldn't likely recognize, and yet the poem functions in the richest sense because of those literary allusions.

DC: Yeah well, I really appreciate your noticing that. I like to think that the writing is incredibly accessible to almost anybody and there are other things to be found, if one cares to find them or is able to find them, or is in a position to follow up on them.

DL: You must disagree violently with Kathie Kolybaba's comment that "there is no way into this book."⁶

DC: I'm bewildered by her comment. I would think that if most readers have trouble with this book, it would be because of quite the opposite reason. The book is so permissive that I would expect most readers to say "Where do I go with this?" rather than have a sense of authorial coercion, and say "Cooley is going to force me in this direction, to do these things." It's a book in which you think: What connections can I make? what can I do with this? In fact, it may even be that her comment has come out of that

exasperation, and has turned on its head in a search to explain the sense of frustration that the reader has.

DL: You obviously are playing a lot. Is it Roger Callois who says that play suspends ordinary legislation and produces new legislation.⁷ What in fact you do is destroy ordinary legislation, and then you allow the reader to produce his own legislation in order to play in the text.

DC: It's hard to know with these things to what degree *does* the text determine its readings. I think there's got to be some boundaries of determination. We were talking a moment ago about what's there in *Bloody Jack* and what kind of ethical centre there is. If there is one, then there are obviously some determinations in which certain discourses or positions are privileged more than others.

DL: It think that's particularly true after the "cunning linguist" episode. It becomes almost impossible after that point in the book to read any work without looking for a sexual connotation.

DC: What do you think of the status of the man and the woman, or the men and the women, or the male/female give and take in that passage?

DL: Well, I was going to ask you the same question with regard to the book as a whole, because Kathie Kolybaba has said it's only possible to find naked ladies or ladies seen as pussy in the book.

DC: Again, that also astonishes me. I was bewildered when I read it. My sense of the book is so different that I immediately got out the book and extracted about a dozen of what (in my insensitive male vision of the world) I take to be quite poignant and gentle love poems. Take even the passages where one might suspect a reader of that kind of wariness. Take "cunning linguist." As I was writing it, I was aware of this possibility and in fact was wanting that not to happen, and I constructed it in such a way that the female figure had the upper hand in the give and take, so that she came off often better than the male figure.

DL: I think that's true. There's also a lot of love present in such playful episodes, and in other places as well: "by the red," or the poem titled "diane." There's an incredible amount of sensitivity in the book, as well as crudeness, suffering, violence....

DC: Actually, there's almost no violence! Name me some violence!!!

DL: The implicit presence of the execution of Jack.

DC: But it's an anti-hanging book!

DL: I agree with you—the violence is a means and not an end, but I find a lot of suffering in the book.

DC: But watch even that early one, “in the yard” it's called. You don't have the actual hanging, but the painfully delayed movements toward the hanging. I mean, the hanging just seems to be *absolutely* brutal and monstrous, and I wanted that sense of physical revulsion and of what a horrible thing that is being done to this body—

DL: —not to mention the mind. But when I said violence, I was thinking of the type of mental violence that results from either “shunning” or excommunication. In that particular episode, the reader gets inside Jack's mind and feels a great deal of the agony that precedes execution.

DC: While he's waiting, he's frequently lonely and frightened. I'm just amazed by this feeling that this figure is bleak, or mean, or insensitive. My overwhelming sense of that character is that he's whimsical, he's playful, he's affectionate, he's uncertain, he bungles, makes fun of himself, he's full of longing and desire. I just think he's so far from the vision of the ruthless killer, that I can't believe anyone who has read the book could conclude that.

DL: What about the poem about God: “god with his yellow teeth”? Isn't that a violent poem?

DC: I don't think it's so much violent as revolting, especially for those who believe in God, but even they might be able to handle it by saying: “Look, this is not the God I believe in. This is a God that certain people may believe in or that Krafchenko in his horrible sense that the world is not very hospitable may conceive of.” You've got a whole number of possibilities.

* * *

DL: Let's just shift a little to a couple of things you said about metaphor and metonymy with respect to *Bloody Jack*. You've spoken elsewhere of the emphasis poetry has traditionally placed on the metaphoric, as opposed to the metonymic, and I take it you're using Jakobsen's and David Lodge's attitudes towards these terms.⁸ Your poetry seems to be proceeding in the

opposite direction, toward metonymy. Are you trying, then, to blur the distinction between genres, or in fact, create a new one?

DC: I don't know, maybe, I'd never thought of the second alternative. I was certainly aware of the blurring of the edges as many contemporary readers and writers are. That's hardly a peculiar strategy or accident. The boundaries of poetry and prose are pretty dubious, especially in *Bloody Jack*.

DL: And you *do* call it a *book*.

DC: Yeah, that's right. It's not called a book of poetry; it's just called a book. I think, personally, it's one long poem, but I can well see how a person would not think of it that way and make a very good argument for not seeing it as a long poem, or even a poem at all. One could quite easily read it as a mix of genres. I've tried to work on those edges, partly in the ways you suggested, by writing some poems not in a metaphoric way, moving them off the axis of substitution and on to the axis of sequence. That's happening in a fair bit of contemporary writing.

DL: Yeah. But you seem to have pushed it farther. You've opened up the form of the book; you've opened up the form of poetry, and I guess of prose, and you've opened up the line a lot. I wonder whether this is a conscious attempt to re-define the line as well.

DC: People have done various things. I've been influenced in my poetics a fair bit, as you know, by some American poets, Robert Duncan more than anyone else. He has influenced the way I think about poetry, including coming to think of the line as a possible form of composition. Nevertheless, I use the line very differently from him. I try to do more things with it. You can use it in many many different ways, setting aside that very traditional prosody that obtained for several centuries. You can do all sorts of other crazy things with the line if you no longer define it as a metrical unit.

DL: Or a grammatical unit???

DC: Well, that's almost the next stage of literary history. When you move away from the metrical line, you say: What can you do now? Those people who wrote free verse early in the 20th century composed their lines off grammatical units. They talked about the cadence of a line, and as near as I can tell, they viewed it as a grammatical unit.

DL: You've mentioned Robert Duncan as an influence, but when the book came out, the first person that occurred to me as an influence was James Joyce, and in particular, *Ulysses*, and even more specifically than that, "The Oxen of the Sun" episode. I was wondering about Joyce as a direct influence on this book.

DC: You mentioned this to me before and I was somewhat taken aback, and I've been thinking about it since...I don't think he was a direct influence. I suppose a possible exception could be the one breathless character in the park.

DL: The Molly Bloom of "in the park"?

DC: Yes, in that passage there, as I wrote into it the breathless excitement of that young woman, I may have vaguely had in my mind a parody of Molly Bloom, a vague sense of Joyce. It's hard to know what you have in your mind during composition and what you make up in retrospect. In any event, I've been thinking about your comment and it has occurred to me that Joyce is one of the few early moderns who maybe was leery of a master-narrative or superstructure. It may have had something to do with him as an Irishman living in a colonized world, or on the margins in Trieste or Zürich. When you live in a colonial environment, in many ways you are living on the margin. As such, it is a lot easier to perceive of the world as bedevilled by master structures and locate your life in a more free-wheeling and mobile way.

DL: Well, I think that's rather what Wolfgang Iser says in *The Implied Reader* about Joyce's use of diverse styles in the "The Oxen of the Sun" episode and throughout *Ulysses*. He says that Joyce writes in various different styles because he realizes they imply various different perspectives and values. Accordingly, he doesn't want to impose any *one* upon life. He does not want to limit the object of his focus, but present it as "potentially illimitable," no matter how commonplace it may be.⁹

DC: Now that you mention it, it sounds rather familiar.

DL: This brings up a couple of other questions with respect to Joyce. First of all, *Ulysses* is a great comic novel which questions the traditional hierarchal subordination of the comic to the tragic. Are you doing the same thing, because you not only have a tremendous sense of play, but also a good deal of energy and humour?

DC: Sure, comedy politically, especially the kind of Menippean comedy, almost slapstick, I'm working with at times is meant to be liberating and subversive, to challenge hierarchies. Tragedy works in a hierarchical world. You have to have superior people. How can you fall if there is no hierarchy in which you privilege those who begin at the top of the hierarchy and lament their movement down?

DL: You can fall from an imagined height as Willy does in *Death of a Salesman*.

DC: I don't think *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy. Miller wants it to be one because of the honorific term. I don't think that it's possible any longer to write tragedy. Still, I think that *Death of a Salesman* is a great play. Our evaluation of it should not depend on the traditional privileging of tragedy. One ought to say that tragedy is just another form, not a better form. It's had its day. Now we write in other forms more appropriate to our time and place.

DL: Let's talk more about generic terminology. Like Pound and Eliot and Yeats, Joyce is usually called a Modernist and we've spoken of the similarities between *Bloody Jack* and *Ulysses*, as well as the Postmodernist *Collected Works of Billy the Kid*; you speak of *your* book as Postmodernist. What's the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism?

DC: If you invoke Joyce on this occasion, the question is problematic because Joyce may very well be in many ways exempted from the definitions of Modernism; he may be a real anomaly here. Postmodernism is not simply confined to a sharp division historically, as no other literary term has been either. So Postmodernists look commonly for other earlier writing for which they have an affinity, *Tristram Shandy* being the obvious one in the English tradition. So you certainly can find earlier instances. Writers and critics struggle over these things, but one of the major differences between Modernists and the Postmodernists is that matter of authority and structure; there's a much greater desire among Modernists to seek and admire overriding systems of knowing and valuing whereas, among Postmodernists, there is either a sense that they are not available, or that they're not wanted.

* * *

DL: All of your books celebrate the local a good deal. You almost seem obsessed with naming local things. That obviously leaves you open to the

criticism of being parochial. Don't you have a responsibility to your American and British audiences, to those people who would rather walk across the street to see *Barnum* than see *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, a better reviewed play about a Canadian hero.¹⁰

DC: All writing is local, it's just that what happens as a result of certain accidents of expansion is that certain local cultures get moved out into the larger world from time to time. Is life in Manhattan any less local than life in Winnipeg? I think not. The reason it seems not to be any less local is that, for the time being, it inhabits a world that is exporting itself in movies and television and books and so on. Those exports accompany the military and economic presence of that nation in various ways. American literature hardly got into American universities until well into the 20th century. Why was it that *Moby Dick* was found worthy in the 1930s or whenever it first was, and not before? It has a lot to do with the fact that British imperialism was still overwhelming American culture and their measures of themselves. So, the recognition of texts, in places other than where they were written, has really very little to do with how locally located they are; it has a lot to do with how seriously a culture is treated elsewhere and that in turn has very little to do with its own merit. It has a lot to do with certain other forms of power. These things are never neutral. Things get known not simply because of their innate virtues, though that helps, but they get known in large part because they are part of a large institution that is moving out into the world.

DL: What you're saying is that your responsibility for the local is more important than your responsibility to possible international and especially American or British audiences?

DC: Yes. If you look over your shoulder you're probably going to lose the verve, freshness, the intensity that's available to you. I think there's no such thing as universality. There's no such thing. If you fool yourself into thinking there is, there's a good chance you're going to end up writing things that are so empty, so devoid of all smell and texture, that they're no worth to anyone. I certainly won't buy the notion that a death in London is more universal than a death in Estevan, or that a reference to a bar in San Francisco is somehow cosmopolitan and a reference to a beer parlour in Winnipeg is not. They may be better known, but they are no more universal.

DL: You've put into your books a good many local characters without bothering to change their names, in much the same way that James Joyce does, except that you've a lot more reverence for your friends than he seems

to have.⁹ What's happened is, of course, that the book has become a game to try and determine the significance of the reference to, let's say, Ken Hughes, Robert Kroetsch, David Arnason, Danny Lenoski, or Paul "Hjartarson" [sic] within the text. You associate a good many of these people with the crow, another friend. What does the crow mean to you? Why all this affection for a farmer's nemesis?

DC: The crow is vaguely anti-establishment; he's noisy and rambunctious and he doesn't speak in reverent voices. But there's a local reference too. You know that Harry Crowe case at United College.¹² In these parts, the crow is a symbol of the rebel, of the margins. Hence Krafchenko's affinity for him in the book; there's a kind of sympathy for his rambunctiousness, his ingenuity, his cunning. The crow, as you know, is a mimic; he can actually speak in a human voice. So what better muse symbol could I find for Cooley, or Krafchenko, or Kroetsch?

DL: So when you criticize Kroetsch for making crows talk in *What the Crow Said* (1978), the criticism is ironic.

DC: He didn't make them talk enough. This is what the crow *really* said.

DL: What about Paul Hjartarson being an owner of a cafe? Is that a comment about his weight?

DC: No, I hadn't that in mind, though it may be valid. Part of it is just a coding. I just wanted to have my friends there as company, to have them in there as a kind of little joke, and an act of affection. Sometimes they're more locally coded. Alexandre Amprimoz becomes the authority in French. As you and I both know, he is extremely sophisticated in his knowledge of Italian, French, English, and even Mathematics. In the book I let him be the authority on very small French words. He might be in a position to give advice to the local Tory.

DL: And Lenoski as the listener is appropriate?

DC: Yes, that was typed right into the manuscript. More seriously, I would like to have included more female friends, but with Krafchenko as a flamboyant ladies' man and Cooley's confusion with Krafchenko, that might have caused some problems. There's also a more general aesthetic strategy to such local naming. That's another sign of Postmodernism if you will, where you deliberately violate the historical situation. Ostensibly, it is pre-World War I Winnipeg that I play with. When I insert the names of people who are contemporaries, what I'm doing is declaring

this as a *made* thing. This is not history, though history is a made thing too. Cooley made this all up. There's a declaration of solidarity, a community of not only friends, but of literary people, intellectual, cultural people, who walk with you in that world, so that in a lot of ways, it's a kind of gifting. Writing is a gifting. Part of it is that. You're gifted with those friends and in turn there's a kind of giving as you enter them in the text.

DL: Yes, that's what I've told my classes. I feel honoured, thrilled, and delighted to be there. But what you've just said also leads me to believe that you don't think of history as a valid discipline?

DC: Sure it is. But historians often fool themselves about what they're doing. One of the major mistakes that most people make in our time is to assume that their language gives them virtually direct access to a phenomenal world, to an experiential world, and if we learn anything from the kind of *mad* theory of criticism that's come out of especially contemporary France, it's that there's no such thing and there never can be any such thing. Language is always mediation, always culturally constituted. That's one of the major recognitions in Postmodernism generally, when it acknowledges its artificiality. It is saying "I am not giving you the world directly or nakedly. I'm giving you an invented world."

DL: But is it only that? Is the message only the medium?

DC: Oh no. My sense of this is traditional in some ways. Language refers, yes, but it is also reflexive and then you have all these things going on. I'm not a nihilist about this, nor an aesthete in the sense that I believe all we can do is construct these inner patterns or fictions. They connect to the rest of life in various ways, but the connections are very complex and slippery and we have to keep reminding ourselves that these are mediations. But I certainly believe that there are references and that one of the major pleasures we take in reading is one of recognition, or of apparent recognition, of a world that we think we inhabit when we are not reading a book. Part of the reading experience for readers, whether they knew me or not, would be to recognize that yes, this book is analogy and that formally it's governed by those aesthetic principles even as it subverts them at times. But this also is a poem about something that actually happened, a death in the world, and that I think most of us will read wanting all of those things. I read wanting everything as I write wanting everything.

DL: How important was history to *Bloody Jack*? You obviously have used a good many “factual” details. Others you’ve changed. What responsibility do you have towards the so-called “factual” details?

DC: None whatsoever, as a historian would describe them. This is a poem, so if I change the names or make up the names or I alter dates, or insert characters who didn’t exist or whatever—there’s no problem. The discourse here is of poetry, not of history, so the paramount measure of these texts is not “Did this really happen?” or “Are these facts correct?”—though that might interest us and inform our reading. But that’s not the primary virtue. What’s important is not “Did this really happen?”, but “Is this interesting?” “By the principles of literature, is this interesting?”

DL: Is it a good story?

DC: Well, I would hope that’s not the main measure of my books, especially *Bloody Jack*. The latter is largely poetry and it goes out of its way to explode the chronology.

DL: It is poetry that emphasizes the metonymic, which moves it in the direction of storytelling and the story begins to take over at times, to tell you, especially in “diane.” “diane” is one poem I admire a great deal, among many others that I admire. In “diane,” the goddess Diana, perhaps functioning as muse, is mixed up with Diane, your wife, and Krafchenko’s sister, who tried to breathe life into him after he was executed. What’s happening of course, is that you are becoming impregnated with the muse, if you like, or vice versa, and also Cooley and Krafchenko are becoming mixed up. Did you have a sense of possession, let’s say, of blurring your personality with that of Krafchenko when you were writing this book?

DC: Well, I would put it this way....Evidently, Krafchenko did exist at a certain place and time. I tried to fantasize into him and obviously there’s a strong confusion of narrator, author and protagonist. Yes, I believe strongly in a muse. One of the other things I had in mind there, since you speak of possession, was that Diana is also a witch figure, isn’t she, and there’s some notion of being bewitched or possessed. That woman is trying to revive the dead body and the language suggests a rather disturbing sexual embrace by the sister of the body of her dead brother.

DL: There are also many allusions to classical mythology, classical stories, if you like, in *Bloody Jack*. Not only do we have Molly Bloom getting into the text, but we also have the Odysseus story with Penny making her

presence known. We have Hermes in the text. We have Mrs. Rhea Morse, perhaps the reversal of the Oedipal situation at the end of her monologue.

DC: Yes, I was working with that pretty carefully. OK, we have the Penelope, but there's also one poem when Krafchenko and his buddies are going to rob the bank and it's cold and by the time they get there, they're drunk and they're cold and they're whimpering, and he is saying "I wish I were home with Penny in bed." Part of what I'm doing is parodying the macho adventure story. He's a kind of Odysseus figure, but often in a comical way. There's not the grand heroic, other than in his verbal audacity and his cunning. But I mean, there are no feats of extraordinary physical prowess.

DL: So, you've subjected the classical story to the prairie mentality, made it appropriate to western Canada.

DC: Yes. Yes!

DL: You've talked about your lack of responsibility to an American audience. You've also spoken about Canadianizing European myths. Do you see your goal as Robert Kroetsch sees his, in terms of what he has called variously "fucking the past," "unnaming," "uninventing," "re-naming"? Is this the special responsibility of the Canadian and prairie writer?

DC: Yes, especially the prairie writer. We're fighting like hell to get out from under measurers of our world who have told us we don't matter, our voicings are boring. It's a real struggle. That's our culture. All acts are political and these are profoundly political attempts to voice release, speak out of our world when we've been told by everybody elsewhere that this doesn't matter, that you must imitate us as much as possible. So, sure...

DL: We're back to the epigraph again, eh?

DC: Yeah, yeah, for sure. This is a very political act. I'm saying, "Here are our voices, look out! Let em go!" The poem more than any that have released our prairie voices is Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue*.¹³ It's the breakthrough poem for prairie poetry.

DL: Kroetsch has meant a great deal to the writing community here and even across the country, but so have you and David Arnason. Perhaps we should talk a little about your editing. There's been a tremendous outburst of writing in Manitoba since you and David, along with a number of others,

founded Turnstone Press. How much do you think the Manitoba Writers' Guild—which has well over 286 members now and didn't exist prior to 1982—owes its existence and fertility to Turnstone?¹⁴

DC: There are lots of things behind that surge. Those things never happened because of one or two people. There has to be a passion, a readiness among a lot of people before that range of activity can occur. There are loads of people in fact who were there, who were simmering, writing, ready to go. A better way of putting it is that there was a readiness and a need all over the prairies. In the mid-70s and even slightly earlier you get vehicles, small magazines and presses opening up and there's just a flood of writing. It works both ways. You've got to have the institutions, the outlets to release and to anoint writers, but the writers have to be there at least in potential, or on the verge. So it's a very large process. Any individuals have to be part of a much larger action.

DL: The creation of the Manitoba Arts Council and the Saskatchewan Arts Council and the interest of the Canada Council obviously meant a great deal too...¹⁵ We seem to be arguing that the time was propitious for you to write *Bloody Jack*. Do you think you can duplicate this performance?

DC: I can't imagine doing anything quite like it, so ambitious or permissive, ever again, although if I have any luck, the manuscript I'm working on now will offend people all over again. I've got some soul/body poems. The souls are bitchy, cranky, and superior, and they can't wait to get back where they came from. The bodies are affectionate and playful, and like to drink beer and make love.

DL: I assure you I'll try hard to be offended. Thanks for the interview, Dennis.

NOTES

1. *New York Times Book Review*, 17 Nov. 1974, pp. 60-61.

2. "A New Way to do It," *Saturday Night*, 86, No. 2 (1971), 30.

3. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1970). *Coming Through Slaughter* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1976).

4. Cooley, of course, is referring here to Julia Kristeva's explanations of Menippean discourse in *Desire in Language* (1980).

5. The local joke is: What does the train say when it goes into Frazer Wood? The answer is in the poem.

6. Review of *Bloody Jack* in *Border Crossings*, 4, No. 4 (Fall, 1985), 43.

7. *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press, 1958), p. 10.

8. See *The Modes of Modern Writing* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. ix-27.

9. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 179ff.

10. John Gray, "Preface" to *Billy Bishop Goes to War, Modern Canadian Plays*, ed. J. Wasserman (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1985), pp. 384-85.

11. Terry Goldie seems to have seriously misjudged Cooley when he sees this as proof of Cooley's egocentricity, in a review called "Cooleying it in a Deconstructed World," *The NeWest Review*, 11, No. 5 (Feb. 1986), 15.

12. In the late fifties, Harry Crowe taught in the History Department at United College (now the University of Winnipeg). In April of 1958 a letter from Crowe to a colleague appeared on the desk of the College Principle, W.C. Lockhart, who opened, read, and copied it. The letter was critical of both the ideals of the College and of Lockhart himself. Lockhart showed it to the College Board, some of whom already saw Crowe—as others did—as a leader of a radical faculty group dissatisfied with the administration's response to poor working conditions and salary. Ultimately, after much acrimony on both sides, the Board voted to terminate Crowe's employment effective August 31, 1959. A good many of the faculty and students saw the events subsequent to the arrival of the Crowe letter in Lockhart's office as a violation of academic freedom and supported Crowe against the administration. Some faculty threatened resignation and the College was picketed by students. A committee of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), chaired by Professor Clarence Barber, was set up to consider the matter and decided that Crowe "had been a victim of injustice, violative of academic freedom and tenure." Nevertheless, Crowe left United College and became, for a time, head of research for the Canadian Labor Congress. For more details to this extremely complicated series of events, see A.G. Bedford, *The University of Winnipeg: A History of the Founding Colleges* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press), pp. 296-300. For Cooley, Crowe is quite clearly an appropriate symbol of the oppressed leftist rebel.

13. Robert Kroetsch, *Seed Catalogue* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1977).

14. The Manitoba Writers' Guild was born officially in 1981, though it had been informally discussed for several years by the St. John's College and Riverside Writers groups in Winnipeg.

15. The Saskatchewan Arts Council was created in 1949, the Manitoba Arts Council in 1969.

Under the Blowpipe: George Bowering's *Αλλοφανες*

Allophanes begins with a citation, claimed to be dictated to the author by the deceased poet Jack Spicer: "It began with a sentence heard in the author's head: The snowball appears in Hell every morning at seven. It was said in the voice of Jack Spicer."¹ *Allophanes*, then, emerges beneath two signatories, two proprietors: the author (George Bowering), whose proper name will authenticate the book, and a dictator, Spicer, a disembodied voice, whose proper name re-formulates the deceased, primal father of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and who, as a spectral subject, haunts the text's temporal unwindings to a degree that can never be ascertained.

Pretending to be inaugural, the sign could only endlessly mime its own circularity, since it has already constituted to de-signate—to whom—its own birth. Mythology imprisons this tautological figure into that of a Monster, a Sphere, an Egg where the nothingness unites with Being, and whose multiple names—Noun, Kneph, Okeanos, Ouroboros, Aion, Leviathan, Ain-Soph, etc.—arbitrarily conjure up that which in *principle* has no appellation, as though to deny to thought the access to its own silence.²

To these names we will add the snowball in hell, as a blank, yet eponymous space, placed in *Allophanes* prior to all metaphoric operation and akin to an arche-sentence, providing the *condition*, not the *sense*, of *Allophanes* as a writing. To read this work is to re-trace the gap between a dictation and a written series of repetitions. Almost. From its initial appearance the snowball in hell will extend a profound ambivalence. Reappearing and permuting, it will always be that to which the work is attached yet from which it is constantly escaping. At times the condition of change, at times the change itself, the sentence will never escape its temporal predicament and will raise constantly the question of the productivity of its own signifiatory ground. As Jean Paris puts it, "the question which begins here no longer springs from the sign because, on the contrary, it supposes it; it

no longer concerns in criticism, either the signifier or the signified, either speech or writing, but the gap itself from which these will be engendered, or, if one prefers, this articulation whose other name would be: *change*."3
This moment, where space explicates itself, will be the moment in which hell's snowball is born into writing *as a writing*; a dictated and a written moment that asserts its identity as its own rupture, signaling the opening moment into that multiplicity of which *Allophanes* will be the trace.

The snowball appears in Hell
every morning at seven.

Dr Babel contends
about the word's form, striking
its prepared strings
endlessly, a pleasure
moving rings outward thru
the universe. All
sentences are to be served.

You've tried it & tried it
& it cant be done, you
cannot close your ear—

i.e. literature
must be thought, now.

Your knee
oh
class
equal
poet
will like use a simile because he hates
ambiguity.

The snowball says it:
all sentences are imperative.⁴

2

Allophanes is a small book (4 1/4" X 8") whose cover will detain us for quite some time. Its central design is a triangle cut out from the surface of the paper. In the space of this triangle is a text comprising geometric

shapes and symbols suggestive of pictographs or hieroglyphs and all decidedly non-phonetic. Through a fold in the paper, the cover's underside becomes a surface. The triangular excision in this way serves to frame a part of the cover's unexposed side. As a result of this cut and fold, the cover's recto-verso distinction collapses and a profound discontinuity is produced upon the cover's plane. An interiority is presented as external and the notion of page is immediately doubled: (opening the cover to meet the title page this other surface is not seen).⁵

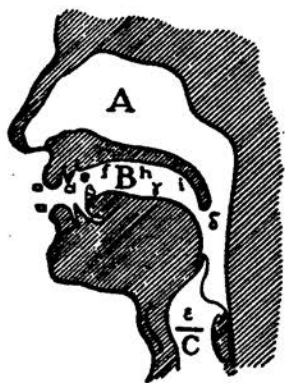
The triangle is resonant with associations. It is foundationally letteral, being both the diagrammatic relation of signifier to signified through a referent apex (as outlined in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*) and doubling too the actual form of the Greek letter *delta*. The triangle also appears at various points within the moving body of the poem. It is the horizontal effect of the tent (at the end of section VI) and reappears in the triangular torso of the pictogram of St. Arte (Astarte?) that concludes section V:



Letter, talisman, Christian trinity, pyramid, inverted pubis are all evoked in this framing shape, which is also a material lack of a surface.

At the end too, of this geometrical labyrinth will be a human throat. My larynx, placed between the trachea and the base of my tongue, forms a considerable projection in the middle line. It presents at its upper zone *the form of a triangular box*, flattened behind and at the sides and bounded in front by a prominent vertical ridge. Its interior houses my rima glottidis in the form of a narrow *triangular* fissure. Also, the portion of my laryngeal cavity above my true vocal cords is broad and *triangular* and named the vestibule. The superior

aperture of my larynx is a *triangular opening* in close proximity to which are situated the cartilage known as my cuneiform. My rima glottidis is an elongate fissure between the inferior (i.e. my true) vocal cords and subdivides into my glottis vocalis (the vocal portion) and my glottis respiratoria (the respiratory part). When vocalic activity is not taking place (for instance, in the condition known as writing) my glottis vocalis is *triangular*. During extreme adduction of the cords (for instance, in the



condition known as speaking) it is reduced to a linear slit and my glottis respiratoria assumes a *triangular* form. Of the five muscles of my vocal cords, the crico-thyroid is of a *triangular* shape. Already, in the cover's constitutional ambivalence we are figuring the withdrawal of speech into the labyrinthine *tactics* of writing. Clearly this cover lacks an innocent, utilitarian function of protection (partly concealing, partly announcing the promised interiority). To repeat: the cover folds to bring its back into visibility through a gap in the front, presenting a physical lack that shows more than it would had the surface been complete. An instability is thereby introduced into the nature of the surface which now carried tri-partite implications as a cover, a frame and a frivolous subversion.⁶ The non-phonetic "text" thus framed in the triangle participates in the system of the cover without actually being a member. Bowering's (Spicer's?) initiatory sentence is framed precisely in the way these non-phonetic characters are framed "inside" the cover. As a received dictation, it enters the textual economy as a perverse "fold" in the writing and similarly participates without membership. Rendering all quotation in *Allophanes* contaminated, this sentence further prevents the writing from being a first order operation. The writing cannot even gain an innocence but must inscribe itself and its implications inter-textually, with a constant referral to another voice beneath the surface of the writing, held absent but constantly re-called inside of the writing's shifting scenes, which work ambivalently throughout the poem to include the exclusion of this sentence.

3

The image moves not forward but elsewhere.

A thing final in itself and therefore good:
 One of the vast repetitions final in
 Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round
 And round and round, the merely going round
 Until merely going round is a final good.
 (Wallace Stevens, *Notes
 toward a Supreme Fiction*)

Mathematics holds the fold to be one of the simplest of the seven elementary *catastrophes*. (A catastrophe is a discontinuity or instability in a system). The catastrophic moments in *Allophanes* occur when the poem's continuous and repeated fabric (i.e. its homogenous, phonetic plane) erupts into non-phonetic events. There is always the danger of this *other* script (occasionally folding to reveal from its back the Script of the Other, i.e. Spicer's) emerging in *Allophanes* as an alternate writing. As the cover

erupts its under-surface, so too the twenty-five sections of the poem always threaten a catastrophic folding into another script. We have already witnessed the appearance of St. Arte in section V and the non-phonetic complex in the cover's triangular lack. But there are several others too. We should take instant account of the fact that the poem's title (on cover and title page) is spelled in Greek:

Αλλοφάνης

The Hebrew aleph appears in section XVI:



A gestural mark in section XIV:



These other scripts, as momentary eruptions, mark a difference within the poem's scriptive system and suggest, not the protean combinatory structure of phoneticism's writing, but a far deeper, prior writing, now banished (like Freud's primary repression) to a place behind the cover, folded, reversed, engulfed and smothered as an agency below the surface of the manifest writing. The poem's key image too, is not without its catastrophic part. SNOWBALL in its pure, phonetic form is host to a stubborn pictographic element. The word, as a signifier, appears, as we shall see, in a complex series of departures and returns to its matrix sentence. But examined on the level of its primary articulation (i.e. of eight phonemes into one word), the third letter is O and functions as an introjected pictogram visually miming in its shape the word's meaning. We can think of this letter as the snowball's anasemic state. It is phoneticism's radical other within itself, invaginated, like the cover, and disseminated as a pictographic contaminant throughout the poem. In acknowledging this anasemic element in *Allophanes* we open up the poem to a bewildering play within its own micro-structures. Wherever an O occurs (in "god" and "dog" for instance) then the catastrophic moment takes effect, un-assimilable in a conventional reading and in the order of a waste in the poem's economy of meaning.

The problematic scene of *Allophanes* can now be specified as the field of a thread working back and forth through two spectral columns: a spectral subject (Spicer as the absent-cause, the Primal Father in a new guise) and a spectral script (Greek, non-phonetic, pictographic and anasemic). Within this space, amid its catastrophic constitution, *Allophanes* stages the transformations of its matrix dictation.

The snowball in hell is both the site and series of fetishistic duplications. It is of the nature of the fetish (like the famous instance of

Van Gogh's shoes) to detach itself from its origins and to re-occur in obsessive transformations. Spicer's sentence is motivated as an object-choice onto which are projected numerous micro-discourses, phrasings, changes, ideations, propositions and questions, all compulsively repeated and re-inscribed. The snowball in hell is a contaminated and contaminating image, entering the poem as a fold in utterance and instantly problematizing (as we have seen above) the work's signifiatory ground. We will note a few of these repetitions in the following catalogue of movements.

Section I introduces the eponymous sentence: "The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven." The sentence itself seems a compact aporia (how can a snowball that depends on cold for its existence appear in Hell with its attendant heat and flames?) that generates a binary opposition: cold/heat to be submitted to numerous permutations. In section II, the sentence bifurcates and pursues two different itineraries. The snowball links to *snow castles* ("snow castles / are alright for lyric poems"), whilst Hell connects with mass communication ("Now it is real as a newspaper / headline in Hell"). The snowball appears iconically for the first time in section III as a picto-ideogrammic mark: a black sphere, like dilated punctuation. Its shape figures the *ball*, yet its blackness opposes the white of the snow. (These oppositions within items are numerous in *Allophanes* and eradicate any simple, unitary meaning.) Hell shifts context into "we grow old together, / we will never meet in Hell" and the snowball re-situates in the assertion "the snowball is not the cold." Already we can trace the anasemic operation in the emergence of the letter O as a pictographic imbed. In section IV the two images contextualize within the heat-cold opposition. Hell's thermal connotations echo in the "*coeur flambé*," whilst the snowball develops its interrogatory code: "& what would a snowball / know about polar knowledge?" In VI, Hell initiates a cultural code ("I haven't got a Dante's chance in Hell"). The snowball transforms to become the white sphere of the baseball and initiates a chain of content that will be centered on that specific sport. ("That snowball's got red stitches / & it's imitating God. / Tells me from third to home / is The Way Down and Out"). In section VII, the white-sphere-snow-ball complex announces a new change in morphology: "The egg sits there, / it does not rot itself." Hell echoes again through its thermal connotations. Asking where "Maud has gone" the speaking subject elaborates: "She crouches / over the fire / her back curved / to her care." The matrix image, at this point, begins to self-contaminate and fold back into itself. As a scene of repetition the section invests in the possibility to break down the discrete partition of the binary opposition. In this case Hell's thermal territory is insinuated by at least three terms from baseball: ("crouch," "curve" and "back"). A *clean* structuralist reading of *Allophanes* is thus impossible, for one set of oppositions erupts inside the other and proliferates a carcinoma of highly local and ludic meanings. In

section VIII, Hell assumes a destinator function as the snowball-baseball transmogrifies into "a spilled ice cream ball, / kick it to hell & Gone, / & turning the cone over, / place it on your head." The triangle here asserts itself as *cone*, whilst the transformation: snowball/ice-cream enjoys a thermal rationale for the change. In section IX, by way of a metaphoric inducement, the snowball leaps the partition of the thermal opposition and becomes a "hot" image: "pluck the melting sno-cone of the lightbulb." This melting process continues through section X, but not without contamination: "See the word made white & melting / before the turn of the fiery wheel." The heat here is *white* heat, i.e. the colour of snow. *Hell*, as a material signifier, can be traced in the word "wheel" which is constructed by a single letter prosthesis (w + heel) and by a single letter substitution ("e" replacing "l"). The snowball reappears, ideogramatically this time, in "The world's meaning is exactly / fol de rol de rolly O." (We have already mentioned the introjected pictographic function of the O.) In the concluding command of this section ("Stamp the snow off your boots / onto the face of the rug") the last word echoes *rouge* (i.e. the red stitches of the snowball of section VI) whose semantic associations (through colour) lead back to red-heat-fire-Hell. In section XI, the snowball as egg reappears in a scene of word-play: "the egg ziled gods," whilst Hell inheres homophonically inbedded in the "ell" of the proper name "Nellie": ("*Run for the roundhouse, Nellie, he cant corner you there*"). The triangle-cone development re-enters in the Empedoclean allusion ("Wear your best suit / when you jump into a volcano"). The *cano* in "volcano" continues another homophonic chain, inaugurated earlier with the phrase in section X: "I see the dog licking it up [i.e. the white word melting], / he turns & goes home, cano mirabilis." (The "I see" that begins this phrase further contaminates the heat/cold opposition in being the homophone of "icy.") "Dog" itself is a reverse form of "god" whose theologic meanings proliferate the poem. Section X, in fact, opens with "Et verbum cano factum est" and later (section XIX) will come the "Dog turds / discoloring the snow / about them." The volcano re-echoes in two phrases of section XII: "the perilous deterioration of dynamite" and more explicitly in the following (which also advances the contamination of the binary colours [red-white] and temperatures [hot-cold]): "On TV we sat breathless as death, / watching them blast the top off the mountain, // to begin, to make a perfect earth, a perfect smooth black orb."

This meticulous re-staging of images creates the effect of a weaving (the etymological source of the word "text") that promotes an undecidability between an abstract, formalist pattern and a shifting representational meaning. There is something in the above traced production that approximates both Freud's dream-work and the transformational grammar of Noam Chomsky. As if Bowering has shifted both of these as

methodologies to the literary order, where the focus is not on explicating the productional operation of the developing text, but on the spatio-temporal play of the surface, the implicative, transformational possibilities of the linguistic signs.⁷ Also, Paul Valéry, in speaking on the nature of poetic images, makes mention of their "indefinitely repeated generation" in a system of "cyclical substitutions."⁸ For Valéry, creativity and repetition are conjunctive but repetition is of a different order in *Allophanes*. The repetitions here are not of the nature of rhythms or rhymes, but profound disjunctions staged within the scene of the "other" writing. *Allophanes* is profoundly dialogic and its writing situates between two further



writings: a spectral, largely non-phonetic other, and a manifest, obsessive, compulsive writing of permutation and play. We must recall that the play of the same and the other is carried out upon a space of repetition that sets the grid for the series of spatio-temporal recurrences. The latter are less events whose existence registers as separate moments, than the consequences of the differential unwindings of writing's transformational operation. As linguistic imbeds inside floating contexts they are marked more by their high provisionality than by their fixing of meaning. What is produced is not a traceable theme but the graphic appearance of the *multiple* and the impossibility of the single instance. Through its succession of pages *Allophanes* asserts the impossibility of maintaining an identity based on sameness. The matrix images of the snowball and of Hell do not inhere in any authenticating metaphor, nor find investment in a cumulative intention; they risk their discreteness scattered in the movement of the syntax *per se*. For syntax in *Allophanes* not only orders verbal groupings but superintends the multiplication of the repetitions. Moreover, as we have seen, these repetitions function as radical generative disjunctions and logical contaminants, which determine the semantic rhythm of the poem through its twenty-five sections.⁹

Allophanes is weighty in its insistence that we cannot write the word, only process it through a labyrinth of re-writings. Inverting itself to transmit the ground of its pre-suppositions as the *explicit* topography of its implications, *Allophanes* will leave, as a kind of residue or sediment, the space of spacing itself as the condition of the gaps that delineate the poem's discontinuities and the differential zones in which its transformations occur. Change, of this radical order, remains unassimilable in a reading. The

allophanic image, rising every morning at seven, shows itself *at every moment* to be irreducibly temporal and dialogic. Present only in its repetition¹⁰ the word becomes sensed as a *betweenness*. A perpetual transformation along the lateral displacements of syntax of a graphic rhetoric whose line is extendable indefinitely. A mineral text?

* * *

GLOSSARY:

Allophane: Min. (mod. ad. Greek *allophanes*, appearing otherwise). A mineral classed by Dana as the first of his Sub-silicates; a hydrated silicate of alumina, with colour sky-blue, green, brown or yellow, which it loses under the blowpipe; whence the name.

Allophone: 1. A positional variant of a phoneme, which occurs in a specific environment and does not differentiate meaning.

2. Sound types which are members of a phoneme class; the individual sounds which compose a phoneme (such variation is sub-phonemic); a class of phones such that all are members of the same phoneme; they may occur in the same phonetic environment, or in different positions, with non-distinctive differences among them.

NOTES

1. From the jacket copy of *Allophanes* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1976). What is dictation if not the reverse movement of the sign? the inverse pattern of desire? Spicer's sentence will function as a remote control over the institution and arrangement of the signifiers. This, too, will constitute the textualization of an invisibility as the act of spacing; the supplementation of a *distance* by a *difference*, from a felt absence "present" to the space of absence itself.

2. Jean Paris, "The Writing Machine," *Sub-Stance*, No.16 (1977): p. 9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

4. *Allophanes*, Section I.

5. We might note, in passing, that the cover in this way reveals its material *from the back*, i.e. the copulatory position of the Wolf Man's parents as Freud recounts it in his famous case history. See, Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in *Standard Edition*, tr. and ed. James Strachey, Vol. 17, pp. 1-122. It is also the direction of weaving (i.e. textuality). We will sense Freud throughout *Allophanes* as a voice beyond the absent one of Jack Spicer.

6. "Frivolity originates from the deviation or gap of the signifier, but also from its folding back on itself in its closed and representative identity" (Jacques Derrida, *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*, tr. John P. Leavey, Jr. [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980], p. 128).

7. Transformation is a relational operation that makes irrelevant the teleological pursuit of stasis or an originary point. As James Ogilvy describes it, "unlike the more familiar notion of analogy, transformation permits the more radical move toward taking the basic parameters themselves . . . as transforms of one another. Unlike symbolism and analogy, which tend to assume a basic or literal foundation on which an analogy is built or a symbol drawn, the concept of transformation assumes no fundamental dimension" (*Many Dimensional Man* [New York, 1977], pp. 46-47).

8. Paul Valéry, "The Idea of Art," tr. Ralph Manheim, in *Aesthetics*, ed. Harold Osborne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 29.

9. We might propose this as a scenario. The image, unable to "erase" itself, reproduces and then re-produces its reproduction, in this way resisting the creation of a unitary, *possessible* meaning.

10. Gilles Deleuze in *Logique du Sens* points to the nature of repetition in an inability to inaugurate exchange. Repetition is decidedly anti-metaphorical and utterly resistant to the substitutional strategies that would exchange it.

JACK SPICER

Manuscript: "Poems for the Vancouver Festival"

Poems For the Vancouver Festival

Start with a baseball diamond high
In the Runcible Mountain wilderness. Blocked
everywhere by stubborn lumber. Where ever
the ocean cannot reach its wastline for
the lumber of islands or the river its mouth.
A perfect diamond, with a right field, center field
~~left~~ field of felled logs spreading vaguely
outward. Four sides each

Facet of the diamond.

We shall a-build our city backwards from
each baseline extending like a square ray
from each distance you from the first-base
line, you from behind the second baseman, you
from behind the short stop, you from the third-
baseline.

We shall clear the trees back, the lumber of our
past and futures back, because we are on
a diamond, because it is our diamond
Pushed forward from.

And our city shall stand as the lumber rots
and Runcible mountain crumbles, and the
ocean, eating all of islands, comes to
meet us.

The Frazer River was discovered by mistake,
it being thought to have been, like all
British Columbia,

Further south than it was.

You are going south looking for a drinking fountain
I am going north looking for the source of
the chill in my bones.

The three main residential streets of Los
Angeles were once called Faith, Hope,
and Charity. They changed Faith to
Flower and Charity to Grand but left
Hope. You can sometimes see it still
in the shimmering smog of unwillingness
Figueroa

Was named after a grasshopper.

You are going south looking for a drinking fountain
I am going north looking for the source of
the chill in my bones

Our hearts, hanging below like balls, as
they brush each other in our separate
journeys

Protest for a moment the idiosyncrasy of age and
direction.

You are going south looking for a drinking
fountain

I am going north looking for the source of the chill in my bones

Nothing but the last sun falling on the last
 oily water by the docks
 They fed the lambs sugar all winter
 Nothing but that: The last sun
 falling in the last oily water by the docks.

W it is the only barrier between ourselves
 and them.
 "Fifty four forty or fight," we say
 holding a gun barrel in our belt.
 There is still a landscaped line on. Trees
 growing where trees shouldn't be. No
 trees growing where trees are. A mess
 of nature. Inconvenient
 To the pigs and guine and cows ...
 Of all these settlers ...
 Settling itself down
 In a dirt solution
 The water ~~is~~ not alive
 In the test tube.

The Beatles, devoid of form and color,
but full of images play outside in
the living room.

Vancouver parties. Too late

Too late

For a nice exit,

Old Simon Fraser, who was called

Fraser in an earlier poem

played with it

intended not to discover a poem.

The boats really do go to China

If one can discover what harbor

Far, far from any thought of harbor

Seagulls, grainy.

Giving the message like a seagull
scratching about a dead piece of bait
Out there on the pier - it's been there
for hours - the cat and the seagull fight over it.
The seagull with only one leg, remote
From identification, anyway
They're only catching skivers.
The Chinaman out there on the pier,
the kids in blue jeans, the occasional
old-age pensioner.
The gull alone there on the pier, the one
leg
The individual
Moment of truth that it cost him.
Dead bait.

It then becomes a matter of not
Only not knowing but not feeling. Can
A place in the wilderness become utterly
fuzzed up with things? A question
Of fact.

They
Come out of the mountains and they come in by ships
And Victoria fights New Westminster and
They're all at the same game. Trapped
By mountains and ocean. Only
A wash on themselves. The seabirds
Do not do their bidding or the mountain
birds; there is

No end to the islands. Diefenbaker
Addresses us with a parched face. He
says if anything, what
in my case will bring us. Some
Of this our land, hunting.

Edit is Act: Some Measurements for *Content's Dream* *

Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984

Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1986

by Charles Bernstein

In writing 'on' *Content's Dream* the temptation is to narrativize the essays, to write 'then, and then, and then'. In that sense, the title is as emblematic as the literal beginning it makes of the literal matter at hand: language. For when Robert Creeley writes that "one tends to value any kind of statement for what one can take from it as a content," one certainly agrees, and with the understanding that Bernstein's reversal gives—i.e., the condition one *has* of content. The qualification of experience (dream) is in the possessive. Beginning at Bottom, as Erica Hunt has put it. If language is the content, "we" and "I" are not.

* * *

"WE"

These essays are frequently the in-print fallout from public and oral presentations. There is, then, an uncertain conflict between the obvious projected values of writing (writing is a private act in a public mode) and the incontrovertible public fact: living speaker, the compaction of the audience, elbow to squared knees, its distractions, coughs, shuffles, scraped chairs, late

* "Edit is act," from "Substance Abuse," in *Islets/Irritations* (New York: Jordan Davies, 1983), paraphrases a sentence ("Editing is act") from Barrett Watten's "Writing and Capitalism," in *THE L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E BOOK*, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1984), p. 170.

arrivals, heads turning, etc., the rapidity of delivery, Bernstein's methodical disjunction. So that his

vision of a constructive writing practice . . . of a multi-discourse text . . . many . . . modes of language in the same "hyper-space" . . . (p. 227)

of necessity sets loose among phenomenal stops, individual terms, one at a time, in which none stands as unifying, but instead dis-establishes the others' claim on the whole. This "we" is Olson's "we," "Polis / is eyes" where "sees" is not Zukofsky's "clear sight as against the erring brain" but a function of what can be actualized in *language* :

Poetry, centered on the condition of its wordness

Language is commonness in being

It is through language that we experience the world

We are born into language

Language is the first technology

Language (and any model projected within it) is pluralized in accordance with time. The result is a pressure applied within extreme formal alternations. Resolutions are never more than partial (usually in the form of reservations about others' extreme positions) and even then continually undercut, so that what Bernstein *does* establish is the *self-evidence* of literary values projected in their material reconstitution in writing. Form is held to as the ability to have effect, and "we" stands forth as a hyper-illuminated language sensorium actualized in the extended reading.

* * *

"T"

Clearly, then, language is not a 'monad' that, once inflated, stabilizes other unknowns. Language is an act and as such compounds itself (it walks, talks, walking, talks, talking, etc.). Within an active definition of its limits, those limits dissolve into the overall and plural emplacement within language's material, social and economic base:

it's not that aesthetic consciousness & political consciousness are essentially different, quite the opposite, but really this is the goal: reunification—in practice—of what we now face as multiple demands. the power of poetry is, indeed, to bridge this gap . . . by providing instances of actualization . . . but, sadly, for us, now, no *maker* is able to reap the legitimate rewards of his or her labor. & so our responsibilities remain multiple & we are called on to fulfill all of them. (p. 31)

This injunction carries with it the problem of a view of

Meaning, coherence, truth projected "out there" as something we know not for ourselves but as taught to us . . . (An imperial clarity for an imperial world.) An official version of reality. (p. 25)

The irony is that within such a view the "I" it vaunts is actually marginalized within its multiplication as one among other isolated units. A view of language as conduit disallows the reconstitutive force of writing. Against this, Bernstein argues for *argument*, talking back as against "the worship of solitude." Bernstein's is the composite sense of the writer as involved in the multiple theses of an overdetermined present, involved socially in fragmentation, giving up to that, taking the social debt on fully, if critically, and so transforming it and the alienated particulars of it. In this, Bernstein demonstrates that the partial intention of the social debt is "language removed from the participatory control of its users & delivered into the hands of the state," and that, quoting Barthes, ideology is the cinema of society and everywhere present. But for Bernstein it is just the fact of a pervasive, inescapable ideology that gives the writer force: "we are each involved in the constitution of language . . . our actions reconstitute—change—reality" (p. 26).

But there is equally a trap in that "each." It is not simply a case of a writing making sense only to its writer. Ideology is not a lie but a fact whose truth is its transformation:

The myth of subjectivity and its denigration as mere idiosyncrasy—impediments to be overcome—diffuses the inherent power in the commonness of our alienation: that rather than being something that separates us, alienation is the source of our commonness The poetic response to the imposition of an imperial reality has been to define subjectivity, by a kind of Nietzschean turn around, not as 'mere' but as exalted. The image of the poet as loner & romantic . . . only the private & individual is real. Beat—to abstract & project a stance, acknowledging the

injury this does to the actual poetry—is an obvious example, as is Surrealism . . . grounded in reaction. (p. 27)

But

the promise of the return of the world can be (& has always been) fulfilled by poetry . . . Poetry, centered on the condition of its wordness—words of a language not out there but in here, language the place of our commonness . . . i'm not saying the "private" literary activity is separable from the "public" conduct. i'm saying a person's got a variety of responsibilities . . . it's not that aesthetic consciousness & political consciousness are essentially different, quite the opposite, but really this is the goal: reunification—in practice—of what we now face as multiple demands. the power of poetry is, indeed, to bridge this gap . . . by providing instances of actualization . . . but, sadly, for us, now, no *maker* is able to reap the legitimate rewards of his or her labor. & so our responsibilities remain multiple & we are called on to fulfill all of them. (pp. 29-31)

Consequently, Bernstein's critical texts, rather than attempting to 'describe' writing—his, others', or all—is much more an effort to make space, or space as sense in which to breathe, perhaps less deeply and with less detail, but nonetheless with a key as to how that does occur in the writing itself. The bricoleur is one term of this, but again scepticism leads it even further. Rather than a simple provisional sense of method, the complete refusal of closure insists upon continuous qualification, a progression from one form to the next, and an irresolution of meaning. It is this progression that brings Bernstein to note

some value still in the author function . . . the "I" in a text operates as a very pertinent measure of the constituting capacity of language Formally, the "I" allows the course of formative capacities to be scanned I want to show that "I" as a social construction, a *product* of language and not a pre-existing entity outside it; that "I" is first a "we." (p. 410)

* * *

"ACT"

If there is an inherent vacillation, it is where the intellectual 'acts out'. In Bernstein's method, it is there in the understanding that any ground for use

is a thoroughly overdetermined one: the desire for reunification in language is in perpetual conflict with the plural present. It is possible then to see "language" as a compost heap of dead ideas "in which present . . . writing grows." The lived mass of writing then actually has as upper limit *act* ("one idea following instanter on another"), consummate motion in language, self-evident seams ("let the roots dangle" and "Edit is act"), and as lower limit "dead ideas . . . comprising an historical unconscious." Within this lower limit the major prop is what Bernstein calls "ideational mimesis," but for which the portrait perpetually will not hold. In Bernstein's poetics of act, thinking "consists not in representations of concepts but in a fabric or nexus of relations. Ideas are always syntactic" (p. 364) and syntax, as brushstrokes for Jasper Johns, is simply a means for getting from one side of the page to the other. Its combinatory makes active space for living, thinking flesh, all transformative hands and feet within phenomenal stops.

* * *

"EDIT"

The progression, then, is from an "I" ('acting out' within an alienation of place and time, the ahistorical loner) through *act* toward an historical collectivity *in* language, a "we" as the active, argumentative agents *in use* as against an "us" fused within a stasis of agreement. In this connection, "Conspiracies," the title of the fourth section to *Content's Dream*, is intriguing, again suggesting, as so many other elements, a mutuality of production in language, among the others also there ("It is the touch of others that is the givenness of language . . . not telling another what she or he does not know but a resonating [articulating] of the space in which both are enwrapped [enraptured]"). Further, this welter of intentions suggests that literature is just such a formation of attachments and oppositions with and within a possible past, present, and future. Thus:

In Coolidge, the experience captured is the one set down, internal to the individual poem, to . . . its limits . . . the reality of the experience during it. What this process reveals is that which is intended . . . that which is human and which is particular of each human. (p. 260)

In tandem with this, Bernstein makes this argument which, for me, is more compelling than any strict 'reader-centered' argument:

In contrast to the predetermined interpretations of a text based on the primacy of the self or of logic, it is the formal autonomy of the text as model that elicits a response, an interpolation. Its presence demands that I measure my relation to it, compute its scale. It is never incomplete or sealed off. Its completeness consists of its inclusiveness. Its autonomy is not of the self or logic but of nature, the world. Its truth is not assumed but made. (p. 236)

However, Bernstein's scepticism again pushes to the obverse. After quoting Stanley Cavell ("The camera has been praised for extending the senses; it may as the world goes, deserve more praise for confining them, leaving room for thought"—*The Claim of Reason*), Bernstein opposes that thought to what could be a cinematic metaphor for Coolidge's writing:

As the screen becomes bigger, it diminishes the sense of looking through a hole and begins to feel like the very immersion—thrownness—into sensation from which film offers relief/release. (p. 98)

Even so, the image has as its "upper limit object idealization and its lower limit blankness," which suggests the "inadequacy of our frames of reference to do any more than skim on the surface of phenomena." This is true but also assumes those frames to be stable, whereas between the poles of idealization and blankness are delimited and particular models, material in their particularity and so susceptible to decay, breakdown, or self-negation. And it is possible to see these—decay, breakdown, and negativity—as giving access—entry and exit—to the world, a multiplication of points of contact with and within it. In this reading, Bernstein's sceptical pluralism is less a forced hand with its only ground in historical tragedy and more a positive, if provisional, method of actualization of the historical present.

Although overall this *is* the argument of *Content's Dream*, Bernstein remains equivocal. Again he quotes Cavell:

"In Wittgenstein's view the gap between the mind and the world is closed, or the distortion between them straightened, in the appreciation and acceptance of particular forms of human life, human 'convention'. This implies that the *sense* of gap originates in an attempt, or wish, to escape (to remain a 'stranger' to, 'alienated' from) those shared forms of life, to give up the responsibility of their maintenance."

(Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p. 105)

Which may be true, but Bernstein must account for “the erection of the Theater of Representation in the place of production” (p. 178). In fact, Bernstein does note that “Wittgenstein and Cavell seem . . . cautionary and conservative . . . because they locate value totally within the context of use and production,” but by locating the sole alternative in Deleuze and Guattari (only to dismiss that alternative), Bernstein’s argument here seems reductive. In fact, noting Cavell’s as well as Wittgenstein’s silence on political and economic interests embodied within conventions, Bernstein elsewhere projects his thinking toward a *reconstitution* of our frames and models. And again, this comes down to responsibility. It is not

that our losses are . . . based on the conceptual impossibility of presence . . . but rather on grounds that each person must take responsibility for—the failure to make ourselves present to each other (p. 182)

However, Bernstein is very clear as to the point of this equivocation:

In talking about language and thinking I want to establish the *material*, the stuff, of writing, in order, in turn, to base a discussion of writing on its medium rather than on preconceived literary ideas of subject matter or form. (p. 62)

This concern swamps ‘material’/‘formal’ oppositions, instead

allowing for writing to be put together in continuously ‘new’ ways—how various shapes and modes and syntaxes create not alternate paraphrases of the same things but different entities entirely. Grains of mind. The desire for writing to be the end of its own activity, its very thatness . . . the text becoming viscerally present . . . the ‘content’ and the ‘experience of reading’ are collapsed onto each other, the content being the experience of reading, the consciousness of the language and its movement and sound (pp. 68-69)

But although Bernstein notes a particular path in “phonemes turning to morphemes turning to words turning to phrases turning to ‘poem,’” there is a larger dimension actualized at the level of intention: “the intending rather than assuming of order” By structuring the poem from the material (if alienated) particulars outward to form (rather than beginning with a core unity, Bernstein establishes unlimited access to a total public field of information. “Edit is act” is the appropriate motto for that access, where

in the end the poem stands as another particular being, hence object, like myself, in the world, and I beside it. And I return not to myself "as some egocentric center, but experience myself as *in* the world, that with the meaning and limits therein revealed I have also placed myself. (p. 71)

Articulating Female

In the Feminine:

Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots

Conference Proceedings 1983

Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985

Edited by Ann Dybikowski, Victoria Freeman,

Daphne Marlatt, Barbara Pulling and Betsy Warland

This is an important collection of papers, and it deserves more than a review. It deserves to be studied closely by every woman (and man) in Canada who writes. In a sense, this unilingual edition of the 1983 Women and Words conference proceedings resolves, through translation, the inherent doubleness of the Canadian voice.¹ What emerges, however, is a multiplicity of female voices—voices that are often unapologetically partisan, passionate, and subjective. The book derives its power from these qualities.

Having attended a few of the seminars at the Women and Words conference, I would guess that the editors have done a good job of selecting some of the best papers for inclusion. None of the less impressive papers I heard is published here. I especially appreciate the translations of several French texts. There were some problems with translation at the conference: translators were in short supply, and simultaneous translation of the highly literary pieces proved intractable. Although the papers are divided into six groups there's a lot of conversation going on across the sections. Section I, "The Social Context for Women's Writing," includes formal papers on the relationship between politics and literature, class analysis as a tool for obtaining access to women's writing, and less formal pieces on writing as a political act against violence against women. Section II, "Writing Against Double Colonization," includes papers by members of visible and not so visible "ethnic" minorities. Statements by women who have succeeded in combining motherhood and a literary career are contained in Section III. Sections IV and V, which make up half the book, are devoted largely to women's attempts to reclaim language and the ways in which those

attempts have been and should be received by scholars and critics. The final section, "Getting Women's Voices Heard," deals with women's publishing and theatre production.

Each of the editors contributes a short introductory statement. In the first of these, Daphne Marlatt outlines the volume's common ground:

The message seems to be, quite plainly: women are tired of being left out of the cultural mainstream, of seeing their work overlooked, their voices silenced; they are tired of having their primary life-concerns dismissed as peripheral to the "real (male) world"; they are tired of being constantly placed "over there," labelled as militant or Third World or lesbian, little signs hung on their work to defuse, minimize, and otherwise muffle what they have to say. The biggest label, of course, being "female."

But the reader who's looking for more female consensus than this won't find it. The volume is as much (perhaps more) concerned with divisive issues within the female literary community. For example, as Marlatt points out, the theme of exclusion is common to several papers: "familiar with being excluded from the culture at large, women are quick to sense when they are being excluded by other women.

So there is the issue of whether or not one woman can speak for other women, whether she is a Black woman speaking for all Black women...or a white middle-class woman speaking for "all" women.... There is the issue of whether or not "academic" theory and a specialized critical language is relevant to women who read to understand their lives.... Rifts occur along the lines of class, colour, sexual preference, and ('ethnic') culture.

This is just a sample of the many forms which exclusion takes in the volume. It's a theme worth noting because many of the most important issues raised are directly or indirectly related to it. Further, the way in which women confront one another on the question of exclusion reveals the spirit of collective self-examination which informed the conference. This review will also commit the patriarchal sin of exclusion by focusing almost exclusively on Sections IV and V. My (weak) excuse for this is the limits of space. A more important reason is the fact that Section IV, "Constructing and Deconstructing: Feminist Critical Theory," is by far the longest section (which suggest that this is where the primary interest of the editors lies), and that Section V, "Writing in the Feminine: Language and Form," supports and augments the call in Section IV for an authoritative feminist literary critique based on French language theory.

The inclusion of so many papers reflecting the whole spectrum of opinion on the future of feminist literary scholarship in Canada reflects, I believe, the chronic crisis in English Canadian criticism. Section IV is inspired in large part by the banality of much mainstream criticism in English—including much feminist criticism.² Were there an eclectic body of critical approaches being practised in Canada, these scholars wouldn't need to draw attention to the application of invalid criteria to women's texts. Nor would they need to fear the kind of academic nest-feathering which has traditionally fuelled the proliferation of theories employing high-tech jargon—theories which compete not only with one another but also with the writing they purport to illuminate.

In "Feminist Criticism as Creative Process," Louise Forsyth's emphasis is on the invention of a unique (and presumably single) approach which will result from the critic's active participation in the texts she reads:

I consider the role of the critic to be, above all, that of serious and appreciative reader....She must seek to understand the text she is reading and the language used by its author in order to talk about it on its own terms, without applying criteria that are quite invalid for the text, as too often happens when the literary establishment reads and interprets a woman's text....By letting it be known in her writing where she is coming from and why she must invent new critical tools in order to read a woman's text well, she does good critical work, and she also throws into relief the unacknowledged biases inherent in accepting literary and critical practices.

As Andrea Lebowitz suggests in "The Danger of Creating Another Literati," this invention of appropriate critical tools for the illumination of women's texts can serve two distinctly different ends, depending upon whom the text is being illuminated for:

Academic critics, and all critics I think, are faced with a dilemma, to wit, as we have entered this sophisticated literary discourse, driven by our own need to know, we have developed highly theoretical models—but have we left behind the ordinary reader?...Are we in danger of creating another literati speaking only to the initiates who understand the lingo? I feel this is a danger among academic critics, who have a need to prove their stuff as academics, to be acceptable, not to be reductive, not to bowdlerize the texts.

Many feminist critics have ascended into the rarified air of pure theory where it's not only the "ordinary reader" who gets left behind but often the literary

text itself. But this concern might make us wonder if the woman who "reads books for pleasure, for escape, for instruction, all the old reasons, and who wants to talk about them" ever gets the chance to read literary criticism anyway. Yet, if we consider the information in Lois Pike's "A Selective History of Feminist Presses and Periodicals," it becomes apparent that women publishers have been struggling for a long time to establish outlets for literature and criticism, and that these outlets have the potential for breaking down the alienation between women inside and outside the Canadian academy. Highly complex theoretical approaches, while they will help to enliven the dialogue within the academic community, may well perpetuate that alienation.

Lorraine Weir ("Wholeness, Harmony, Radiance' and Women's Writing") doesn't share Forsythe's and Lebowitz's sense of responsibility toward a wider female audience. Weir suggests that making women's texts accessible does violence to them: "I wonder about the criterion of accessibility and...about all the hermetic texts in women's literature and about what we do when we open them out, making an often bitterly private tradition into a public one—public on Narcissus's terms" (i.e., terms established by mainstream patriarchal critics). Accessibility is a value cherished by mainstream critics, and by making accessibility the goal of feminist criticism, Weir seems to be suggesting, feminist critics identify themselves with that mainstream. "Wholeness" and "harmony" are the literary standards, drawn from male writing, against which women's texts are measured. In the interest of making those often fragmented and discontinuous texts accessible, these standards are inappropriately imposed upon them. Rather than approaches whose aim is accessibility, "we need to critique the very concept of wholeness which in all its forms has held us captive, often unknowingly complicit.

For as long as we see the "half-saying," the concealed or unspoken subtexts, the use of symbol and rhetoric of camouflage as incomplete, partial, and imperfect "half-life," we are still participating in the judgements of Narcissus.... Those who would dismiss theory because of its difficulty or inaccessibility fall victim to the same arguments which have been used against women's writing.

France Theoret's sometimes cryptic "Territories of Criticism," while it agrees that only theory can account for certain dimensions of women's writing, suggests that she might be suspicious of the meta-theory Weir proposes—a theory that would critique established critique instead of literature. What Theoret seems to be advancing (although it's not entirely clear) is a kind of critical eclecticism which anglo-Canadian feminist

scholarship might well benefit from. She points out that criticism should take into account that women's writing is always affected by the conditions of women's lives, and, more important, she also reminds us that criticism is always less than the writing it critiques:

Critical language is a form of discourse, which is to say that it cannot entirely convey the phenomenon of writing, which is a totalising phenomenon. Writing contains elements of both instinct and rationality. There is a whole dimension of the work of writing that criticism can account for only through theory (the word comes from reflection) or through a mimesis of the text. Journalistic criticism, however, is ill-adapted to mimetic writing, which easily leads to preciosity and all the pitfalls of paraphrase.

Theoret also recognizes the limitations of adopting one mode of critical discourse, "for to engage in one discourse is to set aside another or to keep other dimensions at a distance.... Writing in the feminine is a plural language and it is necessary to aim for a pluralistic logic if we are to give an account of it."

Implicit in Barbara Godard's "Writing and Difference" is a definition of anglo-Canadian women's writing as transparent and Quebec women's writing as opaque (if those terms can be used metaphorically). Atwood's fiction is cited as representative of women's writing in English in that it demonstrates a "retreat from the logos and the word into sensation, finding refuge in prelinguistic forms of communication...." Godard notes in Atwood a "desire for a transparent language which would represent and transpose a preexisting reality...." In contrast to this transparency of and retreat from language is the work of Nicole Brossard which is representative of Quebec women's writing and which "substitutes for [the transposition of a preexisting reality] an emphasis on reading (and unreading), that is, the re-tracing of writing which is itself the trace of other activities.

Always doubled, language is incapable of translating any pre-existent signified. It can refer only to itself.... Brossard plays games with the reader, actively directing her to interpret the text and deconstruct the poetic figures through which we represent reality. Writing is not transcription but inscription, a means of resisting language through a foregrounding of process.

In Brossard, as in many Quebec women writers, "one encounters puns, ellipses, changes in gender and spelling, neologisms, typographic variants, the use of the white page—all techniques which foreground the material fact of the book in the acts of writing and reading." If Godard's generalizations

are correct, one has to wonder what the puns, ellipses, typographical variants, and the use of white space mean in the work of Margaret Avison, Daphne Marlatt, Lola Tostevin, Smaro Kamboureli, Phyllis Webb, Betsy Warland, Dorothy Livesay, Sharon Thesen, etc., etc., as well as in the poetry (as opposed to the fiction) of Atwood. But if women's language in English Canada really *is* largely "transparent" and unconcerned with writing as process, then the critical modes presently in operation are probably sufficient for illuminating anglophone women's texts.

Daphne Marlatt's "musing with mothertongue," Betsy Warland's "surrendering the english language," and Nicole Brossard's "Tender Skin My Mind" all reflect a profound commitment to the concept of "writing the body" which informs French feminist language theory. In addition to what "writing the body" has come to mean for heterosexual adherents of the principles of *écriture féminine* (see Louise Coitnoir's "The Imaginary Body"), for these three writers the concept is conterminous with their lesbianism. I take these writers to mean that the only authentically female language is *literally* the lesbian language of love because like lesbian sexuality this language excludes men. As Nicole Brossard explains it, lesbians bring themselves "literally into the world...."

When I say that we literally bring ourselves into the world, I really and truly mean literally. *Literal* means what is represented by letters. It is what is taken as the letter. Now we take as the letter what our bodies are, our skin, sweat, pleasure, sensuality, enjoyment. These are the first letters which form the beginnings of our texts.

Curiously, this contradicts Godard's perception of Brossard's writing, for literalization creates the illusion of bridging the gap between language and its referents. Warland expresses it as "our skin's syntax, our desire's etymologies." However, she's not concerned with creating new language but with rescuing language from its patriarchal encumbrances by returning to original etymologies. Marlatt talks about "a living body of verbal relations. Articulation: seeing the connections (& the thighbone & the hipbone, etc.). Putting the living body of language together...." This concept of turning female flesh into language seems to be an ironic reversal of "the Word made Flesh," a notion at the heart of the patriarchal language of the Bible. While this dream of an exclusively female language is in itself liberating, it's not a dream shared by all feminists within the school of French language theory. For example, Monique Wittig "rejects the goal of creating a separate 'woman's language.' ... To abandon language because it presently reflects masculinist structures is to abandon transformation of all sexist structures in favour of a marginal women's culture."³

It's hardly surprising that this radical creation of language out of female flesh and lesbian eroticism should have its source in French language theory, and that these theories are slow to catch on in English, for there's no way out of genderized nouns and gender agreement in French (in German, a third category of neuter nouns diffuses, if only slightly, the extreme polarization of male and female and gives women writers in that language a way of avoiding gender encoded expression.) Here, Louky Bersianik explains the linguistic relationship between masculine and feminine:

When the one (masculine) appears, the other (feminine) disappears. In the retirement of old people (*vieux*), old ladies (*vieilles*) are erased; in the union of newly-weds (*époux*), the bride (*épouse*) is soon effaced.... In short, the feminine is that gender which is sacrificed to another... ("Women's Work")

Sexism in the English language seems minimal by comparison, as in this example offered by Marlatt:

can a pregnant woman be said to be "master" of the gestation process she finds herself within—is that her relationship to it? are women included in the statement "God appearing as man"? (has God ever appeared as a woman?) can a woman say she is "lady of all she surveys" or could others ever say of her she "ladies it over them"?

or in this passage by Warland:

...i became angry at the sexism within dictionary definitions... what we find in *Webster's Thrid New International Dictionary* ... is that all positive examples of the usage of this word are male, and all the negative examples female. for instance; (in reference to human character and disposition): "It was his nature to look after others" and "Devotion that was not in her nature to return."

If the creation of a new, exclusively female language through the deconstruction of an old, phallogocentric one isn't as widespread in English Canada as it is in Quebec, where, as Gwladys Downes tells us ("Contrasts in Psychic Space"), there's been the additional problem of "one totally dominant religion [that] was almost co-terminous with language," it's because sexist idiomatic expressions (such as those Marlatt cites) can often be avoided, and dictionaries can be (and are being) rewritten. But how can one avoid erasing *vieilles* from *vieux*? No wonder Bersianik laments that the French language

...is, alas, neither a broken pitcher nor a car motor. The manufacturing defect lies at the very heart of the mechanism. The time is ripe to replace this completely out-dated model with a new one! We must reconstruct each and every part, and reassemble these parts in the form of a new machinery.

As the work of Marlatt and Warland suggests, despite a slow start, that "new machinery" is being assembled by anglo-Canadian writers as well. But given the profound self-questioning among French feminists around the issues of *écriture féminine*, one wonders if perhaps Canada is the only place left where enthusiasm for this aesthetic is still on the rise.

Barbara Godard's "The Translator as She" adds an essential dimension to the discussion of reclaiming and recreating language and the need for critical tools which will help us understand this process. The paper sheds some much needed light on the role of the translator by questioning the time-honoured perception of translation as a "secondary activity, as a mechanical rather than a creative process." The traditional notion of the translator as invisible drudge is absent in this description of the translation experience:

...most of the bliss of the language is that of the translator's, as the edge of her idiolect comes up against that of the author's style. For it is the author who has taken the risks of creation, expounded the ideas, plot and characters, and made a dangerous expedition into the unknown, bringing forth her insights for the scrutiny of the world.

The shadows over the pleasure stem from the nature of the relationship between translator and writer, who are doubles, with the psychic danger this entails, the translator being the monster. Instead, I like to imagine the translator as ventriloquist, as accomplice. Both analogies underline the complicity of writer and translator; both point to the somewhat subversive activity of translation, the copying/stealing of an original work of art.

These lines can't help but recall Louis Forsyth's definition of the critic as an active participator in the text, a reader who "enjoys[s] and vibrate[s] with its creative power." Indeed, the concept of translation as a special kind of criticism is implicit throughout the paper.

The translator gets to know (in ways the critic generally doesn't) the extent to which female expression is alienated from "received" modes of discourse:

In the course of translating the works of women writers, I have been pushed into an active relationship with their words. For these are writers consciously attempting to find new sources of meaning for women within language....In no way could their works be translated with the simple help of a dictionary, for the meanings I was to recode were not to be found there.

This recalls Betsy Warland's frustration with the dictionary, which for her is a reference guide to a foreign language. Godard also explains that while much gets lost in translation, there are also gains, for "in the reading which [a translator] gives to the text and fixes in the permanency of another language, the original text may well find itself clarified or enlarged." Godard quotes a passage from Nicole Brossard's journal which records her reaction to reading herself in translation; this passage corroborates the view of translation as a different order of criticism: "what we [writers] choose to hide in the text must now be unveiled. What the critic...can only presume, dream or imagine as the meaning in what she reads, the translator seeks to clarify." Lorraine Weir might not appreciate the accessibility which the translator's art can effect.

Somewhere just below or above the crossfire of debate in Section IV, Smaro Kamboureli ("Dialogue with the Other") transfuses some desperately needed life into what has come to be known as Canadian myth criticism. While recognizing (as traditional myth critics rarely do) the diversity of women's poetry in English Canada, she notes that "one of the factors that brings all these women together, that erases their otherness as writers, is their evocative and connotative use of myth.

I first became aware of this when...I reviewed *D'Sonoqua: Women Poets from B.C.* I noticed in this anthology that poets...had a common point of reference: myth as an alternate language, as a language that goes through words beyond words, towards the roots of their common feminine selfhood. This pull between feminine creativity and myth became more apparent for me when I read Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck*. There I saw Carr's discovery of and attraction to D'Sonoqua, the West Coast Indian goddess, who gave her name to the anthology....

This suggestion that myth "goes through words, beyond words" complements Godard's observation of the female retreat from language. It also expands that observation by pointing out that myth is itself a language and that the departure from patriarchal language is also an arrival at female language. And this, in turn, echoes Warland's journey back through the patriarchal overtones of language to the etymological origins of words.

Emily Carr's experience, as Kamboureli clearly suspects (and perhaps knows for sure), was itself a journey back through male interpretation: ethnographer Franz Boas, translating the story of *Dzo'noq!wa* as told him by his male Kwakiutl Indian sources, represents D'Sonoqua as the destroyer of children—the stereotypical witch/bitch/demon who haunts the male imagination.⁴ Carr, breaking through this male “myth of unreality,” arrives at that place Kamboureli identifies as “the space where the different faces of the self encounter each other.” As Kamboureli notes, Carr captures the spirit of the Indian goddess “in its many forms.”

Women poets' deconstruction of mythical material “break[s] down the dialectic patterns that have thwarted women's creativity, and open[s] up a dialogic relationship between the feminine imagination and the world that surrounds it.

The dialogic form that feminine experience tends to take in poetry enables women poets to demythologize the attitudes that have constricted their creative energy. Through their connotative use of myth, women poets engage themselves in an on-going dialogue with the world around them, thus re-locating themselves in a tradition that has both excluded and coerced their presence. Their dialogic discourse operates according to the principle of difference rather than the principle of opposition.

This dialogic discourse with its emphasis on difference rather than opposition turns the traditionally opposed elements of “good/evil; innocence/guilt; logos/eros; man/woman” into complementary rather than antagonistic pairs. Unlike the language which is the goal of *écriture féminine*, this is a female language of inclusion rather than exclusion.

Besides those mentioned above, there are excellent papers in this collection by Phyllis Webb, Gail Scott, Marian Engel, Joan Haggerty, Shirley Neuman, and several others. The volume deserves a place on the reading list of every course in feminist literary critique offered in Canadian universities. It contains many photographs of the authors taken at the Women and Words Conference, and the conference program is reprinted here, so the book also serves as a souvenir of an important literary event. All in all, *In the Feminine* is well worth its cover price of \$9.50.

NOTES

1. "Women and Words/*Les femmes et les mots*, held June 30 - July 3, 1983 in Vancouver, British Columbia, brought together over 1,000 anglophone and francophone women involved in traditional and alternative forms of literary activity. The conference was conceived as a cross-cultural forum in which women could explore the traditions and context of our work with words, discuss existing power structures and the creation of alternative ones, and look at new directions evident in women's writing, criticism and cultural organizing" (p. 9).

2. "Mainstream" Canadian criticism has been undergoing profound change since the beginning of the decade, although in 1983, when the Women and Words conference took place, this transformation was perhaps not quite so apparent as it is today. Critics who were thought to be on the fringes in the 1970s have now become mainstream, and the absence of a critical eclecticism that characterized the era of so-called "thematic" criticism is now on its way to becoming the norm.

3. Diane Griffin Crowder, "Amazons and Mothers: Monique Wittig, Helene Cixous and Theories of Women's Writing," *Contemporary Literature* 24:2 (1983), 127.

4. "Dzo'noq!a," *Kwakiutl Texts*, Franz Boas and George Hunt, eds. (New York: G.E. Stechert, 1902), pp. 507-8.

BOOKS RECEIVED

From time to time, *Line* receives review copies of books that deserve extended commentary, but unfortunately our pool of writing readers is not large enough to handle more than a few of them. Perhaps this list will stir up some interest from readers. All serious inquiries will be given serious attention.

B.S. Johnson, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (New Directions, 1985), 192 pp. "Christie is a simple man. It does not take him long to realize that he has not been born into money. So Christie places himself next to it by taking a job in a bank and it is there that he encounters the principles of Double-Entry Bookkeeping and adapts them in his own fashion to settle his account with society." This title is the first in the plan of New Directions to bring the avant-garde writing of the late B.S. Johnson (1933-73) to the attention of North American readers.

William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems* (New Directions, 1985), ed. with an introduction by Charles Tomlinson, 302 pp. The poems included are selected from all the major books and arranged in chronological order. Tomlinson, the British poet who has championed Williams's work in England for many years, has made choices that "trace Williams's search for a poetry that lives and works in the American idiom." More comprehensive and accurate than Randall Jarrell's *Selected Poems* (1963), this selection—given the limits of any selection—manages to encompass the range of Williams's accomplishments as poet.

William Carlos Williams, *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets*, edited with an introduction by James Breslin (New Directions, 1985), 256 pp. A collection of Williams's scattered essays on two generations of poets following him, those he encouraged and advised... Rexroth, Zukofsky, Levertov, Ginsberg and others. "What might have been a random collection of occasional pieces achieves remarkable coherence from the singleness of Williams's poetic vision: his belief that the secret spirit of the ritual, of poetry, was trapped in restrictive molds, and, if these could be broken, the spirit would be able to live again in a new, contemporary form."

Miriam Mandel, *The Collected Poems of Miriam Mandel*, ed. Sheila Watson (Longspoon & NeWest, 1984), 326 pp. "What we have here is not really a collection of poetry, but something now frequently called a long or serial poem, inscribed, as it were, in the margin of another (an/other) text.

The poem speaks both of enclosure and of exclusion, of a locking in and a locking out, of implication in a textual death, of delimitation, and of an enforced marginality which it can elude or escape only by brinkmanship or by transgression. Forestalled by the rhetoric of passion, confronted by images of its own condition, shrouded for periods in clinical silence, it does not flinch from exposing the neutralizing banality that attempts to appease it. The poem is not a confession. It is a disclosure, the necessary deconstruction of any comforting evasion" (from the Introduction by Sheila Watson). This impressive gathering of poems by Mandel—from 1969 when she began writing to the time of her death on February 13, 1982—includes many poems previously unpublished, the last dated January 8, 1982.

Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik, eds. *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature* (NeWest, 1985), 303 pp. "... a collection of seventeen essays on Canadian literature, written by European critics representing seven countries. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the essays represent seventeen different critical approaches. What they have in common is their intellectual energy, their curiosity about a new literature, and their stimulating combination of scholarship and insight" (from the Preface by Robert Kroetsch). The reader also finds a useful bibliography of criticism on Canadian writing by European critics.

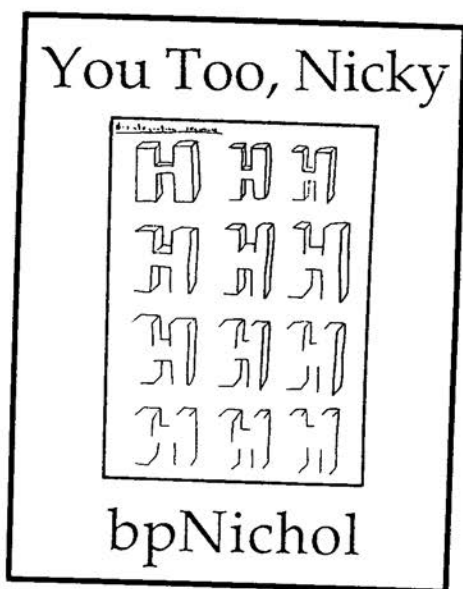
OTHER RECOMMENDED TITLES (for 1985-86):

- Gwendolyn MacEwen, *Noman's Land* (Coach House, 1985), 138 pp.
Sarah Sheard, *Almost Japanese* (Coach House, 1985), 125 pp.
James Laughlin, *Selected Poems* (City Lights, 1986), 248 pp.
Michael McClure, *Specks* (Talonbooks, 1985), 89 pp.
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Henri Guignonat, *Daemon in Lithuania* (New Directions, 1985), 160 pp.
Translated by Barbara Wright.
Smaro Kamboureli, *in the second person* (Longspoon, 1985), 87 pp.
Lola Lemire Tostevin, *Double Standards* (Longspoon, 1985), unpaginated.
bill bissett, *canada gees mate for life* (Talonbooks, 1985), 128 pp.
Robert Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* (New Directions, 1985), 320 pp.
Thirteen essays are collected, including "The Truth and Life of Myth."
Wilfred Watson, *Poems Collected / Unpublished / New* (Longspoon/ NeWest, 1986), 430 pp. Introduction by Thomas Peacocke. This major collection contains many new and unpublished poems as well as poems from Watson's earlier books, *Friday's Child* (1955), *The*

- Sorrowful Canadians and Other Poems* (1972), *I Begin with Counting* (1978), and *Mass on Cowback* (1982)
- Fred Wah, *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (Turnstone, 1986), Winner of the 1986 Govenor-General's Award for Poetry.
- Michael McClure, *Selected Poems* (New Directions, 1986), 128 pp. The poems were chosen by McClure from all his earlier collections from *Hymns to St. Geryon and Other Poems* in 1959 to *Fragments of Perseus* in 1983.
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- Robert Kroetsch, *Seed Catalogue* (Turnstone, 1986), 43 pp. A re-issue of the 1977 book with a new series of poems, "Spending the Morning on the Beach."
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