

West Coast

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Tsunami Editions: A Review

Readers any distance from the Strait of Georgia should be aware of a series of chapbooks published by Lary Bremner that have appeared out of Vancouver over the past three years. I've got twelve of the fourteen (I'm missing only *Metaflowers* by Arni Runar Haraldson and a reprint of Jeff Derksen's *Until*). These books, all between 15 and 40 pages and all limited editions between 100 and 250 copies and costing about \$4 or \$5 each, indicate a tidal swell at work in West Coast writing.

Peter Culley's *Fruit Dots*, I think the second title in the series, is a wonderful and lush exercise in voice that uses subtle shifts in a triadic syntax-intext about West Coast forest growth, and always via a carefulness and reserve in description that allows image to hover in tactile memory of fern, moss, "creeping rootstock," "rock-broken stream," fertile, moist, and green just minutes all year long from the crash of Andean wave. This is a long poem that plays off of naturalist descriptive by cutting into syntax to jar sensation into a tangible presence not only of image stuff (things—"by means of underground runners / crawled under / a tight board fence—") but of the palpable words themselves ("veinlets...cuadex...chaffy stalks...thrice-pinnate"). The book is a fine example of clean and tasteful small-press work; several interrupted text collages, unpretentious type, cover, and so forth.

Small prose or pieces picked up from pun and shift, stories of precision about what's going on in the parapoem, stretched language formulas sometimes but Gerald Creede's *Verbose* gets nifty with surprise and like he says 'll "take (your) socks off of." There are six short-short texts that play around and with narrative by diverting the semiological pressure for unity into shapes language makes of itself. A short quotation from "Cubbyhole" illustrates the kind of attentions Creede manages by anchoring the language to the page:

He wanted a bucket of steam & about this much string. The first quarter the first two thirds of the second quarter the third quarter the last third of the second quarter the last quarter. It was a good thing the rain came straight down. Mind ding. Mother would often take back my lunch money to buy gin. The solemn of whiz domain. Out hats don't accept gratuities...would have done'd. You don't adapt to an avalanche.

I like Creede's interest in trying the "language writing" with intelligence; there's some real gaming going on here.

Lary (Bremner) Timewell comes up nicely on a sequence of 36 shots at serial sentence-building. He says "Hence, the sentence lifted." in *Jump/Cut* where right down to the level of the morphophone eye ear play to meaning pretty much aware of "lyric" as "the prison jargon" but lots of music lots of eme. The texts more than hint at montage and phanopoeic superimposition—each of them is fuelled by a kind of blast-off of talking-to, e.g. the last one, (36),

A fragment is sweet agitation. the subliminal swarms. It took me 10 years to get this far. Crawl out from under the timid journals of recession. I wrap my head in fabric for the last leg of the trip. Circuits, short & shorter, snap.

The advantage of this kind of new lyric prose-poem is the breadth of feeling the voice is still allowed within an acute attention to the literal words flowing by. This is a carefully composed book, full of numbers, I think, and accompanied by a fitting centrepiece and cuts from "Utamaro's Lunchbreak," a collage.

Until by Jeff Derksen undercuts signalling in the poem by leaning the mixture with a little more air at the end of the line. Careful skilful not just turns but returns and knots like in "or what I do, anecdote" large open-space drop "detail, slap happy" or the "specific ph" he lands on very tentative I would guess because he's got to hold on to make it work, and he does. This is a long short-line left-margin poem that uses the syntactic fold at the end of the line to interrupt and settle attention on phrase and word. The political and social bifraction Derksen implicates in his poem is a personal polis, the biotext working itself out in the eighties.

volatile oils only
wants to wax nails
with a brother carpenter
melt down prioritize
plastic fly factory
despite Mennonite
Hutterite application
of D.E.W. line
hollering in *our*
air corridors

This type of poetry, an affront to our predominantly late nineteenth-century sensibility, Derksen uses to relegitimize the new shifts in those godawful desires, "meaning" and "reality." The book has been

reprinted, thankfully.

One two three four five six five four three two one is how *How Two* by Kathryn MacLeod invites this narrative almost lyric you to gesture lightly to form so that something like “Jack, I will not allow you to extend a) an arm / b) an invitation.” really gets operating room in a mind that counts and remember that’s what story is anyway. Counting. The real advantage to MacLeod’s approach to narrative in this sequence of numbered riffs is particularity, so linguistically concrete, syntactically minute, that rhythm, the verification of playing in time, reverberates through her texts. Whether it be a stanza like “Bone nab. Sweater face. Tenure teeth. / Outside I inherit a forest gradually.” or a paragraph like

This time, rebuilt. A vital walk. A very long story, a holiday, our needs met. There is one organization running the whole country. The river teemed with death. We missed you.

—the dispersion of possible reference is adjourned to allow for distinctive and proper recognitions and truths to occur.

Calvin Wharton’s *Visualized Chemistry* synthesizes old poem shape and new languages. As they say, he’s cooking, and with a smile sometimes at having something to say come up against finding something said, like “the voice has many intonations / and designs for renewal / the palms-up signal, meaning it...” I’d think his ear too has been wide open in these dozen poems. The title piece, for example, is a lovely quiet exploration spun from a textbook text out into anything, whatever, a kind of eversion of the whole notion of thesis and subject.

A manifesto of harmony (tools appear in the document, with wooden handles). He says, “Without the village idiot, there’s no vilage.” A course of action with a cast of millions. Humour as also hammer; the real expressed as what gets done.

The rest of the book looks like poetry and really is, a breadth of verse that offers measure of any number of possibilities.

Similarity concerns writing when psyche circles, so Nancy Shaw tells in *Affordable Tedium*. We can recognize here through some landscape black and white photos and word images—anything but tedious—the pummeled city days. The poetic sentence is used almost like punctuation for the passions and is abetted by an intriguing page-edge wrap-around photo sequence as Shaw puts her handle on the therapeutic.

Turn to grasp the slumped shoulder gesture.

We sit to listen.

The audience smiles—a tin rolls across the stage.

She signals for the grainy finish.

Form snaps morally resolved debris.

Familiar loop words “own it.”

The challenging play in the viscosity of such abstraction, space a reflex time, means the periodicity of waiting allows either an emptying or an intense but dwelling focus. Sure-footed.

Syntagmatic scatter collects around sentence and paragraph as units of composition to compost image and intention (attention), literally a garbaged cosmology, is what Dorothy Lusk's *Oral Tragedy* lands on. That is, the “emic” structures of syntax, as witnessed here in phrase and syntactic transition, are left as a kind of residue of a world view linguistically no longer serviced by otherwise imposed structures of style. To me, this is ‘work-writing’—somebody's got to do it. The book contains three sequences of parastanzas that explore the immediacy of perception, period. Or almost, but what the reader rebounds from.

Appears far greater than all machinery yet always misses affecting more than a few months or paragraphs. Not usually called tragedy, so never looked well as heard disquieting items known better. As bereft of physical conditions.

The work goes on and, as Lusk appropriately says, finally, “My gaze is numbered, my days remaindered. Tell you later.”

Peter Ganick's *Braids of Twine* pigtails the stanza as a kind of junction box of abstract/concrete, concrete/concrete, and so forth, ground wire ungrounded so that each of these units in this medium-long poem provide individualized switch-sets of some sort of inverse cadential event. Some measure of flow, just on the edge of shorting out but not.

limits upon radiant perception arrive
well-strangered by th forecast
of deeper-than-once overshot fractions
warped in a slow sorrowful mindsong
retained by blundering
or capable intersections
phases they intend fold blueeyed.

The formal subtleties move the poem forward and, indeed, slow the progression enough to braid thought and reflection, phase by phrase, into

something singular, properly, appropriately, apropos its own movement.

Believing in the World is subtitled “a reference work” and Susan Yarrow offers that it is part of an encyclopedia project. Careful structuring out of reference roots, however, shoot off that margin and acquire further adhesion to words themselves which, here, trail a type of mesh bionarrative and geography even. I’m drawn to the agility of such a wash of suggestion, image, and story that redefines some container.

“The children are watching.” (They have no bodies.) Arising, brings life along. The way water finds its level. And we are so happy to be happy, biographied by oblique reference.

There are seven poems in this book, full of stanza, sentence, and phrase, sometimes line, and a useful balance of play and eyes wide open led by the words’ pensiveness. Penetrating.

Pageless placement of blacked-out numbers first hooks design into Robert Mitternthal’s *Ready Terms*. Style. (In all of Tsunami’s books really.) The language-writing in these lined and stanzaed poems operates as a rail to which attention encounters blips in the road bed. That is, the writing feels engineered to use the form in order to determine possible features not necessarily obstacles but aids useful to this navigation. “Ephiph-guide seeds,” for example. Or I like the landing in “Without Fishing for Initials”:

loyalty aloud drinks
indulgence

straight-club
honey-drone syncope

The page echo in Dan Farrell’s *ape* refreshes both surface and space to a kind of word clip-art where information’s naturally threaded to itself and not, for a change, outside. The clarity of emptying out form until only the page or book is the proposition frees word for action right there, nowhere else. Maybe. Farrell pushes, both coming and going, into the book and out of the book, for the elements of artefact. I find the intention used in this composition attentive and responsible. The reprisal of “piercing gravelwrong late pierced” at

Into the saltbox stooping. A fog linked all fours. Pent cooty push.
Clip from beyond.

depends on the page, on the production of the page. The book at work.

All the Tsunami books are very much work books. New work books.
So, like, work!

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ADEENA KARASICK has recently completed her MA at York University. Published titles include *Manipulating Stairs, dis(emanations)*, and *With*. She has edited *Anerca/Comp.ost* and Warren Tallman's forthcoming collected writings, *Am in Can*.

CALVIN WHARTON has worked as a writer and editor in Vancouver, and is now teaching writing at Selkirk College in Castlegar, BC. He recently co-edited, with Tom Wayman, *East of Main*—an anthology of East Vancouver poetry. His *Visualized Chemistry* was published by Tsunami Editions.

CATRIONA STRANG is currently on leave from the final semester of her BA at SFU. "TEM," a chapbook, is forthcoming from *Barscheit*.

CLAIRE STANNARD is a single parent who works in a worker owned and controlled co-op. She has published in *Writing, Raddle Moon, Jag, Kinesis*, and *East of Main*. She was a student editor of *The Capilano Review*.

CORINNE CARLSON is a visual artist now studying at York University. She has exhibited in galleries across Canada. Her paintings and installations explore connections between spoken language and the effects of perception on interpretation.

DAN FARRELL's chapbook *ape* was recently published by Tsunami Editions. He is currently working as a letter carrier.

DEANNA FERGUSON's *Will Tear Us* was published by Wormhole Press; *Link Fantasy*, with Stan Douglas, was exhibited at Artspeak Gallery. Other works have appeared in *Jag, Raddle Moon*, and *Writing*.

DENNIS DENISOFF is studying Canadian literature at McGill University, and is currently working on his MA thesis and a manuscript of short stories. His work has appeared in a number of literary publications in Canada and the USSR.

DOROTHY TRUJILLO LUSK is a Vancouver writer born in Burkina Faso and raised by wolves in central Canada. She enjoys hiking, and seizing the means of production. Dislikes snobs and phonies.

FRED WAH's *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (Turnstone, 1985) received the Governor General's Award for poetry. Red Deer College Press has recently published *Limestone Lakes Utaniki*. He sent his review from Calgary, where he currently teaches at the University of Calgary.

Work by GERALD CREEDE has appeared in *Raddle Moon, Writing, Motel*, and *Barscheit*. His books include *Verbose* (Tsunami Editions) and *like flies* (archive revisal press).

JEFF DERKSEN is an editor of *Writing* and a founding member of the Kootenay School of Writing. Recent writing is in the "Postmodern Poetries & Language Writing" issue of *Verse*, and in *Raddle Moon*. His first book, *Down Time*, is forthcoming from Talonbooks.

JIN-ME YOON is a Korean-Canadian artist interested in investigating issues of sexual and cultural difference. Photos in this issue are from "Split," a work-in-process.

JUDY ANNE LEWIS RADUL was born in Lillooet, BC. *Rotating Bodies: Alexis, Crystal and Blake*, with images by Carel Moiseiwitsch, was published by Petrade Press in 1988; *Boner 9190 and the weak* was published in the Netherlands (KNUNST Press, 1989). After 9 years, she finally finished her BA (Fine and Performing Arts) at SFU this spring.

KATHY SLADE recently graduated from SFU's School for the Contemporary Arts. *Deliberate Transgressions* was shown at Artspeak Gallery in April 1989.

MINA TOTINO is a painter whose work has been shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Or Gallery, and the Western Front Gallery.

NANCY SHAW is co-editor of *Writing*, and curator of the Or Gallery. She has had a recent show at Artspeak Gallery, and *Affordable Tedium* was published by Tsunami Editions.

PAUL KELLEY is currently on leave from Vancouver Community College and studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Recent writings have been published in *Island*, *CV II*, and *Issues in Education and Culture*.

PETER CULLEY is the author of *Fruit Dots* (Tsunami Editions) and *Natural History* (Fissure Books). His most recent art criticism appeared in *The Capilano Review*.

PHIL MCCRUM's drawings of "Art of War" in this issue continue a series of work concerning diagrammatical strategies and landscape; *Fulcrum*, another work in this series, was exhibited at the Western Front Gallery.

RHODA ROSENFELD is a poet and visual artist born in Montreal. She has lived in Vancouver since 1968. She is the author of *Stooks*, a *B.C. Monthly* publication.

Visual artist ROY ARDEN was born and lives in Vancouver. He has exhibited his predominantly photographic work across Canada as well as in Geneva, Stuttgart, Helsinki, and Stockholm. *Return* is the latest of several works he has produced which refer to Vancouver's "Bloody Sunday" of 1938.

SARA LEYDON was born in Saskatchewan. Her visual works have been exhibited in Vancouver at the Artspeak, Or, and Western Front Galleries, and at the Contemporary Art Center in Seattle.

STAN DOUGLAS is a visual artist living in Vancouver. The exhibition that he organized for the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays*, has been touring North America since 1988, and his own work will be included in the "Aperto '90" exhibition at this year's Venice Biennale.

STEVEN FORTH is a poet and translator who has recently moved to Vancouver after a long stay in Japan. *Imitating Flight* was published by Tels Press (Tokyo, 1986), and a manuscript, "Sine," is now looking for a publisher. He is working on translations of work by Tomisawa Kakio and Yoshida Issui.

SUSAN YARROW is editor of *Raddle Moon*. The pieces from "Not not" published in this issue are part of Book 2 of "The Round," an encyclopaedia project. Book 1 was published as *Believing in the World* (Tsunami Editions). More of Book 2 is forthcoming in *Motel*.

TOM McGAULEY has recently helped edit, and provided an introduction to, *Canadian Panorama*, a book of poems by the Mexican artist José Tlatelpas. "Recarving the Chrysoprase Bowl," a poem-cycle in a number of books, is in the final draft stages.

VICTORIA WALKER is an artist and poet whose work combines visual art and language. She is working on a series of collages called "Alphabet" for a forthcoming show. *Suitcase*, a chapbook published by Gorse Press, just won the Dorothy Livesay Poet's Prize from the West Coast Book Prize Society.



THE NEW VANCOUVER WRITING ISSUE

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