

Word

Canada's Magazine for Readers + Writers

March/April 2006

His review of a young tenor, "Guido Nazzo is nazzo guido," began showing up in other notices and was repeated so often that it virtually destroyed the young performer's career. [George S.] Kaufman was so contrite, he wrote a letter of apology to Mr. Nazzo and offered him a job in a Kaufman musical.
— Jon Winokur, *The Portable Curmudgeon*

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Wayzgoose serves up food for thought
Diane Reid at Gaspereau Press

Moving from Page to Stage: Dayle Furlong
in conversation with **Jill Battson**
about Tapestry New Opera Works

Dani Couture explores
the DRAFT Reading Series

Cut 'n' Paste: Maggie Helwig on new chapbooks

West of Unruly: Jay MillAr and/or Alex Cayce on
Rob Budde and other Princes

Translation Nation: Beatriz Hausner on where
literature and translation intersect

Dave Howard reviews
the *Matrix Comics Issue*

Jon Paul Fiorentino analyzes
Montreal's Poetry Face-Off

New 'pataphysics
by Sharon Harris



Tricia Postle, musician and poet, as troubadour Treearchy Postle Fieldpost, accompanies herself on the handcrafted one-string thing; and Stuart Ross, (writer, editor, small-press champion, Word columnist emeritus, etc.), is the only one bold enough to read hatless on top of shoeless; at the fourth Draft reading series, Toronto, Ontario, second Wednesday of February, 2006.

PHOTOS BY DAVID OWEN

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Word

Canada's Magazine for Readers + Writers

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About *Word: Canada's Magazine for Readers + Writers*

For more than a decade, the publishing teams at Insomniac Press and The Mercury Press brought you *Word* as a free tabloid. *Word* provides a much-needed service to the Canadian literary scene, including reviews, comment and opinion. *Word's* writers and reviewers are among the most insightful and entertaining in the country.

Word's six content-heavy, thought-provoking issues per year appear as PDF files, easy to read online, free to the public and simple to print. Subscribers will receive the *Word Reader*, packed with the best articles, reviews and writing about the world of books. The *Word Reader* is published three times per year. *Word's* Toronto literary calendar of events appears online monthly as a PDF file.

West of Unruly— Rob Budde and other Princes

*2¢: Some thoughts in, on or about the
smallpress enclave*

by Jay MillAr and/or Alex Cayce

Hey man, did you know I'm an honorary resident of Prince George? Better yet, did you know I'm an honorary Prince George poet? Do you even know where Prince George is? Of course you do. I talk about it all the time. Not that we talk much any more. But you know, that place I keep going on about? How it's the unacknowledged poetry-centre of Canada? Lots of great poets are related to Prince George in one way or another. The heavies working out of there at the moment are Ken Belford and Barry McKinnon, but they're of an older generation of poets. Barry just retired—he's remained a hard-core small press poet for the last 40 years, runs Gorse Press out of his house on Gorse Street in Prince George—he practically invented his own version of geographically aware poetry in the '60s. Ken was involved with the downtown poetry circles in Vancouver in the '60s and his work appeared in the first of Purdy's Storm Warning anthologies; his first book, the brilliantly titled *Post Electric Caveman*, has a black and white photograph on the cover of him and Patrick Lane in the mountains with their rifles. Hilarious. He's a guy who ended up way outside the centre; he ran an eco-tourist business 300 miles from the nearest point of civilization for many years, and his poetry is certainly eco-minded as a result.

The key to the current Prince George literary milieu is a fellow by the name of Rob Budde. He teaches creative writing at the University of Northern British Columbia, and is responsible for bridging the gap between older poets like McKinnon and Belford and the new young poets who are his students; in unspoken ways, he's involved in a poetic mentorship with Ken, something that I'd say is totally unusual in a big urban center like Toronto. Rob is a terrific poet and all around super guy (father of four!) who pulls off such crazy-ass poetry adventures as sticking poets on a

train from Winnipeg to Prince George, having them read on the trains and in the stations and in little out-of-the-way villages in the BC interior. He even insisted they be poets first and foremost too, not just people who do all sorts of other things who happen to write poetry, and that they be treated first rate because they are poets. Rob runs the West of Unruly Writers Festival which has made sure that poets stop in Prince George when they're out and about doing readings in the "real" western cities like Vancouver or Victoria (did you know that Victoria has the highest density of writers per capita in Canada? It's insane!) or Calgary or Edmonton. He also runs Wink books, which produces lovely editions in small batches, of his own work and others'.

Anyway, enough blah blah blah. You already know all this crap anyway. What I wanted to tell you about was that Rob just executed the first ever Annual Barry McKinnon Chapbook Fair. Isn't that cool? Barry recently donated his papers to the UNBC library and they threw him some kind of swanky dinner party—not really Barry's style—so Rob thought he'd honour him more appropriately by getting all the local author/publishers together for a fair. By comparison to Toronto's own small press fair, it was perhaps small, sure—rather than an all day event it was an evening event, and on a Tuesday at that. But Rob said the turnout was good, both in terms of presses showcased and the public who turned up to check them out. Rob has always encouraged his students to publish what they write—to figure out how to get their writing into book form. And a lot of the younger writers in Prince George have figured out that the chapbook is really the best form by which to express poetry, thanks to Barry's presence and influence. So the whole event had a nice ur-purpose. There used to be a literary press in Prince George, The Caitlin Press, which in fact published a few full-length books by McKinnon and some other local poets, but it left eventually, (Ken Belford has a theory that Prince George should be seen as a transitory space), "went south," as Rob calls it, and now operates through the Harbour Publishing Group. So there isn't a press in Prince George the way there are usually several in larger cities. Even though the presses in Prince George usually only produce editions in runs of 50 that are circulated amongst the locals, Rob sees author-run chapbooks and events like the chapbook fair as the literary life-blood of Prince George.

But now you're probably wondering, why should we care? You and I are all the way over here and they're all the way over there. We have lots of authors and lots of presses.

We even have influence from other major urban centers. Maybe I'm interested in sticking books by Prince George poets on the shelves of my bookshoppe, but I doubt very much if I can sell them to the locals. What would they mean to people of Toronto? Prince George is out there, man. At UNBC you can take a course in one of 15 different Native languages, but you can't take a course in French. In terms of what we in Urban Ontario think of as "Canadian," Prince George is definitely off the map. The literature that comes out of such a space won't be too much like what comes out of Toronto, simply by geographical inclination. But what I think is interesting is that I do have an idea of what's going on there. For instance, I know that Richard Krueger just won the first ever Barry McKinnon Chapbook Award, and so I'm going to read that book. I know about Krueger's press noScene, and Rob Budde's press Wink books. When I think of how little idea I have about some other places, such as the east coast, (um, I know people consider it the birthplace of Can Lit, and I know Hugh Thomas moved there, Go Hugh!, but that's about it), I think that demonstrates Prince George's literary merit, especially considering the disadvantage it has in not being a major urban centre like Vancouver or Victoria, centres that usually get all the glory for literary production in B.C. It also makes me wonder about what's going on in other out-of-the-way places, and demonstrates a need for me to look beyond my own borders more often.

Jay MillAr lives in T.O. where he runs BookThug and Apollinaire's Bookshoppe.

Alex Cayce lives in Windsor Ontario, where he is a member of The South Western Coalition for the Birds. His wife Alice is an artist, specializing in watercolour and sketch. Her work often accompanies his texts. She has had exhibitions at the Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary and at the Point Pelee National Park Recreation Centre.

254. Muse in a Bottle

*Fun with 'pataphysics
(Ages 1 to Eternity)*

by Sharon Harris

Fill a small goblet to overflowing with dried words, pour in Canadian Whiskey to the brim and place the glass on a metal lid. As the words fill and expand, their internal pressure increases until a force similar to that of a jackhammer is created.

The heap of words becomes slowly higher and then a clatter of falling poems begins, which goes on for hours.

FW'P Labs (discoverers of The Love Molecule) and experts at <http://iloveyougalleries.com> have recently concluded that all trouble starts with S and ends in n. In spite of this groundbreaking announcement, please enjoy spring responsibly. I love you.

Wary Birds of Paradise

Matrix Magazine:

Comics Issue

R.E.N. Allen, Editor

Andy Brown, Comics Editor

reviewed by Dave Howard

For me it's always exciting when a literary magazine includes comics in its mandate; it means yet another community is confirming the diversity of the comics medium, allowing that many

more venues for that many more artists to show that much more work. These venues are vital to the long-term health of the medium.

Matrix in this regard does not disappoint—it has the advantage of having, as the comics editor, Conundrum publisher Andy Brown. Conundrum Press has been showcasing much-deserving comic-art talent over the years for English Canada, publishing the likes of Joe Ollmann, Marc Ngui



and Shary Boyle. For *Matrix's* Comics Issue, Brown has collected 15 pieces contributed by 18 artists, and a very healthy mix of newer and established, experimental and traditional underground comics artists. These include Billy Mavreas, Richard Suicide and Emily Holton, along with international heavyweights Anders Nilsen and Jason Lutes.

The Comics Issue's most interesting piece is the poetical, (almost) silent five-page comic strip by Nilsen: a strange man walks through a forest as seen through the eyes of a wary bird.

The simple, clean line is filled with form, emotion, volume. Nilsen also contributes a striking wraparound colour painting for the cover, a comment on the hypocrisy of US policy. Jason Lutes contributes a technically astute four-page selection from his wartime series, Berlin. Other highlights I found were Lauren Weinstein's scratchy lines and macabre sense of humour, and, surprisingly, the doodle-comics of Alison Katz.

Also welcome (and hopefully permanent) are the comics reviews mixed seamlessly with reviews of prose novels; but the centrepiece article is a gonzo account of Toronto's Paradise Comicon (short for 'comics convention') by Brown and illustrated by Ollmann. It's a drunken, ranting visitation: Brown arrives bent on retrieving a few select comics from his childhood, and is unsure why.

Yet, I admit I still felt there was some kind of veil between the reader and the subject of comics. Rounding out the issue is a nostalgic folio of the now defunct Montreal Expos, and a detailed interview with Danzy Senna, author of *Causica*, a novel about mixed-race blackness in North America. It was this interview that proved the foil: in a few pages I had an incisive, informative snapshot of Senna's work in context. Why didn't we get more interviews of artists discussing their comics? And why must we read about comics only through other reader's experiences?

The *Matrix: Comics Issue* is well worth picking up.

Dave Howard is the founder of the Toronto Comic Jam and publisher/editor of comics anthology *Don't Touch Me Comics*. He writes occasionally about comics, and draws people on the subway to and from work. Visit <http://davehoward.ca>.

Gaspereau Press: Wayzgoose serves up food for thought

by Diane Reid

The wayzgoose tradition dates to 17th-century England, where, at printers' dinners, stubble- or wayz-fed goose was a favourite main dish.

Yet at Gaspereau Press's sixth annual Wayzgoose in Kentville, Nova Scotia, the roast beast was "Chindigo" and book artists themselves.

"They kill us when we sell to

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them, they kill us when we don't," Porcupine Quill's Tim Inkster lamented, leading off a lively debate about the state of the nation's literary press, on the final evening of the literature/book-arts fest.

Publishers, Inkster claims, have experienced as much as a 50% drop in income as a result of Chapters/Indigo business practices. Target marketing in Chindigo stores has become problematic; preferred placement, a matter of luck. Local and regional authors, especially poets, are being accommodated poorly, if at all.

Fellow panelists David Caron (ECW Press), Don McKay (Brick Books), Melanie Rutledge (Canada Council), and Andrew Steeves (Gaspereau Press) concur. Name authors do well in big-box outlets, they admit, but the work of emerging writers is seldom featured.

Public education may be contributing to the problem, suggested a teacher in the audience. With increased emphasis on listening and viewing at

the expense of reading and writing, how many young people look beyond what's heavily advertised?

If writers, publishers, and retailers are to remain competitive, declares Melanie Rutledge, marketing skills can and must be learned.

Others, however, were quick to point out that even carefully planned campaigns with paid agreements are undermined when busy salesclerks have no time to move displays.

According to Andrew Steeves, the success or failure of a literary press depends on two factors: first, the quality of its program (its ability to attract quality writers and publish them well); second, its success in selling the books it produces.

"What good is quality if you can't get anyone to buy?" asks Steeves, co-owner of the Nova Scotia small business phenomenon. "What good are sales if you've nothing to say? A literary press needs both quality and sales to succeed."

Steeves (formerly of Fredericton)

and his business partner, Moncton's Gary Dunfield, seek out fine writers; furthermore, they actively promote their authors and support their communities well beyond any Canada Council or government mandate.

Wordsmiths and collectors were the first to notice Steeves' and Dunfield's attention to craft. Conceived in 1997 as a top-drawer literary journal, Gaspereau Press is now recognized as one of the nation's best, even by publishing houses many times its size.

For Gaspereau's team, the process of creation—typesetting, binding, repairing machinery and contributing to community printing needs—is as fulfilling as designing, editing and distributing the handsome, often whimsical books for which Gaspereau is famous.

"Our fathers are engineers," says Steeves, a UNB creative writing graduate, "but semi-rural, first-generation-off-the-farm New Brunswick is in them. It's in both of us. We're used to independence."

Atlantic Canadian Poetics: Renaissance or Resistance?

"There's blindness about Atlantic Canada—a barrage of clichés from politicians, journalists, and academics who can't get past the word 'welfare' even as our literary arts are surging. Honouring the past doesn't mean we're stuck in it." — Anne Compton, Governor-General's Award for Poetry: *Processional* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside 2005)

"There's been good work happening here always. What has ebbed and flowed is the attention paid to it. I tend to say, 'That's nice!' and carry on doing

what I was going to do anyway. It's dangerous when culture pays too much attention to trends." — Andrew Steeves, *Gaspereau Press*

"Alden Nowlan was the beginning. Our best writing is an alchemical combination of colloquial voices and metaphorical development that resists definition by place." — matt robinson, *A Ruckus of Awkward Stacking* (Insomniac 2000), *how we play at it: a list* (ECW 2002), *tracery & interplay* (Frog Hollow 2004), *no cage contains a stare that well* (ECW 2005)

"We write out of particular locales regardless of where we live. Time away is not to prevent us from becoming parochial, but for discovering where we're from." — Don McKay, Governor-General's Award for Poetry: *Night Field* (M&S 1991), *Another Gravity* (M&S 2000)

"Much Atlantic Canadian work is quiet, positive, concerned more with insight than avant-garde, but it's unfair to define or confine writing—and more particularly, poetry—by place, era, gender, or anything else."

— Michael deBeyer, *Rural Night Catalogue* (Gaspereau 2002), *Change in a Razor-backed Season* (Gaspereau 2005)

"Given Acadie's distinct history and culture, its art differs in what it thrives on. I've noticed more postmodern surrealism, less family and habitat in the region's francophone writing. Regardless of language, Atlantic Canada's finest work is characterized not by paisley, doilies, and flowers on porches, but by raw immediacy that comes from the gut." — Rose Després, League of Canadian Poets (NB-PEI)

Dunfield, a forestry graduate with a Master's of Divinity from Acadia University, is frustrated so many unsuspecting consumers spend large sums on Harry Potter and the like—novels that tear easily, fade, and will eventually fall apart.

“There's nothing more divine,” says Dunfield, “than a well-made, well-printed book.”

Don McKay agrees. He commends not only the physical presence of Gaspereau's products, but also the press's superb editorial attention. “Sometimes we must move toward wilderness—away from the cultural mainstream—to thoroughly open our eyes and ears.”

Gaspereau's roundtable affirmed that literary publishing thrives where it fosters writing and reading communities Steeves has called “anti-mass market” and “grassroots” in character.

Loyalties alien to Chindigo's seasonal promotion of the Governor-General's Award and Giller Prize have

become increasingly deeply rooted. Many read to know what's outside their own experience, says McKay: “They buy poetry before they buy milk.”

Every publisher at the Wayzgoose faces the same issues, Steeves insists. “We're all working to attract the best writers nationally, and we're all selling through the same retailers, big and small. Some provinces (Ontario, Quebec, B.C.) offer much better financial support than others, which can sometimes give publishers in those provinces a competitive edge. Gaspereau would have many thousands more in funding if it were located in Ontario, for example.

“What we've done can happen in any region, regardless of the number of bookstores or provincial funding. It's something that is extra-regional, in that the community that a literary press can build (if what we're doing is any indication) extends well beyond any geographic location, even if it has its roots firmly planted in a place like Kentville. It has to do with people and ideas, not provincial boundaries.”

Diane Reid partakes of the good life in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where she reviews for *The Daily Gleaner* and collects donations for Alden Nowlan House. She's known to buy poetry before she buys milk.

Montreal Poetry Face-Off: Before and After

The Hostility Suite

by Jon Paul Fiorentino

BEFORE

I can't believe I got the call! I'm going to be one of five poets competing in the 2006 CBC Montreal Poetry Face-Off! The CBC producer seemed genuinely pleased to have me on the bill—although I found out from a trusted source that I was actually the eighth or ninth choice. Some big name local poets had to decline for various reasons: one had a shift at The Olive Garden the same night, another had already been booked into another engagement busking in the Vendome Metro. But still, I am in the game; I am in it to win it; my eyes are on the prize, and so forth. I have never competed in a poetry slam before and so I'm not quite sure what to expect. I assumed the other four

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poets would be spoken-word types and I would be the sole “page poet” on the bill. I was wrong. The poets are Susan Gillis, Susan Elmsley, David McGimpsey and Oana Avasilichioaei (who recently won a prestigious Romanian literary prize for being the poet with the most vowels in a name). All fine page poets. I know that literature is not a competition (at least that’s what David Bergen told me as he waved his Carol Shields award in my face at the 2002 Manitoba Book Awards) but I am feeling quite competitive. I want these other very talented and lovely poets to eat it—Jerome Bettis style! I also assumed that the topic we would be writing our poems on would be a very CBC-friendly theme, like gardening, or erm, different types of gardening. Wrong again. We are to write on the topic of “irresistible.” I guess the CBC figured there’s nothing quite like giving poets an adjective and just letting the magic happen. Of course, the best thing about adjectives is that they are abstract and I could now write about whatever it was that I felt was irresistible: emotional eating, competitive eating, other kinds of eating, etc. But in the end I decide to write on the topic of substance abuse. Everyone loves substance abuse! I write two connected poems about hash oil, acid, cocaine, beer and menthol cigarettes. My assumption is that my poems will be so fresh and in-your-face that the CBC will just have to suck it up and endorse my cutting edge poetic innovation. After all, in a poetry slam, the people have the power and I am certain that I’m what the people want. Democracy always works.

AFTER

I can’t believe I didn’t win. Actually it’s not so hard to believe because the winner was David McGimpsey and his

poem was classic McGimpsey: perfect comedic timing and a poignant turn at the end. Susan and Oana were lovely as well—they delivered lyric poetry with confidence and grace. The only awkward point in the night happened during Susan Elmsley’s reading of her poem “Babysat by Sylvia Plath” during which a baby started wailing. It was pretty awesome timing, but you couldn’t help feeling sorry for Sue who was in the midst of an emotive performance of her text. I have to say I regret planting that baby in the audience. But all’s fair in swinging and poetry slams, right? There were many revelations that came out of the CBC Montreal Poetry Face-Off experience besides the obvious “democracy doesn’t work” revelation. First, I am surprised at how happy I am with the poetry I wrote on commission. My compositional process generally involves taking a handful of horse tranquilizers and waiting for the muses to come and visit me with an inspirational blanket party. Second, I find Patti Schmidt irresistible. She looks as good as her voice sounds. I was too shy to say anything to her other than “thank you,” but I would follow her anywhere—even Halifax. Third, the CBC Poetry Face-Off is nothing like that movie *Face-Off* where John Travolta and Nicolas Cage have their faces surgically switched. HUGE disappointment. Can you imagine my face on Susan Gillis’s body? Your loss, CBC! Fourth, and most important, the Montreal literary community is flourishing. The Casa del Popolo was packed with frothing poetry fans. All the poets got to sign autographs, shake hands, graciously accept praise and make love to groupies in the VIP room. It was one of those community-building things. Fifth, and most selfish, it was good to get on the CBC again. It’s been a year

since I last appeared on CBC radio and made my now-famous Eleanor Wachtel-and-a-beer-bong joke. And it seems now all is forgiven, which is great because I have some wonderful material to pitch them about Stuart McLean and web-cam trannies. Rawr.

Jon Paul Fiorentino is the author of *The Theory of the Loser Class* (Coach House Books, 2006), *Asthmatica* (Insomniac Press, 2005), and *Hello Serotonin* (Coach House Books, 2004). He lives in Montreal where he teaches writing at Concordia University and is the managing editor of *Matrix* magazine.

Leave your shoes at the door

Dani Couture explores... the Draft reading series

“The Don River.”—Draft host, Maria Meindl, on what sets her reading series apart from others in Toronto

Where: Artists’ Play Studio Theatre, 290 Carlaw Avenue, Toronto, Ontario

When: the fifth instalment of Draft will be on March 29th

Features: six features

Open stage: no open stage

Cover: your \$5 includes a copy of *DRAFT*, each issue only available at the one reading for which it was put together

Host: Maria Meindl

First culinary abuses: reader Postle’s use of a large pot as part of an instrument of her own creation

Walking north of Queen Street East on Carlaw Avenue, I’m beginning to think I’ve got the address wrong. There are fewer street lights here, and fewer people, less of everything that makes me feel safe when I’m walking through the

city. Instead, it's deeply cold and I'm surrounded by looming industrial buildings. And while this doesn't feel right, I keep walking until I see two people smoking outside of one of the only lit windows on the street. I've finally arrived at the Artists Play Studio Theatre.

Once inside, I'm politely asked to remove my outer footwear before entering the theatre space. I begin to wish I hadn't worn white striped sport socks. There are over thirty people mingling in their socks, some in slippers. The space is a warm den of gold-hued wood floors and dark heavy curtains. Almost everyone is smiling and talking. I guess it's hard to posture, or look the part of the isolated artist, in your stocking feet.

The host of the series, Maria Meindl, relayed in an earlier e-mail that she decided to start a reading series in the east end because there was a need for one in the Riverdale area. "This is a great area. It's a neighbourhood with lots of galleries and privately owned shops. There are studios up and down Carlaw." Also, she wanted a reading that she could get to in 15 minutes. And who can blame her? On these cold winter nights, it's great to have an event in your own neighbourhood, and Riverdale is flush with writers and artists who are taking advantage of less expensive rents.

I decide against sitting at one of the small round bistro tables; instead, I opt for a seat in one of the many pews that face the stage area. Sitting in a pew with a glass of wine and without the requisite guilt is a pleasure.

I'd been forewarned that the reading would take a bizarre twist: some readers decided to change their names for the evening in an attempt to subvert the alphabetized order of the readings. The new reading order is Julia

Steinecke Aaaaah, Treearchy Postle Fieldpost, Beth Follett, Monica S. Kuebler, Stuart Ross and Johnbarlow Tempura.

The readers are a diverse assortment of writers and performers, not a difficult accomplishment when there are six featured readers. Notable is Tricia Postle's performance on her "one-string-thing"—a string instrument made out of a long piece of unfinished wood, a large steel pot and a strand of fishing line that's played with a violin bow. Julia Steinecke rounds out her set with a collaborative piece with OUTwritest facilitator, Terence Go.

Before the first and only intermission, small press publisher and writer Beth Follett, who is currently working on her second novel, takes to the mic. She reads a tense piece of short fiction titled "Beatrice & the Victory Café," which was inspired by one of Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's anecdotes when he read at the Victory Café last year. After performance poet Monica S. Kuebler—co-editor of *Some Words Spoken*—reads a number of her dramatic poems, Stuart Ross is up.

Having recently returned from writing workshops that he conducted in Chile, Stuart launches into his poems in trademark style, reading his first poem as soon as he gets behind the mic. The readings end with John Barlow seated in a white plastic lawn chair. He explains that his bookshelf recently collapsed, and that gave him the incentive to dig through all of the old zines and chapbooks from the '80s and '90s that were on the shelf. So, for a short time, the audience is treated to a lapful of small press nostalgia, as John reads both covers and his own work.

The night wraps up quickly after the last reading as people rush to catch their respective forms of transportation.

As I bend over to collect my boots,

something falls out of my bag—it's my issue of *DRAFT*, the limited edition publication that you get for the five dollars you stuff into Draft's donation jar. This photocopied mélange of drawings, clippings and writing is a nice parting gift for the reading series attendee.

Once on the streetcar, I leaf through the print version of the evening. I read part of Stuart Ross's poem "The Surface": "I recognize/ my eyelids. I could pick them out/ in a lineup. They/ renounce me." On page four is Julia Steinecke's poem "Baroda to Rangpur": "We carry fruit/ still hot from market sun; and a large pane of glass,/ four by three —/ if we stop suddenly, it will/ cut our heads off." John Barlow's bio also provides some good reading material for the ride home: "Spawned near enough the Atlantic to wind up battered and fried, I gradually moved inland growing up until discovering tempura."

In our e-mail interview, Maria wrote that she loves works in progress: "I'm very interested in drafts. I love them. I love rehearsals, sketches, anything unfinished. This process-oriented stuff lets me in." And through Draft she's providing attendees an opportunity to hear works in progress, though the series is not limited to drafts alone. She understands the idea would be horrifying to some writers.

Maria also promises that she will not let her reading series "get too locked in to any one policy or format"; after all, "it's only a draft." In the future, she plans to continue to invite both poetry and prose writers, and even plans on adding drama in forthcoming months. The next instalment of Draft is on March 29th with Judy Fong Bates, Andrew Daley, John Aylesworth Ide, Maria Jacobs, Maria Meindl and Robert Priest. Following

readings will be held on April 19th, May 17th and June 14th.

As for me, I just plan on better coordinating my socks for the next reading.

Dani Couture—www.danicouture.com

Moving from Page to Stage:

a conversation

with Jill Battson

Interview by
Dayle Furlong

Dayle Furlong: *Tell us about your work with the Composer-Librettist Laboratory for Tapestry New Opera Works.*

Jill Battson: I had been interested in participating in Tapestry New Opera Works' Lib-Lab for about three years, but it always coincided with my work at the Red School House Poetry Primer festival in Kingston. The 2005 Lab occurred the day after the festival this year, so I was able to participate. The participants are literary artists and composers who've never written for the opera before: three of the other

librettists were playwrights, and I was the only poet. Our challenge was to create a new five-minute opera every 48 hours for 10 days...so it was like an opera boot-camp! If you know opera, it is very much about the emotions that the music brings, the pyrotechnics of the voice etc.; very often the story can be banal, or you can't hear the story because of the enunciation of the language. In Tapestry's Lib-Lab and Opera-to-Go, I was concerned with the quality of the voice and the articulation of language. Since I was the only poet who participated, I refused to write in any other style than poetry. The challenge was conforming to operatic convention—the narrative and story arcs, etc., while still enabling words and language to be heard and understood. I used the singers' voices in all their registers to explore where in the voice vowels and consonants are best heard, and the composer worked out what that would mean in a musical sense.

DF: *"Netsuke", one of the pieces in the Opera-to-Go series, is in haiku; did you study the form beforehand?*

JB: I was quite familiar with haiku, and "Netsuke" is based on one of my short stories. Composer Rose Bolton's work lends itself to Japanese style: it's sparse, beautiful and contemporary. In the Lib-Lab, she and I worked on two haiku pieces, so when

we began to adapt "Netsuke" the obvious choice was to use haiku as "dialogue." The story is about Japan, sex, death and love. Netsuke are objects used in traditional Japanese kimono dress: they are often elaborately carved objects that serve as counterweights to bags of coins or tobacco that thread through the obi (waist sash) of the kimono. As you know, kimonos don't have pockets! So in some way netsuke are like little haiku.

DF: *Your second piece, "Ashlike in the Cradle of the Wind," deals with the impact of AIDS on a man's life; can you tell us about your process with this piece?*

JB: "Ashlike in the Cradle of the Wind" is based, in part, on a piece written during the Lib-Lab; it is also about sex and death—most of my work generally is. As for process, in the Lib-Lab, I wrote one sex scene and one death scene, and for Opera-to-Go, I completed the story of the relationship by adding other scenes to bring the narrative of these two men's lives to the composition. I began by writing about the world of AIDS I knew during the mid-'80s and early '90s pandemic. This newer piece explores the relationship between a younger gay man and an older man in a historical context. For instance, today's 50-year-old woman has been impacted in a vastly different way than her twenty-something coun-



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terpart by feminism. I wanted to investigate the impact of gay liberation on inter-generational relationships. I also wanted to explore and write about drug culture and its relationship to HIV and AIDS. Large themes presented here as a very tight piece; it's presented in poetic form, and the way I've crafted the stanzas echoes the nature of relationships: there are solos; equal amounts of singing; and as each character's part develops, they take on one another's phrasing and places in the narrative world, through the written word, much like a contemporary relationship!

DF: You are also described as a poetry activist; can you tell us a little about that part of your work?

JB: I don't believe that poetry is something that is a secret solitary pursuit done in a dusty garret and never sees the light of day; neither should it be solely the property of books. I

believe that poetry can be for everybody, so I deliberately produce events that successfully capture new audiences. For example, "Fightin' Words" was a limited edition series that put six poets in a boxing ring; they fought it out with words instead of their fists. I created a theatrical environment involving mock bookies, judges and naked ring boys. This has captured an audience that wouldn't necessarily go to a 'poetry reading.'

DF: What impact do you hope to have with your poetry activism?

JB: For every person who comes to an event, one person will inevitably say, "this event has changed my life," or "I didn't think poetry could be this much fun"; the possibilities for converts are limitless. In the end, I would like my event to reach as many people as possible and the language of poetry—sometimes challenging to an

untrained ear—to be accessible to a wider population.

DF: Future plans?

JB: I am much more interested in the collaborative process as of late; my personal mission seems to be moving the work from page to stage. Besides the opera, I am creating a performative piece with fellow poet A.M. Allcott that will premiere in Peterborough at a movement festival called "Emergency 14." In Montreal, I will present a work with dancers and myself, choreographed by D.A. Hoskins.

Catch Opera-to-Go at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts (55 Mill Street, Distillery District), March 3-17, \$39-49 (8pm, discounts for culture workers, students); previews March 1 & 2 (2pm matinee; \$20-36); gala tickets \$150.00; 416-537-6066 x224, www.tapestrynewopera.ca

Dayle Furlong is the Executive Director of Stellar Arts Services, an arts administration company that she founded. She is a writer and former modern dancer who wrote and performed for the theatre.

Cut 'n' Paste: sewing paper, knitting protein

Une canadienne errante

by Maggie Helwig

I intended to have a table at the Cut 'n' Paste zine fair in Toronto this February, but as usual failed to get around to it. Still and all, I did make it by, and found Kim Kutner selling her many lovely wares from her suitcase and chatted with her about how no basset hound has ever killed a human being, and also about her daughter's new dwarf hamster Robin Diggers, so it was all very punk and crazy as you can easily see.

As for items acquired, my interesting new discovery of the fair was liisa k. gra-

ham, who has produced a small chap, twelve handsewn (with rather fetching dangling red threads) long narrow pages in a brown wrapper, and a typewritten text filled with blacked-out words and typographical irregularities and unpredictable syntax, the title of which I cannot easily reproduce due to layout issues, but which is approximately *there are/all/and the fillings of/this// there are all and the fillings of/wonder/wonder/wonder/wonder/this wonder of summer//of summer*. It is a diary of sorts, of summer and despair, and while at a few moments it does slip into a kind of hipster bathos, it is mostly intriguing and quite evocative in its fragmentation: "you will die and your this and this of this city strip will go i wish i could save you. so eager and willing, you go ~~xxx~~ on and on our hearts open /// you fill them a step into new worlds and dust." You can get a copy for \$3; write to incircles@graffiti.net.

Continuing to watch the small-press career of Amy Lam, I picked up a little two-sider chapbook, *Lives of Saints/World Records*, part of which I thought I had heard her read at the Pontiac Quarterly, which would have been a much better event if the Drake Hotel didn't suck so bad, by the way, and also was not filled with record industry flacks and Liberals, as it was on that particular occasion. But it turned out that what she had read at the Pontiac were different world records, so actually this was all new to me—and as you will now realize, I just slipped in that digression because I am currently missing no opportunity to run down the Drake. Very well, on to the chapbook.

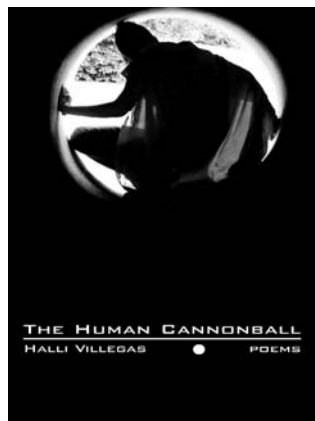
I particularly liked the *Lives of Saints* side, which is a funny little collection of pieces, mostly in the voices of the saints, whose attributes are somewhat impressionistically employed here and there, scrambled and sometimes



invented (some of them are also not strictly canonical saints, e.g. Saint Tiny and Saint McGyver). As usual, I am most fond of those in which Lam evokes the eccentrically poignant tone she can be so good at, as in "Saint Agnes": "I am not a ghost that haunts my mother. I am not a ghost that haunts my mother while she bakes pies... After celery pies came pies of the little green berries that most people do not eat. Most people do not eat them anywhere, and most people do not eat them in pies, so I am not sure why she is baking these pies ... I am not one to tell my mother how to act, so I say nothing." Contact amyclam@gmail.com, or www.wearepeople-too.org.

I also picked up a copy of a rather charming zine called *ladyscientist*. It's more of a personal zine than a literary thing, and really primarily aimed at young women in the hard sciences (the editor is a graduate student in biochemistry), but her survey of campuses in Spain, England and Scotland was fun to read, and there's an interesting article on "imposter syndrome," which is certainly not confined to women in the sciences but probably has some power for just about all women of any significant achievement, and quite a few men as

The Human Cannonball by Halli Villegas

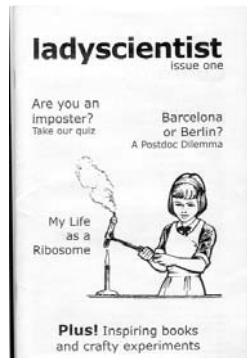


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well. (I happen to know one Professor Emerita of sociology who still has nightmares about people coming to take her degree away because she never really deserved it). Plus, the zine tells you how to knit your own protein! You can't beat that, even if the editor didn't fully succeed in her task as a ribosome.



Write to Susan P. Bustos, info@ladyscientist.com, for more information.

Finally, may I remind all of you to get your acts together and send me poems for the Left Breast of the Century Challenge, my anti-tribute to poet and war criminal Radovan Karadzic? 'cause I've only got four poems so far, and there won't be any chapbook unless I get more than that. Just to remind you (or tell you, if you missed my last column), the only rule is that you must write one poem titled "Under the Left Breast of the Century," the title of my buddy Radovan's own latest book. Relevance to war crimes is entirely optional, though my entrants so far have mostly been strangely loyal to this theme. Write to me (or e-mail) c/o *Word*. Fame and fortune can be yours.

Send small press items to *Une canadienne errante* for review via *Word*, 22 Prince Rupert Avenue, Toronto ON M6P 2A7.

Translation Nation

Notes on the joint

Canada-U.S. conference:

"Language Crossroads: Where Literature and Translation Intersect"

by Beatriz Hausner

I got hooked on American Literary Translators' Association (ALTA) conferences in 2001, when I had the good fortune of being present at a reading of *Secrets Need Words*, Australian translator Harry Aveling's groundbreaking anthology of avant-garde poetry from Indonesia. There are works of literature that shake you to the core... A rare thing indeed, finding books that open doors to worlds unknown to us, and reason enough to fork out the cash and catch a plane to Chicago (2002), Boston (2003), Las Vegas (2004).

The 2005 instalment, held jointly with the Literary Translators' Association of Canada / Association des traducteurs et traductrices littéraires du Canada (LTAC/ATTLC) in Montreal last November, held true to its ambitious title: "Language Crossroads: Where Literature and Translation Intersect."

There were workshops that dealt with the permutations of translating Robert Frost's "On Going Unnoticed" from the perspective of French-speaking North Americans, panels that focused on Langston Hughes as a translator, panels on translating pre-modern and modern Iranian poetry.

Because the conference was a joint effort between Canadians and

Americans, many of the discussions focused on topics of relevance to both, such as the challenges of translating Acadian and Cajun literature into English.

Issues of importance to translators, such as the transfer and acquisition of rights, public funding (or lack thereof) available (or not) to translators, publishing opportunities, were well represented at the Montreal conference.

All ALTA conferences make one feel party to a code of sorts, one that opens secret doors. I say "secret" because most translations of international literature are published either by university presses, or by small publishers, neither of which are disseminated through mainstream journals or bookstores. It is through ALTA that I have come upon Vietnamese poetry translated by the American writer John Balaban, or Marie D'Agoult's 19th Century scandalous bestseller *Nelida* (translated by Lynn Hoggard), based on D'Agoult's ten-year relationship with composer Franz Liszt.

Montreal offered many such opportunities. These stand out: Discovering how much Ray Ellenwood's translations of the Montreal *Automatiste* writer Claude Gauvreau bear in common with Hugh Hazelton's translations of the Argentine avant-garde poet Leopoldo Marechal's *La masmédula* (1956), a work made up of, well, made-up words based on alliterations, onomatopoeias and such; the diversity of views on eros and translation when seen through the eyes of Suzanne Jill Levine as she discusses Manuel Puig and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, as Allen Hibbard fixes his gaze on Syrian novelist Haydar Haydar's *A Banquet of Seaweed*, while Carol Maier weaves layered gauzes around her relationship with *Cobra*, by the late and unequalled Severo Sarduy.

ALTA holds its next conference in October, in Seattle, Washington. Check out their website for more details: www.literarytranslators.org.

For information on the activities of Canadian literary translators check their site at: www.attlc-ltac.org.

Beatriz Hausner is a poet and translator, principally from Spanish into English. Her poetry is rooted in the traditions of Spanish America and international Surrealism and most of her translations have focused on the writers of those literatures. Her latest poetry collection is *The Wardrobe Mistress*.

The Sadness of Life

The Human Cannonball
Poems by Halli Villegas
believe your own press

reviewed by
C. Durning Carroll

At its best, the despair of others reminds us of the persistence of happiness. When we watch or hear of suffering we may be lucky enough to recognize that for most of us life isn't so bad. If it's successful, the sadness artists express soothes our nerves by reminding us that pain is universal. As Elton John put it so succinctly: "Sad songs say so much." Halli Villegas, in *The Human Cannonball*, (believe your own press, 2005), uses this phenomenon to build a short but affecting collection told in the voice of some of our greatest sufferers—circus performers.

Villegas' collection recalls the once great but now mostly forgotten poetic masterpiece, Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology*. Like that work,

Villegas' book creates a microcosmic society, (for Masters, it was the imaginary Spoon River, Illinois) and through the interplay of poetic voices shows the foibles and falsities in which we all participate. The power of such writing, whether by Masters or Villegas, is that it doesn't take long for us to recognize in these poetic voices some aspect of ourselves. When Villegas writes: "I saw the hesitation./ He held the pose for a heartbeat longer than usual/ his arm went a little higher/ his hand trembled a bit," in the poem "The Knife Thrower's Wife," she subtly evokes the double edge of true passion, the terrible proximity of love and hate.

Villegas calls these "narrative poems," and she is right to do so; they tell intimate and affecting stories. However, while Villegas gains from her narratives much of the power of fiction to make complete worlds for us, her poems can correspondingly suffer from the curse of some prose writing—indifference to the poetic line. Since the disappearance of rhyme and/or metre as essential structures of verse, the question of what constitutes a vital poetic line has been thrown wide open. Being a prescriptivist about this is consequently a good way of displeasing all the people all of the time. Still, in several places: "with misdirection while passing a juicy bit," from "The Shell Game" or "uncontrollable" and "The trick is," from "The Lion Tamer," one wishes Villegas had wrestled a little more with that unruly beast of poetry—the line.

C. Durning Carroll is related to the actor Charles Durning and other illustrious personages but still has less hair on his ears.

Tightrope Books launch

Outside The Social bar on Queen West there is a bleeding mannequin. Inside, the bar is dimly lit with sconces and old chandeliers. On one side hangs a large Smirnoff Vodka sign. Some of the lighting is purple and the couches in the lounge are covered in fake zebra skin. We could be in a mod bar in early post-Communist St. Petersburg. But this is Toronto, 2005.

On the evening of October 28th, I strayed in here for the launch of Tightrope Books, Halli Villegas' new, "multi-arts" press. Among all the elegantly dressed gentlemen and the women in sequined hats were a few recognizable faces: George Fetherling was there and was warmly greeted by everyone; copies of *George Fetherling and His Work*, on sale at the front table. Others, though I didn't know their names, were regulars in Toronto's literary reading scene.

After a late start because of a broken video projector, we heard some good poetry and stories. Myna Wallin, who seems to be everywhere in Toronto these days, read from her forthcoming collection *A Thousand Profane Pieces*. Paul Hong read subversive fiction about the cruelties of love, and Mariella Griffor, a Chilean revolutionary, arrived all the way from Detroit to entertain us.

The feature act of the evening was Emily Pohl-Weary reading from her first collection *Iron-On*



Constellations; small though she is, she felt like a huge presence in the room. The video poems we heard/saw were like whispered flirtations from some-

one you've long wanted to be with, intimate yet unyielding. They left us wanting more.

All in all, a promising start for a young poet and a bold new press.

C.D.C.