

CPR

Resuscitating the art of Canadian poetry

THE CANADIAN POETRY REVIEW

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ISSUE ONE

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Discipline of Ice

Lelsey Choyce

One: Six Good Seconds of Stillness

Picture this: the young me tethered to reason, rules, barbed wire perimeters, my own backyard full of so much possibility. But for the tangle of dangerous metal around my neck, I could find time to pledge allegiance to the weeds, run into the crickled forest, become green and cousined to briar thorns, as my skin, my bark, turns oak and shagbark elm while I kneel down on the rocks left here by my pathfinders, the glaciers.

The pull of all moons in this system controls my tide as I spill towards the sea of ideas, of haunting memory, of loss and losing everything. Invitations circulate generously to drown with me in the words if I am willing to follow the surge, the slide into the gravity of this situation.

The teachers in each successive grade had me dissected before an auditorium filled with strangers, the principal a man with small change clanging around in his pocket as he spoke of suburban high points of the ceremonial destruction of youth, all aching to be sent spinning into deep empty space, these children posing as sanity sitting in rows, in stone seats, some begging for the sovereignty to invent superior religions based on communion with the sweetness of the girl on the bus. Instead, the daily sacrifice of the solemn language on the pedantic altar of fractured sunlight.

In the afternoon, free from the funnel of education, postponing adulthood was the plan, smoking the acrid long green pods from the catalpa tree, dreaming of languid Mississippi sargasso rivers while walking to the malls filled with all the available sameness except for unknown girls waiting, sitting on the cold floors, skirts blossomed around them, their thighs cool and smooth on the fake marble floor.

What were they doing there? I was young, had fatal music in my fevered brain, callouses on my fingers from hitting favoured dark, hard chords: A minor for a life.

After the mall, the music, God sat with me down by the creek where I watched the pigeons nesting under the bridge. Once saved a nestling that fell into the water, scooped it out with good will and took it home, had this idea it was the Jesus Christ of pigeons because of the peacefulness in the eyes. Found books in the woods and ripped out pages, patched them together and came up with a kind of *Ulysses*. James Joyce among the skunk cabbages, one page about sex, the next about landing on Mars, followed by a speech written by JFK. Vietnam haunted me in the skunk cabbage swamp and I thought I could invent a new country, a new century, and run to it. So I did and peopled it with simplicity, sanctity and greatness, sea to sea. And told all the citizens there was something wonderful about a north wind down the arch of your back on a February morning with sea wraiths — the ghosts of antiquated nationalism. But there would still be demons from the world behind and those to come.

Then there was my speech about cures for cancer in the ninth grade with a survivor fresh out of chemo giving me an award that my friends would not care about but how the old women with their mastectomies loved me for my eloquence and my English teacher so happy with my success that he wrapped his car around a pole later that month.

A Jules Verne kind of existence, a few years later, halfway on a journey to the centre of the earth, driving a 1957 Chevy with baby moon hubcaps, still skateboarding behind the supermarket with the rapture of a saint inside me, breathing in the perfume of pollution and performing chemistry with it as the sun drizzled through the leaves. The light itself could be read like a holy book, for even the yellow jackets in the stinging pear trees offered the truth in those days but we could never once stop and hold it for six good seconds of stillness, of silence. Instead, we conjured ourselves as a part of some great theory on the pathway of a circuit pounded into our hearts: *Go out and own liquor stores*, it said to some, *build better drive-thru banks*, *talk on television* and *spend your yammering years in wealth. Offer back nothing.*

[...]

Six: The Black Spruce Saints

Snowsift over ice and gravel as I pilgrim down the road first thing to the sea, study the line where saltwater scallops snow along the seaweed shore — full moon last night, the old high tide/full moon routine that the Atlantic has practised for several hundred thousand rehearsals.

The ravens are angry at me for not leaving corn on the snowbank. Damn, noticed the swing set almost rusted through, kids grown, but I had anchored the bastard with concrete beneath the frozen soil, have to wait for a good frost heave to undo the labour or spring thaw maybe. Spring: imagine. Surprise rapid fire growth of tiny blue violets on the lawn (so called), really mostly moss. In the summer we mow the moss, chip the bright lichen from the roof tiles.

Kafka, Tolkien, Kesey, Ginsberg, Brautigan, Dostoevsky. I never went anywhere without a book from 1969 to 1972, sometimes travelled light as wind, hitched rides to Dallas, Tennessee, sat with illegal radar gear in my lap from Atlanta to Philadelphia with a young anarchist buying old military hardware for God knows what. Caught other rides as a young man with truckers, drinkers, Vietnam vets telling me stories about shrapnel, hookers, monkeys and pain so deep they drove all over America with a cooler of Budweiser beer for ballast against the great white truth.

A quick tally of reasons I should not be alive: drowning (near, in several of the world's oceans), fights (victim of a couple of serious ones, always lost), alone on the Interstate outside Birmingham, Alabama once with beer bottles flying past my long wavy hair in the dark. Asleep with the war dead in a cemetery in France, my sleeping

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Lesley Choyce is the author of 67 books for adults, teens and children. He has taught at Dalhousie University for the past 25 years and is the publisher of Pottersfield Press. Lesley surfs year round in the North Atlantic and is considered the father of transcendental wood-splitting. He's worked as a rehab counsellor, a freight hauler, a corn farmer, a janitor, a journalist, a lead guitarist, a newspaper boy and a well-digger. He lives in a 200 year old farm house at Lawrencetown Beach overlooking the ocean.



bag full of rain. Threats (against me, something I wrote in the paper, twice).

Down the road now and here I am (only across the street from there, really) at work on self-definition (again). Here goes: failed vegetarian, posturing poet, heavy wool socks, half-shaven, half-formed theories baking in oven, indulgent with words and memory bespectacled (for reading at least), fatherhooded, man with parsley frozen down in his frozen garden stubbornly clinging to life all winter only to go to seed as soon as the soil melts to mud.

Did I tell you the black spruce are the saints of Nova Scotia? No one will believe me here but they love us and care for us and we owe them better than a noisy clearcut revenge by spiteful men. Admitted, they be dullards, these trees, in some respect but prove saintly and protective if given the chance. The spruce are saints and the ground juniper prophets of centuries to come after us, as we, our small human sapling selves, alive these brief decades with nothing to do but learn to read, find a handful of good books to keep you alive (Wordsworth, Whitman, *The Last Temptation of Christ*) and then sift back into the soil — If only I could be buried among the spruce out back — a surfer among the saints. Instead, the priesthood will plant me like a package deal at Walmart.

I am convinced that raw cranberries mixed with lemon and Guinness is a mode of communion, a formula for repair not tested yet on the unsuspecting public. I drive to Seaforth this morning with the dog peering out the frosted windows and there's a woman with a big broom sweeping snow from the road, a performance artist of sorts. The critics raved.

Sharav & To Bite the Blue Apple

Dvora Levin

from *To Bite the Blue Apple*

Diagnosis

The small ferry glides into a fog bank.
A gull flutters on the water's surface,
lifts up and disappears.

The fog horn sounds.

The sun rolls itself into a pearl,
rivers its light across the cellophane sea.
A glimpse of blue, a sunlit cloud.

The fog thickens.
The fog horn sounds.
The ferry chugs on.

It is said there is an island ahead,
hills of evergreen,
a dock to land on.

Reaching Centre

I stroke the fur, bite into
the skin of a fresh peach,
taste earth, rain, wind and sun,
the faint decay of a small bruise.

At the centre of flesh, a stone;
a small whorl brain, solitary,
two sealed hemispheres cupping the universe.
The knife glints in my sticky hand,

its point poised to open the fissure,
reveal the smooth casing,
two amber teardrops ready
to release the embryo.

But first, the piercing,
the breaking open.

from *Sharav*

Waiting

Imagine time as
ripples of sand formulating stillness,
an ancient desert well dug deep,
the lighthouse, disappeared with the freighter's passing.

Imagine time as
the waft of perfume held steady in a glass bottle,
letters vanished from fragments of parchment,
a robin painting its unborn eggs blue.

Imagine time as
the essence of being, curved without form,
continuous without space, and at its very centre,
a rose petal floating in a dry wind.

Suddenly

a poem will shiver the curtain,
reveal the opening,
offer a glimpse through
the glazed window;

as a song will,
or a prayer,
or your voice calling my name
suddenly.

Diplomacy

The arm wielding the knife hangs limp
from the ripped-out shoulder, one fierce red eye
straining to see if the hand is open or clenched.

In a far away land, foreign physicians
in clean white coats, clutch overexposed x-rays,
huddle to discuss the treatment.

Clever surgeons, crowded with consequence,
recommend the clean cut of amputation,
hidden burial of the afflicted limb.

In a dirty surgery, local doctors, muddled
with forgetfulness, thread their thick needles
for the stitching, without anesthetic, in a fading light,

knowing the chances of infection, death;
the ghost arm reaching not for a plowshare,
but a gun.

Two Poets Meet

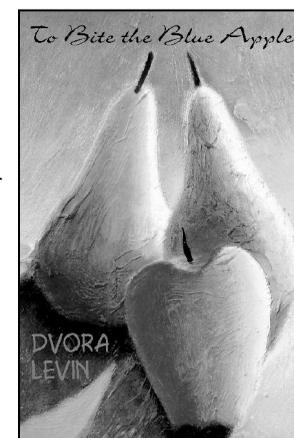
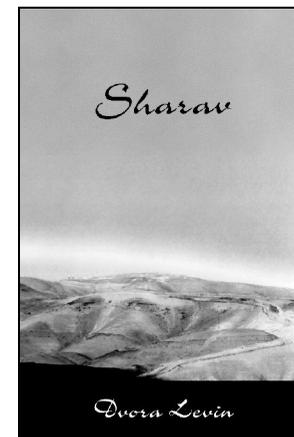
In the middle of the night, the taxi came.
The Arab driver and I waited
while you collected your bags.

Looking up, I spoke my poem:
Hard white, upright, half moon
slips down into a begging bowl.

The Arab driver spoke his poem:
It looks like a banana, he said.

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Dvora Levin is a vessel, thinning her clay through poetry, to reveal more light. Sharav is her first full-length book of poems. She has published the chapbook This Time In the Land, as well as poems in five chapbooks edited by Patrick Lane (Leaf Press). A regular reader at Planet Earth Poetry in Victoria, BC, she has read poems on CBC Radio and participated in the Poet Tree Project. She leads poetry writing workshops in the workplace and for people of the street.

Your Wailing Wall

for Avram

This stone wall is not your foundation,
your fence, nor your gate.
It is a refection of you.

Wings of doves agitate the air
and your every empty space is filled
with the same love prayer.

Your skin, touched by so many hands,
some delicate, some desperate, their absence
brings such persistent longing.

Your wall is so often broken
by that earthquake, that uproar
of falling in love.

All your carefully hewn, stacked stones
tumble into chaos, into ecstasy,
quickly followed by

the settling,
the turning away,
the awful silence,
rubble and dust,

and you waiting there
to be put together again,
reconstructed into any shape
that can be recognized.

Opera Bufa Manolis

First Hour

At the time of indifference and
its absurdity their novice

teenage God debuts
with His know-it-all

stance giving the trees
their first tears as

leaves reflect in brutal perfection
the color of Earth

reduced to boredom
and as I stand on the promontory

trying to enclose the infinite
between two parallel grooves of skin He

splashes beaches with
yellow sulfur the little creeks

with rainbow trout stigmata and
other marks defining the

alive stench of silence erecting
cypress groves to resemble

fractured stone on the statue's
face suddenly a bell

purrs for the descending plague
the forest ejects odors

of darkness when the young God
is asked to trade His leisure in

heaven with edema of a
horny virgin's pubic mound and

the mature eavesdropping wind
shoots stars with a Yes

while a greedy deacon smiles
in sardonic agreement

rubs his paws in anticipation and without
concern for decorum jeers: who cares?

First Canto

*The genesis of tragedy is
sharp like the crisp watermelon*

*its black spots amid a red cosmos
I dig with my fingers trying to*

*unravel the meaning of my thirst
some fiery July noon or a cuke*

*picked from its mother's arm
at dawn when one wakes*

*to go to church or to attend the pious
execution of an allopistos saint*

*benevolence or benediction swirling
a winding path that forgets your name*

*though remembers the taste of your soles
on gravel rebelling when the*

*undulating shadow of your voice
gnaws the chirp of chickadees*

*the murmur of its echo becomes
a miracle and bubbles from the depths*

*of sacred empyrean music
your devotion bell pealing*

*for a recently departed
osprey and its grace diving into*

*clear shallows where an unnoticed loon
cries away his departure and*

*a last ray filters its glimmer through
the lonely cloud mesmerizing*

*a moment of silence
trapping my perceptions*

*to ask the most peculiar
question my emotions*

*that guard cemetery gates
affirming with salutes*

and shouting: we can do better

Second Hour

I move my brush toward the eastern field
and the cows stop spinning their tails

splashed in light brown although
worm and eagle earn gratification

in the nimble yawn of nostalgia
of life in Chronos' pendulum

tender sparrow tackles two seeds
in his beak and retreats to his brother

in the bushes one teardrop in an
irksome afternoon when even chewing

a stick of gum embalms you
with such pleasure you couldn't

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Manolis has written three novels, a large number of collections of poetry, which are slowly appearing as published works, various articles and short stories in Greek as well as in English. After working as an iron worker, train labourer, taxi driver, and stock broker, he now lives in White Rock where he spends his time writing, gardening, and traveling. Towards the end of 2006 he founded Libros Libertad, an unorthodox and independent publishing company in Surrey BC with the goal of publishing literary books.



think yourself more lucky
as you breathe fresh air rising

off seashore dusk always
recurring as a faithful friend after

a tough day's work then starts
the game of cynical Death

evangelizing his fearsome enigma
The dark wind blows

as from the future and undresses
a decaying reality concocted by

hands of the few though the rose
traverses past eyes of the girl

who reflects at the redness of her lips
shrugging her shoulders my loneliness

in the path enmity grasps
thin air and ponders the question

while headmaster cinches the noose
around an apostate's muscled neck

without concern for mercy
carves emblems and insignia

inked with blood crying out: who cares?

Casting Out Nines

Richard Stevenson

Thetis Lake –
we pack a car battery
to play Pink Floyd

cliff dive –
submerged ledge bottle shard
slashes my foot

bikini pubes
at twelve o'clock!
towel at six

science geek alert!
he pauses, decides not to
pick up the feather

first condom purchase –
box ditched when he spots the clerk's
gun turret tits

first acid trip –
my friends laugh when I say
the light is still on

second acid trip –
I fall down a black light
rabbit hole

virginity is
a big balloon:
one prick and it's gone

(found senryu)

panty remover –
no opener, but she doesn't care
about the cork bits

full meal deal –
I get her panties off;
she launches noodles

the first time –
her panties hang jaunty as
lovebirds from their perch

the mini skirt!
"six inches from hem to floor, miss, or
you go home to change!"

floor to ceiling – done!
a Smarties box of balloons
to jump around in

Leary for Chem?!
all the grade twelves
call him Tim

trying to stay young –
poor Ms. C, ham hocks swaddled
in a mini skirt

the swim coach is hot!
we gladly swim lengths as she
walks back and forth

phone in a bomb scare –
sure fire way to avoid
writing the final!

teacher goes mini!
when she's seated, not looking,
out comes Ken's pen light

panther agaric –
hallucinogenic ... your
last trip, Tim intones

breast implants –
two bald midgets
in a headlock

ra! ra! sis boom ba!
no one else could fill
your bra

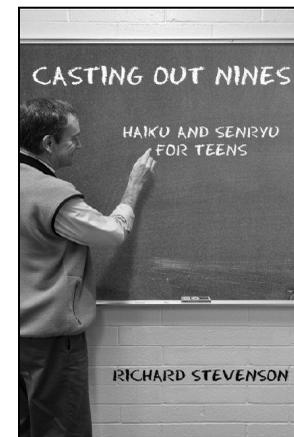
(senryu found on a birthday card)

poor Strawberry Fields –
she has zits on her zits
and we're so cruel

Dana's jacket reads
"Memorial 70" –
beer count or waist size?

hands and knees —
drunk, grovelling in gravel
for her contact lens

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Richard Stevenson lives and teaches in Lethbridge, Alberta. His other Ekstasis Editions titles are From The Mouths of Angels, Flying Coffins, Nothing Definite Yeti, Hot Flashes, A Charm of Finches and Bye Bye Blackbird.



making u.f.o.s –
the news man claims air force planes
doing night recon ...

no floor mats,
parallel bars set too wide:
sadist for phys ed

no bells, no locks –
substitute teacher wears a
Mickey Mouse watch

road tar! the teacher
calls the girls' mascara –
not on my microscopes!

Mr. Morrison?!
my grade nine phys ed teacher
drinks after shave

to take his seat, D
has to crouch, lift his belly,
drop it on the desk

brain damage –
this time he *decides* to
drive off the same cliff

no smoking in my car!
when he's not around,
we blow the smoke in

Poems

Yannis Ritsos *translated by Manolis*

Ocean's March

Harbor at night
lights drown in the water
faces without memory or continuance
faces lit by passing spotlights of distant ships
and then sunken in the shadow of voyage
slant masts with hanging dream lamps
like the cracked wings of angels who sinned
the soldiers with helmets
between the night and embers
wounded hands like the forgiveness
that reached late
Prisoners tied on anchors
a ring around the horizon's neck
and other chains there at the feet of children
at dawn's hands holding a daisy
And it is the masts that insist
to count the stars
with the help of calm memory
– a bouquet of seagulls in the morning blue sky
Color deserts the face of day
and light doesn't find any statue
to dwell in to be glorified to be calm
Nevertheless we still shelter
the sun's open wound
that springs flowers out of seeds
in the same march
in the same question
in the fertile veins of spring
that repeats the swallows' rounds
writing erotic zeros
in the invincible firmament?
Which wound
hasn't graced us yet
that we may complement
the godliness of God?

Doxology

He stood at the far end of the road
like a leafless dusty tree
like a tree burned by the sun
praising the sun that cannot be burned

Duty

One star gleams in the twilight like a lit
keyhole
you glue your eye on it – you look inside – you see
everything
The world is fully illuminated behind the locked door
You need to open it

One Dead

He said: The light with the enlarged eyes
with the enlarged arm hairs
with the magnified voices of builders on the opposite
construction site with the blinding sea
between their naked ribs is terrible
You have to get saddled with a mountain – he said –
so that you may pass standing through the sun's responsibility
However down in the basement – he said –
are the large empty barrels like coffins of your ancestors
there is the conciliatory shadow
and the oil stains on the floor
and the roots of the tree that pushes through the wall
its contorted fingers
The security of death – he said
There you hear the distant words of vineyards and seeds
you taste the silence and the moisture
you get used to being dead
And he was truly dead without being accustomed to it
When the long days came with flags
when light knocked on his door
no one opened
He was dead without being accustomed to it

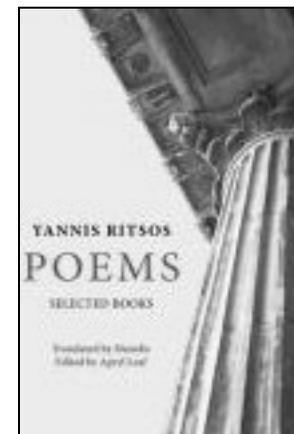
Myth

At night we lighted the oil lamps
and took the roads asking the passers-by
She wore a dress we said
in the color of dreams Didn't you see her?
She wore two light blue earrings
No one had seen her Only in the cabin at the end of the village
the old woman the lumberjack's mother pointed her finger
and showed us the river behind the trees
Down to where two light blue stars flickered

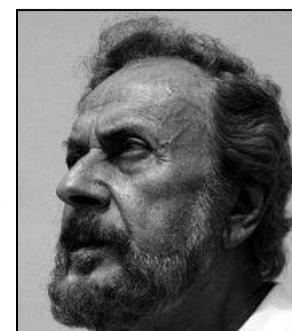
In the Barracks

The moon entered the barracks
It rummaged in the soldiers' blankets
Touched an undressed arm Sleep
Someone talks in his sleep Someone snores
A shadow gestures on the long wall
The last trolley bus went by Quietness
Can all these be dead tomorrow?
Can they be dead from right now?
A soldier wakes up
He looks around with glassy eyes
A thread of blood hangs from the moon's lips

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Yannis Ritsos was born in Monemvassia (Greece), on May 1st, 1909 as cadet of a noble family of landowners. His youth is marked by devastating in his family: economic ruin, precocious death of the mother and the eldest brother, internment of the father, suffering of mental unrests. He spent four years (1927-1931) in a sanatorium to take care of his tuberculosis.



The Hill

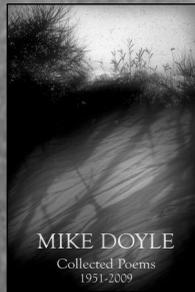
Someone had a lot of dead people
He dug the ground he buried them himself
Stone by stone earth on earth
he built a hill
On top of the hill
he built his cabin facing the sun
After that he opened pathways
he planted trees
carefully geometrically thoughtfully
His eye was always smiling
His hand wasn't trembling
The hill
There on Sunday afternoons mothers climb
pushing their baby carriages
the workers of the neighborhood in clean shirts
go there to sunbathe and breath some fresh air
There at twilight pairs in love saunter
and learn to read the stars
Under the trees a child plays harmonica
The pop vendor yells about his lemonade
On the hill they all know
that they are closer to the sky
But no one knows how the hill was built
no one knows how many sleep in the hills' bowels

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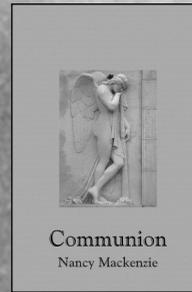
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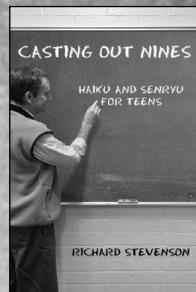
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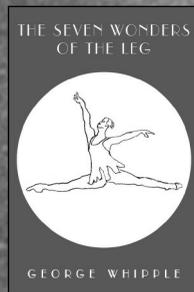
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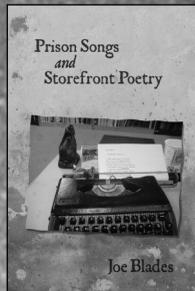
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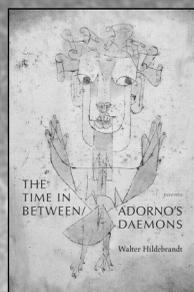
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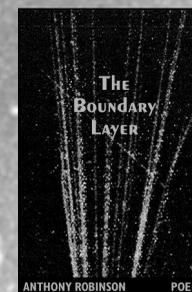
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