LENNY YES, JONI NO

That was a well-researched feature on literary visitors, but how disappointing that the writer did not dig deeper beyond male chauvinism to add a few more female writers! If you are going to highlight Leonard Cohen, then why not Joni Mitchell? If you included Pope John Paul, then why not Gloria Steinem? Maybe the writer of the article lost his government research grant and ran out of money. Really now! I thought we women did not have to keep raising money. Really now! I thought we

B. Yaworski

DELTA

[Leonard Cohen writes books; Joni Mitchell does not. And she lived on the Sunshine Coast. Yes, the panacea of famous female authors—not on book tours—was problematic. More suggestions from readers are welcome.—Ed.]

SEAMUS WAS HERE

While guest lecturer at Berkeley, Seamus Heaney made a brief visit to Vancouver in 1971 to give a reading sponsored by UBC. He was accorded on the bill to Rainer Schulte. As Seamus and my husband George McWhirter had been at university in Belfast together, he stayed with us in a rental house at 4659 West 8th Ave in Vancouver. A father of two wee boys, Seamus was a wonderful houseguest and not perturbed when our youngest leaned out of his high chair and chucked up by Seamus’s dinner plate. Earlier that year, Marie, his wife had been mugged in our youngest leaned out of his high chair and chucked up by Seamus’s dinner plate. Earlier that year, Marie, his wife had been mugged in

Angela McWhirter

Vancouver

THOR HEYERDAHL

Two addendums to your fascinating round-up of literary visitors:

In addition to spending time at Bella Coola, Thor Heyerdahl worked at the Trail smelter for about a year, starting in 1940. One of Heyerdahl’s children appears in a Sunday school registry held by the local archives.

Theodore Roosevelt first saw B.C. in 1888, during a month-long hunting trip on Kootenay Lake. He devoted a chapter to it in The Wilderness Hunter (1893), and mentioned it in subsequent works. Roosevelt biographers, if they remark on this trip at all, usually overlook the fact it was predominantly in B.C., and instead say he was hunting “in northern Idaho” or in “Idaho’s Kootenai country.”

Greg Nesteroff

Castlegar

GENTLE BUL

Thank you for your “25 Famous Literary Visitors” issue, including a picture of Charles Bukowski’s 1979 reading at The Viking Inn in Vancouver. Bukowski actually fell against a radiator in The Sylvia Hotel, when he was smashed, after the reading. For years I thought that was last reading he ever gave that was captured on film, but, in fact, the reading he gave six months later in Redondo Beach (which I attended, as well) was also recorded. The DVDs are available at BukowskiLIVE.com. Most of what Hank did on stage was an act. In person he was kind, gentle and very wise.

D.B. Del Torre

Vancouver

ALEISTER CROWLEY

Thanks for the great issue about international literary visitors to British Columbia. It should be noted that Rupert Brooke, Hart Crane, Blaise Cendrars and Aleister Crowley all visited Vancouver at one time. Rupert Brooke traveled to Vancouver with the Hon. Robert Rogers, minister of public works, and wrote about his visit in Letters from America. Hart Crane visited Vancouver (which he was 17) with his mother, Grace, and Blaise Cendrars wrote a great poem about his visit called Vancouver: a Decapite.

Aleister Crowley wrote in Confessions: “Vancouver presents no interest to the casual visitor. It is severely Scotch. Its beauties lie in its surroundings.” He continued: “I was very disappointed with the Rockies, of which I had heard such eloquent encomiums. They are singularly shapeless; and their proportions are unpleasing. There is too much colourless and brutal base; too little snowy shapely summit. As for the ghastly monotony of the wilderness beyond them, through Calgary and Winnipeg right on to Toronto—words fortunately fail. … Toronto as a city carries out the idea of Canada as a country. It is a calculated crime both against the aspirations of the soul and the affections of the heart.”

Richard Olafson

Victoria

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email: bookworld@telus.net
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A is for Adams

Shelley Adams

Having worked as a chef at Whistler and in the film industry, Shelley Adams also ran the Fresh Tracks Café when she was a co-owner of the Whitewater ski hill near Nelson. Adams' widely-reviewed first book, Whitewater Cooks: Pure, Simple and Real creations from the Fresh Tracks Café was self-published and reputedly sold 5,000 copies before Whitecap Books took it under their imprint. She has opted to self-publish her follow-up, Whitewater Cooks at Home (Sandhill $34.95), which zoomed to the top of the BC Bestsellers List.

B is for Belshaw

North Island College professor John Douglas Belshaw has revised the theory that population growth necessarily equates with progress for Cradle to Grave: A Population History of British Columbia (UBC Press $85), with an emphasis on aboriginal depopulation, settler-era sex ratios, fertility patterns and immigration.

C is for Carolan

Jessica Berger Gross

Ex-New Yorker Jessica Berger Gross of the UBC Creative Writing program received a National Parenting Publications Award for About What We Lost: 20 Writers on Marriage, Healing, and Hope (Plume 2007). Her follow-up is a memoir/handbook chronicling how yoga philosophy helped her lose 40 pounds, keep the weight off for seven years and overcome a lifelong struggle with depression, enLIGHTened: How I lost 40 Pounds with a Yoga Mat, Fresh Pineapples, and a Beagle Pointer (Skyhorse $24.95). "Having lived in Los Angeles," she says, "I couldn't help but run into yogis who have done, and loved, The Master Cleanse—a fasting regime involving maple syrup, cayenne pepper, and fresh lemon juice..." 978-1-931235-40-5

D is for Dauncey

Trevor Carolan

As president of the B.C. Sustainable Energy Association, Guy Dauncey describes steps being taken around the world to address climate change, showing how it is possible to reduce our carbon footprint to almost zero by 2040, in The Climate Challenge: 101 Solutions to Global Warming (New Society $24.95), due in November.

E is for Evanoff

Maggi Feehan

Maggi Feehan travelled to India, England and Ireland to research her debut novel The Serpent's Veil (Thistledown $18.95) about two independent-minded women who meet in a London hospital near the end of the 19th century. With flashbacks and dreams we learn the adventures of Constance Stubbington and Ani Maguire over three continents—from the bogs of Ireland, to the streets of Victoria, B.C., through the Raj lands of India, and to the scary grimy world of east London's expression-era Alberta to the tops of the Rockies.

F is for Harvey

Al Harvey

With a gargantuan photo archive consisting of almost half a million images, veteran photographer and avid outdoorsman Al Harvey, born in Vancouver in 1944, has easily provided the stunning photos for the souvenir album Portrait of British Columbia (Heritage $16.95).

G is for Gross

Jessica Berger Gross


H is for Harvey

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I is for Isumataq

Ken Kirkby

Born in England, raised in Portugal, Ken Kirkby was transformed as an artist when he lived off the land with the Inuit for four years. Goody Niosi's Ken Kirkby: A Painter's Quest for Canada (Libros $27.95) traces Kirkby's evolution and his successful, ten-year-long completion of his masterwork Isumataq, unveiled as a 25-foot model in Parliament in 1992. The original is 152' long and 12' high. Isumataq is an Inuit word meaning, "An object in the presence of which wisdom might show itself," and refers to the man-like monuments of stone-called iñukjuut that Inuit have erected as guides and markers of good hunting and fishing.

continued on page 6

continued on page 6
Humourist Susan Juby has a serious book about teenage addictions, due in the spring. “My family seems to specialize in people who enjoy drinking,” she says. “And taking drugs. In such families, there is usually one person who stands out as particularly gifted in the field. When I was a teenager, that person was me. It was the star, Alec Baldwin, if you will. I started drinking seriously when I was thirteen, smoking pot with a vengeance at fourteen and getting into cocaine at sixteen. By the time I was twenty I was done. Nice Recovery (Viking $20) is the story of how I slipped so far off course, how I got back on track and, most importantly, what it’s like to come of age as a sober young person.”

Pender Harbour poet and essayist Teresa Kishkan has won the inaugural Readers’ Choice Award presented at the Banff Centre for her writing from Phantom Limb (Thistledown $15.95), chosen from a list of nine nominated titles from the past two years. The new prize is the brainchild of the Creative Nonfiction Collective, a new national organization.

The Canadian Historical Association’s 2009 Clio Prize for British Columbia was granted to Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations (UBC Press) by John Sutton Lutz.

Former Banyen Books employee Kay McCracken lived on a commune in the Kootenays and has been in love more times than she cares to remember. In 1993, she moved to Salmon Arm from Vancouver and decided to open a book store called Reflections, choosing the name from the title of a book on her father’s shelf by Carl Jung. Her memoir A Raven in My Heart: Reflections of a Bookseller (Gracepoint Collective $27.95) was launched in Salmon Arm at the SAGA Public Art Gallery in June.

Wayne Norton’s interest in women’s ice hockey was sparked by childhood visits to his grandparents in Fernie. The Kootenays were the geographic heart of women’s hockey in Western Canada (Ronsdale $21.95). The most famous women’s hockey team was the Vancouver Amazons. Top female teams from Alberta are also profiled.

He’s baaaack. To coincide with the Winter Games, Michael Slade (aka lawyer Jay Clarke) has fashioned a five-ring circus of 2010 mayhem and murder for everyone stuck on the Sea to Sky Highway. In his latest corpse-filled thriller, Red Snow (Penguin $24), mercenaries isolate Whistler Mountain, putting the Olympics in jeopardy, as Slade slits his psycho-villain Mephisto against the RCMP’s Special X squad, enabling publicists to gleefully declare, Let The Games Begin.

Half-Italian and originally named Parsonage, soon-to-retire BCTV anchorman Tony Parsons, age 70, grew up in small-town Ontario where his alcoholic father left his mother to raise her six children. Married three times with no children, Parsons is an obsessive golfer who has himself battled the bottle. He is devoted to his canine pal, Jack, a Maltese cross who sleeps at his feet during newscasts. His memoir is A Life in the News (Harbour $32.95).

The 22nd Annual Vancouver International Writers & Readers Festival takes place October 18-25.
Based on documents released through the Access to Information Act, as well as interviews with gay, lesbian and civil servants, Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile: The Canadian War on Queers. National Security as Sexual Regulation (UBC Press $85) is a 560-page investigation of a national security campaign that was undertaken by the state to harass and restrict the freedom of homosexuals in Canada from the 1950s to the late 1990s.

Joe M. Ruggier of Richmond (formerly of Malta) has self-published his Collected Poems and Prose 1972-2009 ($50 jmbooks@hotmail.com), an eclectic, 550-page mix of religious poetry, criticism and prose poems heavily influenced by Mediterranean Catholic devotion.

Amrita Sondhi, author of The Modern Ayurvedic Cookbook (Ar- senal $26.95), is hosting a new television program on The Body Mind and Spirit network in Canada that debuted in July. The Ayurvedic Way is a thirteen-episode series that introduces viewers to Ayurveda's holistic approach to health and wellness, demonstrating an array of recipes and exercises that can help to promote weight loss, combat stress and anxiety, and foster a great sense of well-being.

Sequential Nautical Research Society for best biography, At the Far Reaches of Empire: The Life of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra. The resultant biography, At the Far Reaches of Empire: The Life of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra (UBC Press $85), has received the Keith Matthews Award from the Canadian Nautical Research Society for best book on a Canadian nautical subject in 2009. It's the first in-depth career profile, in English, of the pre-eminent Spanish sea captain in the Pacific Northwest prior to 1800.

Juanita Rose Violini ran murder mystery events in Vancouver for eighteen years, leading her to produce a pop-up series of history's mysteries and unexplained events, Almanac of the Infamous, The Incredible and The Ignored (Red Wheel $19.95). This self-illustrated trivia and reference work covers the gamut from Peking Man to UFOs.

Vivian Yawnghwe was a Peruvian-born Canadian books with the likes of Douglas & McIntyre for almost 30 years, leading her to produce a potpourri of short biographies as well as translations of select poems into French, Thai, Bulgarian and Tahlitan.

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas has won a gold medal in the Storyteller of the Year Award category of the US-based Independent Publisher Awards for Flights of the Hummingbird: A Parable for the Environment (D&M). His forthcoming graphic novel Red: A Haida Manga (D&M $28.95) is a full-colour graphic novel about Red, a leader so blinded by revenge that he leads his community to the brink of war and destruction.

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Dedicated to children around the world who don't have enough to eat, Emilie Smith: Viva Zapata (Tradewind $16.95) is a fanciful tale about how Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata vowed to address poverty as a boy after meeting bandits who had stolen his black horse named Sombra. Smith befriended her co-writer Margarita Benecio Tejada in a Mexican village one day's horseback ride from Emiliano Zapata's home. Art by Stefan Czernecki.

As an editor of The Malahat Review, Derk Wynand has translated contemporary German poetry for decades. Glass Voices Lasinaanet (Buschek $17.50) is his second translation of Dorothea Grunzweig, a German poet now living in Finland. We encounter snowsage, mercycfield, prizesobbing and summernated. According to our reviewer Hannah Main-van der Kemp, "Wynand's nervy compound words open up new possibilities of meaning." (985155514434)

Xerography is a literary journal co-founded by Onjana Yawnghwe who also operates a micro press for hand-made publications called Fish Magic Press. Born in Chiang Mai, Thailand, she grew up in Vancouver and now lives in Burnaby. Featuring work by Yawnghwe and Daniela Elza, Peter Morin and Al Rempel, 4 poets (Mother Tongue $18.95) is the first volume in a proposed series to highlight emerging poets. It includes poetry drafts, interviews, author photographs, poems and short biographies as well as translations of select poems into French, Thai, Bulgarian and Tahlitan.

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Tony Hiss, author of The Experience of Place
US/Can $26.95

The Climate Challenge
101 Solutions to Global Warming
Guy Dauncey
A comprehensive guide to the world's best climate solutions
US/Can $24.95
To celebrate the centennial of Captain John T. Walbran's groundbreaking work on coastal names of B.C., Sechelt-based Andrew Scott has produced a 650-page lighthouse of a book, Raincoast Place Names: A Complete Reference for Coastal British Columbia (Harbour $49.75), destined to stand tall for decades.

Selma Park is named for the Selma, a pleasure-pleasure turned coastal steamer. Its former owner, Sir Henry Paget, held mad parties aboard, some of which featured excessive behaviour by the likes of Prince Edward and actress Lily Langtry. Renamed Chausna, the vessel became a run-runner and then disappeared in 1931, along with its crew of 11, en route from Hong Kong to Macao.

The Union steamship Cutch, another former private yacht, was built for an Indian prince, the Maharaja of Cutch. It ran onto this rock now called Cutch Rock in 1899 and ended its days as a gunboat for the Colombian navy.

The name Klin Bay has nothing to do with klinis. It's a misspelling. The feature commemorates US artist Wilfred Kihn, who specialized in documenting First Nation cultures and travelled up the Skeena River in 1924 to sketch Gitksan poles and carvings near Hazelton.

There are lots more such errors enshrined on the maritime charts. South of Calvert Island, it's easy to run aground of Calvert Island, it's easy to run aground on Pearl Rocks. Early fur trader James Hanna called them, with good reason, the Peril Rocks. Peril somehow got changed to Pearl on Captain Vancouver's chart.

Alert Bay is named for HMS Alert, which spent seven years patrolling the B.C. coast in the 1850s and 60s. It went on to lead a famous British mission to the high Arctic, chart Magellan Strait, help rescue the lost polar expedition of Adolphus Giculty, survey Hudson Bay and supply the lighthouses of Nova Scotia before being broken up in 1894.

Lucy McNeill, daughter of Hudson Bay Company official William McNeill and his first wife, Mathilda, a Kaigani Haida chief, was a "miraculously unfettered Victorian female," according to B.C. memoirist Helen Meilleur. "She was so adaptable that she could occupy the VIP cabin aboard the Labouchere... and then set off in a canoe for weeks of weather-exposed travel to Indian villages." That's how the Lucy Islands got their name.

Similarly, Gillen Harbour is named for William Gillen, a Halfax fisherman, who ran Banfield's lifeboat station, skippered halibut vessels off Haida Gwaii and took the legendary St Roch on its first voyage to the Arctic. Gillen became an Arctic specialist, running supply ships for the Hudson's Bay Co, before mysteriously drowning in Vancouver Harbour in 1930.
We have become a community of prophets,” writes the Downtown Eastside poet, “rebuking the system and speaking hope and possibility into situations of apparent impossibility.”

Along with City of Vancouver’s Drug Policy Coordinator Donald MacPherson and UVic academic Susan Boyd—who lost her sister Diana to a drug overdose—Osborn has documented the social justice movement that culminated in the opening of North America’s first supervised drug injection site in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES).

As a landmark celebration of collective activism and resistance, the trio’s acerbically titled Raise Shit! Social Action Saving Lives (Fernwood $26.95) is a sophisticated history of despair and courage, commitment and change. It is also an important contribution to the serious literature on drug prohibition and an inspiring story of how marginalized citizens have refused to let their friends’ deaths be rendered invisible.

“Our story is unique,” say the trio. “It is told from the vantage point of drug users, those most affected by drug policy.”

At its outset, this montage of photos, news stories, poems by Osborn, MP Libby Davies’ letters and journal entries does not fail to note: “From the early 1980s, poor women, many Aboriginal, associated with the DTES, went missing. Twenty years passed before one man was charged with the murders of 26 of the missing women; however, later he was convicted of six counts of second degree murder. The investigation is ongoing, and poor women remain vulnerable to male violence.”

The DTES made headlines around the world in 1977 when a public health emergency was declared in response to the growing rates of HIV, hepatitis C and overdose deaths among drug users in the area.

The last time we checked, raising hell was not an official Olympic event, so as 2010 draws nearer, it will be interesting to watch how critical DTES voices will be raised.

Earlier this year anti-Olympics author Chris Shaw was hassled by the RCMP, requesting information of protest plans.

Bud Osborn has been the unofficial archivist of Canada’s poorest neighbourhood.

“We have become a community of prophets,” writes the Downtown Eastside poet, “rebuking the system and speaking hope and possibility into situations of apparent impossibility.”

Unnamed Downtown Eastside resident erects a cross in memory of those dead from overdoses.
CIRQUE DU FARRANT

M.A.C. Farrant is a trapeze artist of the imagination, swinging over the existential void, says reviewer Sheila Munro.

A self-proclaimed “archaeologist of the absurd,” M.A.C. (Marion) Farrant of Sidney is perhaps Canada’s most ascerbic and intelligent humourist. Farrant’s stories are not fiction in any conventional sense. Don’t expect to find much character development, or conflict, or plot (in other words, realism) on her pages.

Down the Road to Eternity: New and Selected Stories is a fantastic trip through twenty years of metaphorical and metaphysical imaginings.

Most of the stories are short, some no longer than a page. Other selections are essays, vignettes, stream-of-consciousness musings and internal monologues. Throughout it is the author’s wild imagination, her willingness to break the rules, that is on display, that creates the fireworks. It seems Farrant can (and does) write convincingly on just about any subject, finding humour (and pathos) in the most unlikely places.

Where else would you find a conversation between Barbie and her younger sister Skipper, a funeral for a budgie who has committed suicide, or a man serving as material for his wife’s fiction who lives in a cage?

Farrant’s stories can be wickedly funny, but they are rarely clever for the sake of being clever (okay the description of the nativity scene made out of luncheon meat may be an exception). Generally, though, there is a seriousness, an awareness of uncomfortable truths anchoring the metaphorical flights, and of course this is what the absurd is all about: finding a way to talk about things we can’t talk about any other way.

Farrant is a trapeze artist of the imagination, swinging over the existential void.

We meet a hermit who digs himself a trench as a bulwark against a postmodern age, a man suffering from EDT (end times trauma), street poets facing extinction, and a husband who won’t get off the couch until the polar ice cap stops melting.

The selections from Farrant’s earliest collection, Sick Pigeon, though still fanciful, read more like conventional stories than her later ones, with their tales of the lonely and the disposessed.

One story is about a nineteen-year-old welfare mother with seventeen cats who barricades the door against the social workers. They are always asking, “How does it feel, Sybilla, to be on welfare? Oh terrible, No, really Sybilla, how does it really make you feel?”

In her second collection, Raw Material, Farrant unleashes her genius for the absurd. Her writing becomes more daring, more zany. In The Comma Threat, a woman is giving away commas. I gave some to my aunt to decorate her curtains, she flung handfuls of them against the drapes hoping for a Jackson Pollock effect.

When all the commas are gone, the piece turns into one long run-on sentence: Bright Gymnastics of Fun is an absurd riff on the people who make laugh tracks. Who are these people? Who pays them? Without them, how would we know what is funny?

One of the funniest stories, The Heist/Plan Wellness Retreat, spoofs the pseudo-profundity of New Age beliefs. The characters include a couple who consult a book called Instant Feng Shui. They decide they must bomb their house to get rid of bad karma.

Farrant frequently invokes the names of the great masters of literature and art, mussing on the works of Blake, Borges, Nabokov, Chekov, and Georgia O’Keeffe, among others. Sometimes she writes stories about actual writers, one involves eating bears with Leonard Cohen and another recounts Dorothy Parker’s rounds of cocktail parties at the Algonquin Hotel.

My favorite of the stories in this vein is Alice & Stein, a mini-biography of the literary icon Gertrude Stein and her life partner Alice B. Toklas. Stein, who is busy “building platforms” for herself from which to make her pronouncements on art, is juxtaposed with her amanuensis (Alice) who sweeps floors and types manuscripts, but nonetheless manages to have her own “white wine with breakfast” period.

The reader is left wondering whose life has been better, the one who creates, or the lover who loves.

The selections from the most recent work, North Pole, tend to be more philosophical as the mature artist contemplates the diminishing days, struggles to define what writing should be, and considers the surreal prospect of the nursing home.

But shot through the darkness are explosions of light: small epiphanies, unexpected revelations, quiet affirmations.

“There are times when the experience of living in this world is rapturous. And there are times when it curls us crying in our beds. Between these extremes we tell each other what we know...”

✫ A new collection of Farrant’s personal essays on family life, The Secret Lives of Litter Bugs (Key Porter Books $17.95) was also published earlier this year. These complement her coming-of-age memoir, My Turquoise Years, published in 2004.

Sheila Munro is a freelance writer in Powell River.
GREAT SCOT, GOOD KNIGHT

Robert the Bruce meets the Templar Order in Jack Whyte’s trilogy clincher

BY CHERIE THIESEN

The Knights Templar was a union of fighting monks, founded by Hugues de Payens in 1118, ostensibly with the aim of protecting Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land. But it’s quite possible its agenda also included the recovery of treasures stored beneath the ruined Temple of Solomon by fleeing Jews after the Roman siege of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD.

These were not your everyday trinkets and treasures. We’re talking about the Holy Land’s famous treasures and trinkets, and its treasures and trinkets. The Temple of Solomon’s Rosslyn Chapel seems to depict certain Templar rituals. Jack Whyte’s Knights of the Black and White, released in August 2006, and Standard of Honor, released one year later, have chronicled the Templar origins through its founder, Hugues de Payens, and the ongoing Crusade adventures of three members of the St. Clair family.

Those who have read the first two books will be eager for this final novel.

In Book Three, Sir William St. Clair has a lot on his shoulders. France’s greedy and devilous King Philippe IV has pounced on the Templar, seized its assets, and imprisoned its knights. Grand Master Jacques De Molay has been snatched and put on trial at the mercy of the Inquisition. After more than two hundred years of prosperity and service to church, king and country, the Order of the Temple of Solomon is about to come to an end.

Not all is lost, however. St. Clair, alerted by De Molay, has managed to spirit away a large fleet based at La Rochelle, taking the Temple’s famous treasures with him, along with a thousand knights.

In Order of Chaos, Sir William St. Clair and his knights manage to overcome enormous obstacles and to thrive in their exile, forming close relationships with the Scottish king, Robert the Bruce, and his close friend, Sir James Douglas. Both the king and Knight Templar are on shaky ground.

Robert the Bruce must outsmart the British and their supporters from his lands. His communications from the church for a perceived murder in Dunfermline before the high altar has not helped matters.

Sir William must keep order and morale high within his ranks, conceal their true identity, and face an unknown future.

In spite of the ultimate death of the Templar’s last Grand Master, who is burnt at the stake, and the subsequent realization that the order is finished, and can never again return home, optimism lingers.

There is a cumulative battle in full Knights Templar regalia, during which our heroes attempt to defeat British invaders in the face of overwhelming odds. We hope that St. Clair will be able to sail off to a distant land called Merica with his ladylove, the feisty widow, Lady Jessica Randolph.

This is a meaty book, full of details you wouldn’t expect to find in an adventure so action-packed: what the knights wore, every layer down to their skin, for example, and how ladies of the period prepared their makeup and hair.

Several pages are devoted to Sir William’s solitary bathing in the sea and his convoluted preparations for drying himself. I’d rather the pages were spent in bringing me up to speed on Tam, Sir William’s invaluable aide and the most intriguing character in the book. After such a strong entrance, he resurfaces only occasionally.

Like a Greek tragedy, much happens in-between the chapters, often the really exciting stuff, like the decisive Battle of Bannockburn. (In 1314, the Battle of Bannockburn was won when a Templar force led by Sir William St. Clair came to Robert the Bruce’s aid; and thereafter Scotland remained an independent kingdom for 289 years.) There is also the revelation of the origins of the bat-tered ship William spies following his soltary swim. All of it is learned second-hand, in the Greek style.

But, to be fair, ’showing’ might have made this 600-pager even weightier, and how much action can a reader withstand?

Word is that this indefatigable Kelovena author has another trilogy underway, to be called The Guardians of Scotland, set in the 14th century during the Scottish Wars of Independence. The Templars have made their fictional exit with Order of Chaos, but we can look forward to seeing more of Robert the Bruce and James Douglas.

Cherie Thiesen reviews fiction from Pender Island.

Jack Whyte (above) and Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland.
Ian Weir’s pugilistic parable about a preacher who wants to KO the Devil would be a perfect follow-up vehicle for Mickey Rourke’s The Wrestler

By Cherie Thiessen

Daniel O’Thunder by Ian Weir (Douglas & McIntire $29.95)

aced with blood, thun-
der, sex, murder, rape, mayhem and miracles, Ian Weir’s first novel is about good versus evil. It’s the vibrant story of a has-been boxer named Daniel O’Thunder who makes a Lazarus-like comeback to fight for Christ.

Rocky Balboa goes to Dickensian London.

O’Thunder who makes a punch-up with Lucifer himself. As the chief adversary in this Book of Daniel, the Devil is more of a presence than a person, a chimera rather than a character, but his influence is continuous and very real to the hero.

Reverend Jack Beresford, the most-heard narrator, recalls when he himself was a preacher in Cornwall in 1849. By 1851-52, when the bulk of this tale takes place, the not-so-reverend Jack has become Jack Harrington. God helps him in both endeavours.

He claims the whole story really can be traced back to Biblical times when, for forty days and nights, the son of God spent some time in the desert with that tempter, the Devil. As Milton has already made clear in Paradise Lost, all sensitive Satan ever really wanted was to be God’s special companion, but he was pushed away, and we all know the results of that.

But every good screenwriter knows a good protagonist requires a formidable antagonist, so Weir pulls no punches in that department. O’Thunder hankers for a punch-up with Lucifer himself.

From multiple narrators we learn O’Thunder is a battered one-time boxer, an army deserter and a reformed drunk. When he’s not preaching or consoling his mission of fallen souls, he fights for Christ with the gift of a golden voice and a fist like a thunderbolt. God helps him in both endeavours.

Fighting with fists has been a sport ever since the early Romans, and the Brits raised it to a national pastime in the 19th century when illegal bare-knuckle bouts were usually ignored by authorities unless a competitor was killed. When he’s not preaching or consoling his mission of fallen souls, he fights for Christ with the gift of a golden voice and a fist like a thunderbolt.

There are many types of fisticuffs. O’Thunder’s charisma comes from his willingness to fight for Christ with his fists. In the first chapter, Jack writes, “...to tell my story we must begin where it all began to go wrong.” What reader can resist reading about all the things that have gone wrong in someone’s life?

Son of B.C. author Joan Weir, Ian Weir has written more than 100 television episodes, several radio plays, and received two Gemini awards, a Jesse, and a Writers Guild of Canada Screenwriting Award for his labours. He was also a writer and executive producer of the CBC series, Dragon Boys.

So soon enough you can relax, knowing he’s going to hook you, reel you in, let you run, then release you, only to throw some juicy bits over the other side of the boat to tempt you back.

Although the thinking in this novel is modern; the scope of the tale is Dickensian. How divine is O’Thunder? Can he really perform miracles? Will he get a chance to fight the Devil, if in fact the Devil exists?

Is Lord Sculthrope the Devil, and if he is, what does that make Nell? And who has been murdering those street women (prior to the days of Jack the Ripper)?

In addition to knowing the importance of jumping into the story at the height of the action, Weir also knows how to create a strong sense of place and how to weave a story that shows instead of tells.

While crafting a rollicking tale with a payoff, Weir adds research to match his wit. Several of the mid-19th-century pugilists in the novel were actual boxers such as Tom Cribb and the Tipton Slasher.

Pungent, repelling, frequently nauseating—one smells fishy—

Sights of low-life London in the 1850s come through shudderingly strong.

The desolate cold of Barkerville’s northern B.C. winter in the final part of the novel, when (or if) O’Thunder battles with the Devil, is also chillingly evoked. Yes, it’s movie material. If Mickey Rourke’s agent is looking for a follow-up vehicle to Rourke’s Oscar-nominated performance in The Wrestler, Weir’s rollicking morality tale could easily be retitled The Boxer.

This is one of those novels that can be re-read. At the very least, go back to that first chapter. You can see how everything has been neatly trundled together and how things apparently random all make sense.

978-1-55365-435-3

Cherie Thiessen reviews fiction from Pender Island.
According to Don Sawyer, last year only 45.7 percent of Americans read literature—defined as novels, short stories or poetry. This is a 10 percent decline since 1982, a loss of 20 million readers, largely due to the introduction of home computers. Here he looks at how electronic media is also affecting our children—whose IQs are collectively dropping.

More than 40 years ago, Canadian media guru and philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who coined the term “global village,” saw, with astonishing prescience, how the move from print to electronic media was having, and would continue to have, a profound impact on every aspect of our lives.

The introduction of new communication technologies, McLuhan said, is not a moral issue, good or bad, but one that carries great dangers because of our inability to understand them: “There can only be disaster arising from unawareness of the causalities and effects inherent in our technologies.”

To say that we are living in a rapidly changing world may be the biggest understatement in human history. The internet has only been generally accessible to the public for about ten years. In 2004, 71 percent of Canadian households owned a computer, nearly twice as many as in 1998. In 2009, more people reported accessing news via the internet than a newspaper.

While the full social effects of this breathtakingly rapid move to electronic media may not be fully recognizable, it is reasonable to expect to see the outcomes first, and most dramatically, in those most immersed in these new technologies, our children. And while the jury is still out, the results are unsettling.

For the first time in a century, children’s IQ scores are dropping. A 2008 British study indicates that for those in the upper half of the intelligence scale, average IQ scores were six points lower than 28 years ago.

A study commissioned by Lloyds of London showed that the average attention span had fallen to just 5 minutes, down from 9 minutes 10 years ago, with youth showing the most dramatic declines.

There are indications that increasing use of computer games may result in neurological changes resulting from constant downsizing to primitive fight or flight responses built into most games. These could habituate the brain to a need for extreme experience or even chronically affect blood pressure and anxiety.

The overuse of computers during children’s early development may also cause the prefrontal cortex (which regulates emotion, complex thought, and problem solving) to become idle resulting in a lazy or underdeveloped capacity for critical thinking and emotional empathy.

Some studies indicate that the vocabulary of the typical American teen of today is less than half the size of the vocabulary of a teenager in the 1950s, representing not merely a decline in numbers of words but in the capacity to think. In an American survey, teenagers were able to recognize over 1,000 corporate logos but fewer than 10 plants and animals native to their locality.

Don Sawyer of Salmon Arm is the former director of Okanagan College’s International Development Centre. His new children’s book The Lunch Bag Chronicles (Platypus Publishing) grew out of his parenting days. “For years I drew pictures attached to jokes on my daughters’ lunch bags. They liked them so much, they brought them home, and eventually I had collected over 1,000 bags. We have incorporated 80 or so, along with a light narrative, into the finished ms.”

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To honour Alice Munro’s acceptance of the $120,000 Man Booker International Prize in June—a awarded for a body of work that has contributed to fiction on the world stage—a tribute to Alice Munro will open the 22nd Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival on October 18. Alice Munro is scheduled to attend.

In Dublin, Alice Munro reads to her audience at Trinity College, having accepted the Man Booker International Prize.
A LITTLE DISTILLERY WILL GO A LONG WAY

In Ashok Mathur’s audacious second novel, the “massage” is the medium according to reviewer John Moore.

Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, and an apt overture for a work whose subject is the struggle of a soul to get itself born.

The year is 1895, the place is central India and the boy-child Jamshed, born into the Parsi minority of Indians who follow the teachings of Zoroaster, is not the narrator of his own story. That role belongs to Sunny, a future grandchild of indeterminate sex, whose spirit is able to drop in on Jamshed. His spirit is uncomplainingly in a schoolroom under a ceiling fan whirling like a karmic wheel to endure a parent-teacher conference about their ‘difficult’ child becomes a recurring drama that links the generations.

Within India’s close-knit Parsi communities, Jamshed’s reputation for being a bit ‘odd’ always precedes him, yet it works to his advantage as well, giving him a heightened sense of his own divided nature and of the opportunities presented by India’s emergence from colonial servitude and its accelerated entry into the ‘real’ world.

Visitations by a spirit no one can see and only he can hear have a disruptive effect on the life of young Jamshed. He becomes famous in his village for ‘going right,’ a posture of attention he adopts when he’s listening to Sunny, which others, especially teachers, interpret as a kind of idiotic trance, a problem behavior.

The image of parents sitting uncomfortably in a schoolroom under a ceiling fan whirling like a karmic wheel to endure a parent-teacher conference about their ‘difficult’ child becomes a recurring drama that links the generations.

As the son of a dastur, a Parsi priest, by tradition he ought to follow in his father’s footsteps, yet he is also drawn to the world so desperately needed. Though he willingly fulfills his feudal obligations and becomes a dastur, he also becomes the successful manager of the little distillery of the tribe, where he literally blends the religious and secular elements of life in the recipe for a marvelous rum called Asa, (Truth), which induces a state of enlightenment in the drinker. (For the record, a friend of mine brought me some whisky from his home town, Chandigarh, which had a remarkably similar effect.)

Over the course of his life, Jamshed develops into the kind of Renaissance ordinary man the world so desperately needs.

The presence of Sunny in his life doesn’t give him foreknowledge, since Sunny’s future ‘existence’ seems as uncertain at times as his or her presence is scientifically unverifiable. What it does give Jamshed is a heightened sense of the mission of each human being; to be a good person and to engender and nurture future generations of good people.

Jamshed is capable of great passion. He persuades his Parvin, a customer in the shop where he works, to marry him by very politely threatening to kill himself if she refuses. His belief in the future represented by Sunny also teaches him the patience to endure the deaths of two sons in infancy without undue bitterness.

It is Jamshed and Parvin’s only surviving child, the precociously bright daughter Piroja, on whom responsibility for Sunny’s existence ultimately falls. She embodies the spirit of the newly independent India, reaching out for freedom and equality while burdened with the weight of history and tradition. Excluded from the latter by becoming a doctor, reluctantly she settles for becoming a nurse, but breaks tradition by marrying Pradeep, a Hindu doctor, after her affair with a Muslim intern founders on the rocks of his refusal to challenge his family’s objection to a ‘mixed’ marriage.

Together, Piroja and Pradeep tend to the victims of the terrible violence that accompanies the post-Independence partition of India and Pakistan. Together they make the difficult decision to leave India, first for England, then Canada, in search of a better place to raise a family. Together, in spite of working long hours, often on opposite shifts, and having to re-qualify professionally each time they move, they make their ‘mixed’ marriage work.

The job isn’t made any easier by Sunny’s ability to make trans-generational social calls and he isn’t the only spirit Piroja has to contend with. The truculent ghost of her mother, Parvin, keeps popping in to suggest abet ways she might rid herself of her ‘inappropriate’ husband.

Pradeep and Piroja’s daughter, the suggestively named Sunny, grows up to become an international recording star of bhanga, the catchy fusion of traditional Punjabi music with contemporary rock that became India’s major contribution to the explosive popularity of multi-cultural ‘world music’ during the late 80s.

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Richards on Richards

“When you open your heart, you don’t always know what will come out.”

Once the book was finished, I was Cinderella. I didn’t have all the pain you hear about writers going through. Once I got down and did it—once I had finished book in my hand—it all came together in amazing}

mass political movements turns everyone into a potential victim or victimizer.

By telling the story of India’s twentieth century through the lives of one family, Mathur reminds us that politicians merely make noise; it is the millions of ‘little people’ who make history and who have to make the choice between good or ill for mankind.

Ashok Mathur teaches at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, where he is the Director of the Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada.

Not surprisingly, Mathur is deeply involved in worldwide ‘reconciliation’ projects which seek to maximize the effect of the arts to bridge racial and cultural differences so often played on by cynical politicians to create fear and distrust. His previous novel, The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar (Arsenal Pulp Press), was a Commonwealth Writers Prize finalist.

Last words: having recently read Arvind Adiga’s Booker Prize-winning novel, The White Tiger, I have to say that while it’s an amusing satire of contemporary Indian life, in my opinion, A Little Distillery in Nowgong is both better written and a more perceptual book.

That B.C. publishers continue to publish fiction of this calibre, when the brutal economics of the trade and the hostility of government suggest they’d all be better off just publishing cookbooks and self-help manuals, is something we should all be grateful for.

John Moore writes from Pemberton.

Death was in the Picture by Linda L. Richards

Richard Steffens (Miami University/Thomas Dunne Books $27.95)

A classic noir mystery set in the Depression, Linda L. Richards’ Death was the Other Woman introduced her heroine Kitty Pangborn, an ex-debutante whose father killed himself on the eve of the stock market crash of 1929. Having to make a living for herself for the first time in her life, Kitty took a job as a secretary for a hard-drinking gumshoe named Dexter Theroux.

Our unlikely Girl Friday now mixes with Hollywood glitz in the second Kitty Pangborn novel, Death was in the Picture. This time Dexter has been asked to help clear the name of leading man Laird Wyndham, the last person to be seen with a young starlet who has fallen from the big screen to the big house. Wyndham’s a dreamboat, but that isn’t the only thing that has Kitty hot under the collar. Her boss has already signed a client for this case—someone who wants to prove Wyndham is guilty.

Death was in the Picture is Richards’ fifth novel. “When you open your mind, when you open your heart, you don’t always know what will come out,” Richards says. “You can think you see the story, what kind of box it will be; what kind of magic it will hold. Then when you build the box, sometimes it will hold a different type of magic entirely.”

I’m a decent journalist and I’m a good editor but, like a lot of writers, what I’d always wanted to do was write a novel. I made several starts on topics that were important to me, but was never able to ride it through to the end. I know that writing a book is a very different journey for everyone, but for me, the novel form is…well, it’s not that difficult, exactly. But it’s hand. It drains me. It takes exactly everything I’ve got. It took me a while to learn that. And it took me a while to learn how to get to that place of supreme letting go.

So there were all these false starts. Stories that were important to me. They were all too big for me. We asked Richards to reflect further on the writing process, and how she got embroiled in the crime fiction game.

Mathur takes some acrobatic risks in the manner he chooses to tell what is essentially the story of a family making the big move from a traditional parochial village culture to the Global Village.

Using a disenchanted spirit, who exists outside time but still has a ‘personal’ stake in the outcome of the story, is a slick way of getting out of the Omniscient Author/third person narrative bind that can trap a writer into telling too much and breaking the delicate spell of magic realism.

Though the early parts of the story are set amid some of the most traumatic events of a century destined to be characterized by its horrors, like his characters Mathur resists the temptation to rationalize the politics of the modern age.

One of the most poignant episodes in the novel is the description of Piroja and Pradeep working round-the-clock shifts at a hospital during the Partition, the largest and most violent migration of people in recorded history. They both notice that none of the victims, Hindu, Muslim or bystander, understand why these terrible things happened to them.

Like Jamshed, who politely resists the overtures of his best friend to involve him in the politics of Independence, they learn first-hand how the US versus Them psychology of modern...
Patrick Gallagher is a fortysomething Irish bachelor whose only love is his garden in Southlands, a posh neighbourhood on the outskirts of a landowner who provides a cottage and greenhouse on the grounds rent-free in return for his tenant’s botanical expertise.

That expertise is prodigious. Gallagher spends weeks, months and years meticulously cultivating exquisite roses prized by fanciers across the country and beyond. His introductions are renowned equally for the delicacy of their blossoms and the inimitability of their names.

Gallagher christens his gardening creations for certain attributes of his favourite female entertainers—Shania’s Thighs, Pamela’s Panties, Nicole’s Knickers and so forth. He speaks to them with a lover’s affectation while guiding their pollination, in passages that are at once scientific and unabashedly erotic:

“With utmost delicacy he touched Nicole’s exposed anthers with the tip of his little finger and then ever-so-gently rubbed the fingertip against Michelle’s sticky stigmas. ‘Ah,’ he sighed breathily at the sensuous touch that marked the moment of pollen transference.”

He is utterly content with his sliver of fame, his modest home and his verdant laboratory—until his sponsor dies.

The owner’s son wants to develop the property for housing, leaving Gallagher in a panic. Desperate for “dosh,” he agrees to return to Ireland in a panic. Desperate for “dosh,” he agrees to return to Ireland, with expenses paid, plus two weekly Lotto tickets.

But this is neither a comic nor a sentimental portrait of the auld sod. From the moment Gallagher sets foot in Ireland he feels the ghosts that would undo him closing his eyes to the blarney and bonhomie soon succumb to darkness.

Instead of gushing descriptions of the countryside and its many hues of green, there are sharp observations of downtown Dublin, “where tourists swarm like spermatozoa up onto Grafton Street.” There’s a nod to the modernity and wealth (since collapsed) of the “Celtic Tiger” but there are still corners plagued by the cassock and the gun.

Kennedy’s gift of the gab and his Irish heritage provide the perfect stage for his narrative. But there’s a sudden left turn in both plot and voice at the last, in the chapter that explains the title, however opaque. It’s a bit of a head-scratcher, but to say more would give away too much.

By Shane McCune. 9781897142394

Shane McCune writes from Comox where he much prefers Guiness to gardens.
**Douglas Coupland**

*Generation A* by Douglas Coupland (Knopf $32.95)

With honey bees almost extinct, Douglas Coupland’s *Generation A* starts when five people around the world are stung simultaneously. As a deliberate reflection of his famous first book, *Generation X*, Coupland’s slightly futuristic novel takes its title from comments made by Kurt Vonnegut at a Syracuse commemorative ceremony in 1994, “Now you young twerps want a new name for your generation? Probably not, you just want jobs, right? Well, the media do us all such tremendous favors when they call you Generation X, right? Two clicks from the very end of the alphabet. I hereby declare you Generation A, as much at the beginning of a series of astonishing triumphs and failures as Adam and Eve were so long ago.”

*The English Stories* by Cynthia Flood (Biblioasis $16.95)

Cynthia Flood’s *The English Stories* is a suite of twelve linked fictions set in 1950s England, as the Empire shrinks into Commonwealth, following the life of Amanda Ellis, a young Canadian woman who goes with her parents to England “for a year that stretched into two.” At St. Mildred’s girls’ school and in a small residential hotel, various narrators depict colonialism’s weakening and its strong residual hold on English, Canadian, and Irish characters. Several stories in the collection have won prizes and/or have appeared in Best Canadian Stories.

**Rhea Tregebov**

*Rhea Tregebov’s The Knife Sharpener’s Bell* is the story of a girl who leaves Winnipeg at age ten with her parents to escape from the fathering of the North American capitalist economy in the 1930s. They return “home” to Stalinist Odessa, then must flee to Moscow to avoid the approaching Nazi forces in World War II. In the post-war years their family is threatened by anti-Semitism and the repressive totalitarianism of Joseph Stalin.

**About a “semi-functional marriage” and fierce competition among scientists, Leona Gom’s 14th title, *The Exclusion Principle*, is a rare novel about astronomy and astronomers, set in B.C. and on the summit of Mauna Kea, in Hawaii, at the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope.

**More House by Hannah Calder**

More House by Hannah Calder (New Star $17)

Hannah Calder moved to Barcelona, wrote her first novel *More House*, and has since relocated to Vancouver. It’s experimental writing, much concerned with gender. “I was born without a penis,” says the narrator, “... I learned to divide a room into groups—those with penises and those without—at an early age.”

**George Bowering’s collection of ten short stories mostly about the sixties in British Columbia, *The Box*, is introduced by archival photographs and freely mix writing genres that include biography, autobiography, parable, letters and drama.**

*The Exclusion Principle* by Leona Gom (Ottawa Press $18.95)

*The Knife Sharpener’s Bell* by Rhea Tregebov (Coteau $21)

*The Box* by George Bowering (New Star $17)

*The Exclusion Principle* by Leona Gom (Ottawa Press $18.95)

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*The English Stories* by Cynthia Flood (Biblioasis $16.95)
You gotta love a guy who can start a story called ‘Runaway Jill’ with this sentence, and have it be true: “It was 1965, the year pulled rigging for Big Bart Clapperton on the risky eastern slopes of Goatfoot Mountain.”

With an introduction by Mac Parry, who published many of Peter Trower’s stories in Vancouver magazine during that publication’s golden age, *Hellbound on his Trail and Other Stories* is more proof that Trower is one of the few irreplaceable talents in British Columbia writing. Trower’s coastal memoirs in the realm of fiction are unsettlingly from a bygone era, eloquent with a raspy voice.

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**PETE’S FEAT**

Michael Turner

Four X 10 by Michael Turner

Music groups have concept albums, so why not a concept novel? *Four X 10* doesn’t refer only to the standard size of a glossy, promotional photo. It’s about the lives of eight people told over ten events. “No one is known by their names,” he writes, “or their ethnicity but by their relationships to each other… and by their occupations.” The year and the places are also unrevealed. Namelessness and timelessness, in theory, reflects today’s uncertainty and indecision, war and migration, love and loss.

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**Incident at Willow Creek by Dan Hunter**

Garry Thomas Morse

Death in Vancouver by Garry Thomas Morse

Garry Thomas Morse’s stories in *Death in Vancouver* reflect a “transnational, ahistoric cosmopolitanism” as he attempts to rediscover the “theatrical madness” of his mother’s people (the Kwakwaka’wakw) who have become disconnected from the dream-time that existed in everyday lives.

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**Sounding Line by Anne DeGrace**

Nelson librarian and journalist Anne DeGrace has followed her debut novel *Treading Water* with *Sounding Line*, a story based on a reported UFO sighting at Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia, a much-hyped event sometimes referred to as ‘Canada’s Roswell.’

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**Also Received**


Sarah Felix Burns. *Song Over Quiet Lake* (Second Story $13.95) 978-1-997187-67-8

Kat MacVeagh. *The Coat in the Woods* (Orbit $14.95) 978-0-9580850-1-4

Christian Petersen. *Outside the Line* (Rundum $11.95) 978-1-55002-859-1

In 2007, I received a letter from Jane Rule announcing the impending publication of her collection of essays Loving the Difficult.

Ever irreverent, while battling maladies that would lead to her death, Jane noted that she’d fancied a different title for her forthcoming book. In so doing, she gave a nod to her activist sister-in-arms, journalist June Callwood.

“I heard a story about my friend, June … [when she was] taken to hospital, unconscious,” Rule wrote from her home on Galiano Island.

“She woke, looked around and said, ‘Shit! I’m still here.’ I thought it would make a wonderful title for my collection. I said, ‘Shit! I’m still here.’ I thought it would make a wonderful title for my collection.”

Published posthumously, Loving the Difficult has won the 2009 Lambda Literary Award for non-fiction by a gay author.

In her essay “You Be Normal,” Rule wrote from her home on Galiano Island.

“Jane welcomed a wildly diverse community of visitors with Jane. That is to say that we all gladly came. Jane Rule, more than six-feet tall, stood above her peers.”

Her 2009 Lambda Literary Award for Loving the Difficult seems only appropriate.


I was rarely “the only raisin in the cornflake bowl” during visits with Jane. That is to say that Jane welcomed a wildly diverse mix of people into her life.

Modeled by her wit, generosity and in later years, veils of grief, we all gladly came. Jane Rule, more than six-feet tall, stood above her peers.

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33 BC BOOKWORLD AUTUMN 2009

FROM JUNE TO JANE

Why Loving the Difficult is easy to love

BY EVELYN C. WHITE

Loving the Difficult by Jane Rule

Even irreverent, while battling maladies that would lead to her death, Jane noted that she’d fancied a different title for her forthcoming book. In so doing, she gave a nod to her activist sister-in-arms, journalist June Callwood.

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Time Enough for Books

33 BC BOOKWORLD AUTUMN 2009
I Have My Mother’s Eyes begins long before the outbreak of war. As the daughter of a successful businessman, Zosia was always shielded from knowledge of the Holocaust, but when Natek returned to Poland, Zosia’s father dismissed his warnings. Three months after the German bombs fell on Warsaw, Zosia joined Natek in the countryside. There they were married and embarked on a long journey to freedom. Through Natek’s resourcefulness they managed to reach Lithuania, where they obtained visas allowing them to travel across Russia, then sail from Vladivostok to Japan. Natek, Zosia and their child, sixteen-year-old Michiel Mielenicki, were taken to Birkenau, survived a death march, worked in the slave labour camp at Mittenau-Dora in Germany and was finally released from Bergen-Belsen. The emotional cost on both survivors and amanuensis alike is made clear in his memoir, written with John Munro, Biastoky to Birkenau: The Holocaust journey of Michel Mielenicki which provides harrowing first-hand accounts of Birkenau, Buna, Mittenau-Dora and Bergen. Mielenicki’s story ends with a blistering indictment of the callousness of the British liberators, and his discovery on returning to Poland that no Jew was safe there. Born in 1927 in Wasilkow, he moved from his shtetl, or village, and lived in the Catholic Church and its clergy for their efforts in saving Jews. They were well aware of the daily horrors are The British journalist, Anne Karpf, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, criticized the movie for depicting the partisans in combat with the Nazis when, in her opinion, they avoided confrontation and merely tried to stay alive.

The subject of righteous Gentiles is also a contentious one. The debate is dramatized within this series by contrasting opinions of two of the contributors. Leon Kahn, for example, makes a broad indictment of those who did nothing. He believes it is absolutely imperative to mention the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy for their part in the wholesale and unprecedented slaughter of Central European Jewry. They were well aware of the daily horrors were The British journalist, Anne Karpf, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, criticized the movie for depicting the partisans in combat with the Nazis when, in her opinion, they avoided confrontation and merely tried to stay alive.

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Irene Watts has won three Canadian Jewish Book Awards. *Good-Bye Marianne: The Graphic Novel* (Tundra $14.99), illustrated by Kathryn Shoemaker, is her poignant story about the Kindertransport that saved ten thousand Jewish children in Germany prior to the outbreak of World War II.

Watts’ original print version, about an eleven-year-old named Marianne Kohn in 1938, won the Geoffrey Bilsen Award for Historical Fiction and Isaac Frischwasser Memorial Award for Young Adult Fiction.

Rhoda Kaellis gathered the experiences of 15 Holocaust survivors over a period of nine months for the fictional story of 12-year-old Sarah Carozo, the only child of a Jewish family in post-World War II New York City, and Lilly, her Belgian cousin who comes to live with her after her parents have died in a concentration camp. Her book *The Last Enemy* (Arsenal Pulp, 1989) arose after Rabbi Victor Reinstein of the congregation Temple Emanu-El in Victoria suggested recording recollections of the Holocaust in 1987.

Helene Moszkiewicz worked within the Belgian Resistance and maintained three identities, Jewish, Belgian and German, while working for two years as a clerk in Gestapo headquarters in Brussels. The German took control of Belgium when she was 19. “They were so stupid,” she told *The Province* in 1985. “They thought only in caricatures. You would call, ‘but so many Jews escaped, escape, escape,’ working within the Gestapo, hearing screams of SS victims, stealing information to rescue Jews scheduled for transport and killing a Gestapo officer. ‘We heard about the camps from the BBC,’ she recalled, ‘but so many Jews seemed to think it couldn’t happen to them. You know, it could happen again. Jews have to be ready to fight.’”

As a social worker in the psychiatric department of Montreal’s Jewish General Hospital, Fraidie Martz met some of the 1,125 Jewish war orphans whom the Canadian government reluctantly allowed into Canada from 1947 to 1949. Her non-fictional *Open Your Hearts* (Vehicule 1996) recalls how and why these war orphans were brought to Canada. It received the Joseph Open Your Hearts Festival established a film award for Canadian Jewish History in 1996.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1929, Steve Flotz survived the Holocaust and was later reunited with his pre-war love, Eva. They escaped Soviet-occupied Hungary and went to Austria, where they worked in UN refugee camps before immigrating to Canada. They remarried and operated the Ferguson Point Tea House for many years. His *Escape* (Granville Island Publishing 2002) recalls their lives together.

The most important Holocaust author in British Columbia, Rudy Vrba, co-wrote the Vrba-Wetzler Report, alerting the Allies and Jews to the nature of the concentration camps, after he made his remarkable escape from Auschwitz in April of 1944. Vrba lived in Vancouver for more than thirty years until his death in 2006.

Born as Walter Rosenberg in Topolcany, Slovakia, in 1924, he was arrested by the Nazis at age 18, incarcerated at the Majdanek concentration camp, and later (June 1942) transferred to Auschwitz for slave labour.

After his escape from Auschwitz—during which he and Alfred Wetzler hid inside a woodpile for several days while guards and dogs searched for them—he joined a partisan group, adopted the name Rudolf Vrba, and fought against the Nazis until the end of the war with a distinguished record.

Vrba was featured in numerous documentary films, most notably *Shake* by Claude Lanzmann and in the series *Man Alive* by CBC. He also appeared as a witness at several investigations and trials, such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial in 1964.

In Canada he was called upon to provide testimony at the seven-week trial of Ontario’s Ernst Zundel in 1985, when Zundel was found guilty of misleading the public as a Holocaust denier. In 2001 the Czech Republic’s annual One World International Human Rights Film Festival established a film award in his name.

“It is evil to assent to evil actively or passively, as an instrument, as an observer, or as a victim,” Vrba concluded in his memoir *I Cannot Forget* (1965). “Under certain circumstances even ignorance is evil.”

In 1975, Vrba came to the medical faculty at the University of British Columbia as an associate professor of pharmacology, specializing in pharmacology pertaining to the brain.

For more information on Vrba and other authors herein, visit www.abcbookworld.com.
Buddha, Lordy, Look Who's 40
Mixing metaphors and religions, Three Wise Women share their religiosity as Sono Nis enters its fifth decade.

In Wearing my People, Field explores her return to, or rediscovery of Jewishness. Her work is largely narrative. It moves from her New York childhood where Jewishness was something to discard, to Jerusalem and to Alabama where her ancestors settled. The family histories are not told in a linear manner.

Kelly Parsons used silence and a meditation bell to evoke her Buddhist practice. Though it is not unusual for poets to have a private religious practice, it is not common for contemporary poets to celebrate their religious beliefs and perspectives quite so openly in a secular setting.

The publishing arms of religious groups may feature poetry in liturgies and other religious practice, but not to be an easily perceived rationale for the divisions. Many pieces are prose pieces for the divisions. Many pieces are prose pieces for the divisions. Many pieces are prose pieces for the divisions. Many pieces are prose pieces for the divisions.

In Duet, the Christmas story is re-imagined. Like any true (literal and/or metaphorical) good story, retelling it from perspectives other than the conventional one vivifies the story. Though there are some places in the fundamentalist Christian world where this might be considered a desecration, poetry isn’t read much by literalists. Retelling is a way of honouring, a deepening. Joseph speaks as well as the donkey. Even the little town has a voice. The sheep wonder if they are more important than they ever dreamed.

Although these poems assume a conventional theology of the Incarnation and the role of Jesus, his humour and tender- ness are a freshly polished story. Mary speaks, "When I rub my hand in gentle circles over your back to make you bring up wind, / I think of the wind / and it was wind and spirit / All in one word." It takes a skilled poet to bring together baby Jesus’ birthing with the creation story.

At only thirty-three poems, Kelly Parsons’ I Will Ask For Birds is the slimmest of these new titles but not at all slight. A beach poem follows a dog poem. It’s an earth-centered spirituality. There are angel poems but also grand-mother-on-the-nursing-home poems.

Parsons learns to write with a quill that teaches her patience: “a kind of flying / a choreography of the waiting.”

Kelly Parsons died not long after the launch of this book. In her “Tea Meditation,” she writes, “the sound of the village bell enters into all that is / with its shiny brown voice. This cup contains / the jasmine bud / clinging to the vine / before she is picked / and invited to give up / her fragrance.”

There is no universality without particularity. An Anglican cantata for Bethlehem. Lutes from a wandering Jewess. Monastery quail from a practitioner of stillness.

Congratulations to Sono Nis for forty years of publishing (Diane, please continue to accept poetry manuscripts) and for briding these three poets.
Milton Not Lost

Your Literary Visitors issue brings to mind Milton Acorn.

The year was 1967 and we were partying with a group of Israeli university students in their rented Cornwall Avenue bungalow. Suddenly, in the doorway, stood one of the ugliest men I had ever seen. His rugged weather-beaten face looked like it had been dealt by a harsh force of nature from sheer igneous rock. Ragged discoloured teeth, red nosed, a thatch of thick reddish-gray hair, he stood, all six feet of him, inside the doorframe looking at us over, wondering perhaps, if he should join us or not. One look at him was enough. If anybody had genius written all over him with all the world’s eccentric implications, it was Milton Acorn.

He joined us on the floor, drank from a bottle of wine, and we began to talk. I can’t remember the gist of the conversation. The place was noisy with dancing, drinking, laughing. Thank God It’s Friday-nighters. I think the topic was poetry. He might have mentioned Genius, but I’m not sure if I heard it. I can’t remember the rest.

I didn’t know that Milton had a literary reputation in Canada. I hadn’t heard his poetry. I’d only heard him recite some of it on the street as we walked up Trafalgar in Kristolino. Or at Kits Beach, his rugged head on my lap. “You’re a Boogie,” he told me once, looking up into my face with rheumy eyes, “but you’re a nice Boogie.”

Easter Darlington MacDonald

Vancouver

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I am a government librarian, bibliophile and all around book nut working in Washington, D.C. I came across BC BookWorld on the internet and now I am thoroughly obsessed. I am printing out your back issues year by year, relishing reading each and every issue. I just printed all of the 2007, having read 2009 and 2008. What a joy to have them available in PDF!! I am learning so much about Canadian authors, books and so much more. Thank you so much.

Leah Smith
Smithsonian Institution
National Air and Space Museum
Washington, D.C.

Correction: During a performance at the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver in 1979, Allen Ginsberg was accompanied by musician Mike Beddoes, not Gary Cramer. In 1980, Ginsberg performed with guitarist Gary Cramer at Kitsilano High School. Part of that concert was recorded by Lenore Herb and can be found on YouTube.