

Return to conventions popularizes poetry

The Blue Pools of Paradise
by Mick Burrs
Going Places
by Don Kerr
Coteau Books, 1983

review by Gilbert Bouchard

Canadian poetry is finally emerging from the elitist gutter it has been stuck in for the last decade or so.

People don't read poetry any more. The art lost much of its appeal for the majority of Canadians

Two Saskatchewan poets, Don Kerr, and Mick Barrs, have written two collections of poetry (*Going Places* by Kerr, and *The Blue Pools of Paradise* by Burrs) that may do a heck of a lot to once again popularize poetry.

Poetry's popularity problems began in the 50's and 60's when the majority of Canada's poets abandoned the traditional poetical conventions. Masses of strange intellectual blank verse emerged out of our universities and intellectual communities.

After all, someone once said (I forgot who) that blank verse was equivalent to playing tennis without a net.

While the tennis metaphor is a bit weak, the basic idea behind it is sound. Without discipline, poetry is rather pointless:

Now, before anyone jumps on me let me explain what I mean by discipline. Discipline, as far as I'm concerned, can be interchanged with other words like focus, precision, or even intent. A true poet has an idea, feeling, emotion, (whatever) and wants to communicate this emotion, feeling (whatever) to his reader with the quickest, easiest and most precise method possible. After all, brevity is the soul of poetry.

Conventions, be they rhyme, stanzas, line length, rhythm serve to facilitate (and shorten) the communication between reader and poet. These conventions also serve as a means of discipline - a means for the poet to refine, condense, focus and control his ideas and emotions.

However, conventions bind as well as

define. For ever poet who flourished within set confines of rhyme and rhythm there languished a half dozen who were strangled by the limitations of the art. Poetry, like any other art form that becomes too formalized (e.g. the romance or detective novel) ceases to be an art form and becomes an exercise in technical ability. It gets to a point where it doesn't matter if it was shit on paper or honest to God brilliance - if it didn't rhyme it wasn't poetry.

So, during the 50's and 60's a few generations of the world's poets started experimenting with line lengths, sound, and what-have-you. In time, poetry

wasn't a poem. Simple as that.

So, what did the vast majority of poetry readers think of this new poetry? They didn't.

The 80's, mind you, are ushering in a new era in poetry, like everything else. The swing to conservative verse and the return

somebody uncrated it
one morning last October
gosh said the people
looking way up
the prairie turned on end

Or mundane situations like a broken
down car halfway through a vacation:
take the car to the car doctor
it's all broke down
there's water steaming out of the knee hole
and the front flaps
fellow with a green cap
gonna fix us up at the Texaco hospital
for busted cars

Burrs, on the other hand, not only deals with his own personal experiences but also with his family's roots:

The Names Leave the Stones

Daylight. I walk quietly
inside the rusted iron fence
at the end of Kelly Street.
Searchin, I step among
unven rows of marble
inscribed against the wind.

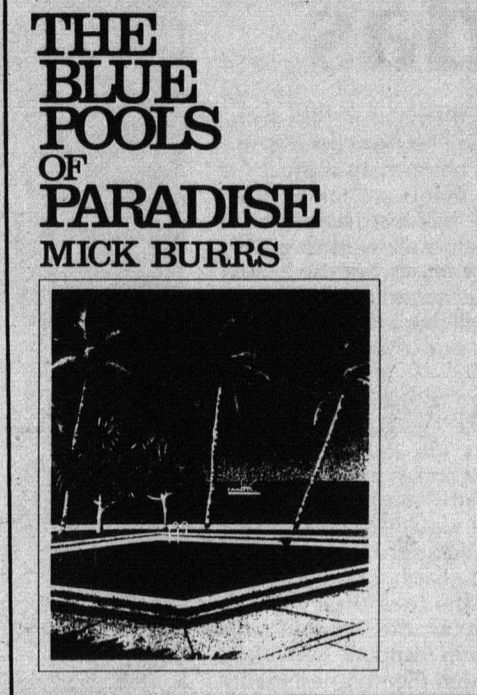
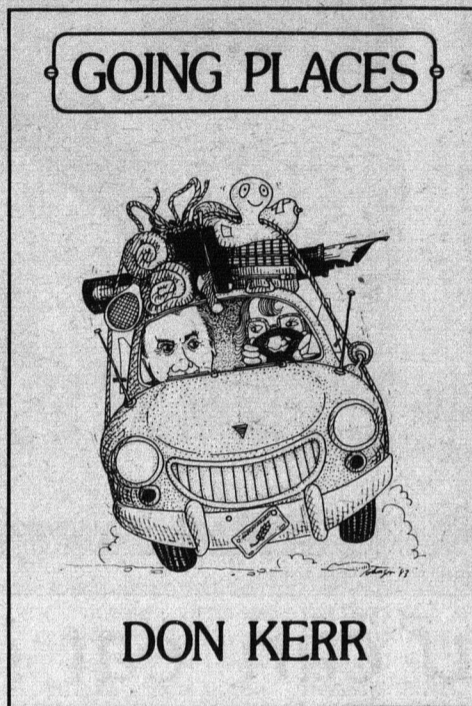
Footsteps on gravel
do not interrupt
my voiceless chanting
of their names:
grandpa Max
grandma Anna
great aunt Sarah
great grandpa Zady.

After every sunset
the names leave the stones
to form a congregation
and wander the flowered paths
in mute hallowed circles.

I still live above ground
in another country
where no relatives reside.
Now I visit this garden
overgrown with marbled names

where not even memories stay rooted
where every fragile blossom
every dropped petal
shines.

All in all, two strong, readable collections.



of discipline and conventions is producing poetry that looks like what people think poetry should look like.

Kerr and Burrs write poetry that at least resembles poetry. They have regular stanza lengths and lines that end where lines should end.

Both poets write in a voice that's easily understandable and with simple images that work on multiple levels - superficial, obvious, and metaphysical.

For example, in Kerr's *Calgary 1978* we get a glimpse of the rapid development of a relatively new western city:
*late afternoon we pulled it
to brand new Calgary*

Notice to All Intercollegiate Rodeo Clubs

The Edmonton Intercollegiate Rodeo Club is pleased to announce their upcoming 1984 spring rodeo.

Place: Panee Memorial Agriplex, Hobbema, Alta.

When: Friday March 16, 1984 at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday March 17, 1984 at 1:00 p.m.

Events as Follows:

MENS EVENTS	ENTRY FEE
Saddle Bronc	20.00
Bareback	20.00
Bull Riding	20.00
Steer Wrestling	20.00
Calf Roping	20.00

LADIES EVENTS	ENTRY FEE
Barrel Racing	20.00
Goat Tying	20.00
Cow Riding	20.00
Steer Undercorating	20.00

MIXED EVENT	ENTRY FEE
Team Roping	20.00

All around awards will be presented for men and ladies. Entries will be taken Wednesday March 7, 1984 and Thursday March 8, 1984 from 7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m., to Aileen Munro at 433-8106. Call back will be Monday March 12, 1984 from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

There will also be a dance on Saturday night March 17, 1984 at Wetaskiwin. If you need any additional information you can call me at the above number.

CJSR

THE ALTERNATIVE

FM 88.5

This Week	Last Week	Weeks On	Album - Artist (Label-Distributor)
1	-	1	The Bobs (Kaleidoscope) (US)
2	-	1	The Flat Earth - Thomas Dolby (Capitol)
3	2	5	Learning to Crawl - Pretenders (Sire-WEA)
4	1	3	Anthem - Black Uhuru (Island) (UK)
5	6	5	Juju Music - King Sunny Ade and His African Beats (Island-WEA)
6	21	2	Mystery Walk - M & M (Current-RCA)
7	13	5	Cold Blooded - Rick James (Gordy-Quality)
8	14	3	Such Winters of Memory - John Surman (ECM-WEA)
9	29	2	Subtle Hints (Stony Plain-RCA)
10	3	5	Magical Ring - Clannad (Tara) (UK)
This Week	Singles and E.P.'s		
1	Sex and Revolution - Facecrime (Dog into Plasma)		
2	Batastrophe - Specimen (Sire-WEA)		
3	Let's Stay Together - Tina Turner (EMI-Capitol)		
4	What's Up - Neo A4 (A4)		
5	New Song - Howard Jones (WEA)		
6	Smiling Song - Voice (Tape)		
7	1984 - Junior Gone Wild (Tape)		
8	Animal Slaves - (Mo Da Mu)		
9	Calling All Girls - Rock Angels (Attic)		
10	Snake Charmer - Jah Wobble-H. Czukay-The Edge (Island-WEA)		

Literary Supplement

Deadline for submissions:
March 16, 1984