

BOOKS

Magic Water
Tom Marshall
The Quarry Press

The most surprising thing about the poems in this collection is that they tend to salvage themselves at exactly the moment when the reader is prepared to give up on them. Marshall has amazing grace under pressure: the poems are very intense, and at times it appears that no amount of juggling with words will be able to sustain the flow of interlocking images until the poem is finished. Then Marshall manages to say exactly the right thing, and the tension is released for a time, only to build again in the next poem. This process goes on both in the poems and from poem to poem, and *Magic Water* is one of the very few collections of modern poetry which may be quite comfortably read through, from cover to cover, at a single sitting.

The book opens with a four-part poem, "Politics", which appears to set the stage for those to follow. Marshall outlines his particular idea of "our myth" as opposed to that of other countries. This myth, which "shapes... the faceless/beast made of many

longings" has been hidden under the snow of Canada, but Marshall sees it surface in the violent passages of our history, when a Riel or more recently a Laporte is to be considered.

"Islands", which Marshall refers to as "a kind of modern equivalent of a sonnet sequence", places the poet in a number of mental and geographical areas in which he finds himself alienated from his surroundings. But this alienation is of a fruitful sort, since it is through his experiences "exterminating/crabs as if they were Biafrans", and "The Empire State Building... Paul Bunyan's mad hypodermic plunging at God." which enables the poet to "set sail on this magic water", the process of living between "islands" of experience.

In the section titled "Circuits" are a number of shorter poems, and two rather interesting "found poems" edited from letters received from Gwendolyn MacEwen. These serve to give the reader an insight into how Marshall arranges words to suit his own fancy, since one assumes that Miss MacEwen wrote the letters in a more narrative fashion. Of the other poems in this section

"Solstice Poem: 1964", with its very smooth, flowing language and use of light and dark imagery to convey a changing relationship between two people, and "Kingston, Ont." in which Marshall returns to what appears to be a favorite theme, that of changing perspectives brought about by a wider knowledge of a familiar subject, are most noteworthy.

If the book has a weak point, it is the selection of "Words for an Imaginary Future" as a closing section. This is subtitled "A Poem for Voices", and a note tells us that it was originally commissioned by CBC Anthology. I believe that the poem, which contains a good interplay between the three parts or "voices" of which it is composed, is probably for more effective if read aloud by three different people. Somehow, it does not work well as a poem for reading to oneself, perhaps because the "voices" play into one another so well that some definition is needed to avoid confusion of the roles.

But this is nit-picking. *Magic Water* is, on the whole, a good collection of good poems, well-balanced and well organized.

—Sid Stephen

Touch — Selected Poems
George Bowering
McClelland & Stewart Ltd.
\$4.95 hardcover

This collection of verse by George Bowering, a young Canadian poet, brings together poems previously published separately in magazines, as broadsheets, and in earlier books.

The influence of William Carlos Williams is clear in the basic simplicity of Bowering's poetry—simple diction, brevity, concern with the real ("Poets don't look for grails/They want to drink from/the cups at hand").

However, in my opinion Bowering has failed in his attempt to duplicate Williams' achievement:

Language lifted
out of the ordinary
into the illumination
of poetry.

His poems, for the most part,

cast no light. They are shapeless leaden things, with neither richness of imagery nor toughness of idea in them. Worst of all, a large number of them are simply boring. For someone with an academic background in English, Bowering appears surprisingly unaware that the main themes of, for example, "Moon Shadow" and "Round Head" have been expressed with considerably more grace, subtlety of thought and vitality than his prosy and laboured conceits contain.

Having said this, let me qualify it by pointing out that not all of the poems are complete failures. Bowering's style is best adapted to narrative rather than lyrical poetry, and his exploration of his genealogical past in the trio "Family", "Grandfather", "The Descent" have a certain vitality and quality of nostalgia about them:

his brother's collie

dog sitting beside him, muzzle in his hand. Old collie dead how many years, & my grandmother, & who knows where the picture is now?

The poems "Windigo" and "Hamatsa" evoke a peculiar uneasiness, not simply for their bloodthirsty themes, but also because of Bowering's ability to call up the primeval powers which once inhabited the mountains and forests of the west.

"Baseball" is a poem which in the final analysis does not "come off", but is nevertheless an original and interesting effort. There is however a heavy-handedness in the treatment which mars it.

A few good ideas, a sometimes rather arrogant approach, and too little poetry make *Touch* much of a write-off.

—Margaret Calder.

Earle Birney reads tonight

If Canada has such a thing as a "grand ole man" — and though I personally hate using that term, in this case it may be a *propos* — then the title must go to Earle Birney, who will be visiting Edmonton this week as one of a number of Canadian poets brought in by either the University, the Dept. of English or Grant McEwan Community College.

Earle Birney was born in Calgary, Alberta in 1904, and the mountains adjacent to that city were probably influential in one of his earliest and best-known poems, *David*. Birney graduated from UBC in 1926, and completed his doctoral degree at the University of Toronto. Since

that time he has worked as a teacher and writer-in-residence at a number of Canadian Universities, and was for a time literary editor of the *Canadian Forum*.

Since the publication of *David and Other Poems* in 1942, for which he was awarded the first of his two Governor-General's Awards, Birney has been a prolific writer, and his poetry, with its concern for the meeting of personal and universal meaning in individual experience has influenced such Canadian writers as Alfred Purdy and George Bowering.

Birney has never been one to remain aloof from the changing style and perspective of modern poetry. His latest collection, *Rag*

and *Bone Shop*, has met with mixed critical reaction, probably because some critics feel that it is "undignified" for a poet of Birney's stature to admit influence by new comers like bp nichol. But the poems in the collection speak for themselves, they are for the most part fresh and ingenious interpretations of various forms of "concrete" poetry, their form informed by Birney's own particular sense of humor and intelligence.

Earle Birney will be reading his poetry in the SUB Art Gallery at 8 P.M. tonight, (Wed., 13 October), and if the turnout for the reading by Al Purdy was any indication, you are advised to come early!

—Sid Stephen

MORE FILMS

It's underground film time again!

But before those of you who saw that underground film festival fiasco a couple of weeks ago finish groaning and turn to another article, read on!

This show is being put on by an entirely different person from an entirely different organization and has nothing to do with that last lead balloon we were treated to.

And judging by the films that are currently before the Alberta censors, it should be a much better show.

The show is being put on by Ihor Todoruk of Vancouver and will consist of selections from the five part film festival that Mr. Todoruk and his associates have been holding in Vancouver over the summer.

The festival has been widely acclaimed and has been playing to large crowds at every showing. In fact, the reason for the Edmonton viewing is tied up with one of the films shown during the summer festival.

You see, it was deemed to be obscene by the Vancouver morality mandarins and Mr. Todoruk and his associates are now facing a very expensive court procedure. For this they need money and for that they are holding this show in Edmonton and prairie points east.

The show itself will consist of seven relatively short films that will illustrate Mr. Todoruk's concept of "radical films". They vary from Jim Morrison's (yes, the Doors' Jim Morrison) *Unknown Soldier*, a starkly brutal film about his own crucifixion that includes such scenes as Mr. Morrison being

executed and coughing up blood to Scot Bartlett's *A Trip to the Moon* which Mr. Todoruk tells me is one of the most visually exciting films he has ever seen. He told me that its space sequences are better than those in *2001, A Space Odyssey* and that its ending is guaranteed to shrivel your cerebral neurons, dendrites, axons and all.

As advised by the Canyon Cinema Cooperative's second catalogue, *Off-On* by Tome Dewitt and Scot Bartlett will be shown on the same program. The two (*A Trip to the Moon* and *Off-On*) form a complementary duo that exam first the world outside self and soul and second the world within, respectively.

Also shown will be Cat Stevens' *Father and Son*, a film made around his song of the same name.


Two Canadian films will be shown, Keith Rodan's *S* and Silvia Spring's *Madeleine*.

And to round the show off, a very fast paced super-slick underground Hollywood film called *Listen To Your World* will be presented for your viewing edification.

Mr. Todoruk assures me that the show has been structured for maximum effect and that, while it contains some very heavy cinematic moments, this is not its sole purpose (wait until he brings in his promised film by Andy Warhol). Generally, it should be a well rounded show designed, to quote my favorite metaphysicians "with your mind in mind."

The show will take place this Thursday and Friday in the SUB Theatre at 2:00 and 3:30 p.m. Tickets are \$1.

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