

St. George explores art and poetry

White Lions in the Afternoon
by Elyse Yates St. George
Coteau Books

Interview and review by Carole Amerongen
Few people are gifted artists. Fewer still have a talent for more than one art form. Elyse Yates St. George is an exception. After years of working as a visual artist, St. George started to explore her ability as a poet.

The result of this endeavor led to the creation of *White Lions in the Afternoon*, her first book. The subject matter of this book reflects St. George's interest in the connection between what she refers to as "visual and verbal forms of art."

White Lions in the Afternoon contains a series of poems and etchings, each under one of four categories: Women and Children, Ghosts, Rhymes, and The Animals. Each poem relates to the corresponding etching because they were created with a similar feeling or emotion.

St. George was in town before the holidays to do readings and show slides from her book. She was concerned that some may get the wrong impression of her work.

St. George's work has been described as "an interdisciplinary artist's experience with an emphasis on how one medium informs another," but the systematic production of poem with picture was not St. George's intention. She did not merely illustrate a series of poems or write poems to go with a series of etchings.

Instead, St. George says: "I went through my etchings and took pieces out that gave



me the same feelings as the poem did. I never do this consciously."

St. George has been a practising artist for thirty years, though her experimentation with art goes back to her childhood. "I've always been drawing," St. George recalls. But, as she explains in the afterword of her book, an appetite for creating is not always praised. As a youth, she was even reprimanded twice for what was considered an overzealous interest in art.

In the first grade, St. George was punished for drawing a mermaid with "plump breasts... on the empty lilyleaf of the school board's Hans Christian Andersen." As a high school student, St. George was disciplined for drawing the great Cleopatra (she wisely chose to draw this character fully clothed) on a much larger canvas — the wall of the girl's washroom.

Fortunately, these incidents, paired with a lack of encouragement from a school which suggested more "practical" pursuits, did not suppress St. George's zeal for art. In fact, while first studying art in England, she asked if she could work with the fourth year painters because she was so eager to develop. Her talent must have been obvious even then, for she was granted this rare request.

Years later, St. George resumed her study of visual art, but she continued to experiment with language. Fellow artist Patrick Lane, collaborated with St. George to produce the innovative style that pairs poetry with visual art. Lane may be favorably biased towards St. George, but his estimation of her work is unvarnished. In the forward to her book, he states: "Her gifts as an artist and a poet are gifts to us as a people."

Outskirts of originality

Outskirts
Blue Rodeo
WEA Records

by Randal Smathers

Blue Rodeo's LP *Outskirts* has been around for a while now, and the reason this review is relatively late is that the album is just not all that exciting. Writing a review requires several listens, but somehow I just had a hard time putting this platter on the turntable.

The album starts out as pretty standard cowpunkably, nothing Jason and the Scorchers haven't done before. Nothing the Sweethearts of the Rodeo haven't done either.

After a couple songs, Blue Rodeo switch into their Los Lobos mode with "Joker's Wild", a blatant ripoff of the barrio band. Things really get schizophrenic with the next song though, "Prairie Pool", which closes the first side, is eerily reminiscent of Elvis Costello's *Imperial Bedroom* era.

The second side is equally, shall we say, eclectic. After a while it becomes obvious that this band, instead of having any given style, is a bar band who have transformed some of their covers into "original" material.

The musicianship is not bad, so Blue Rodeo at least rate as a pretty good bar band,

but it is not inspired either. On the lyric sheet they take pains to tell you when they are doing an instrumental bit, presumably so you don't think they just forgot the words.

The lyrics could be called deep, or mystical, but probably should be called bad imitations of L2 or J.C. Mellencamp, or Springsteen. They don't seem to have much to say, and they try to hide this by saying nothing in a very roundabout way. See "I need love and it's you/ And I feel like William Holden floating in a pool" from "Floating" as an example.

I suppose if you wanted albums by Tom Petty, REM, Elvis Costello, Los Lobos, and Jason and the Scorchers, but could only afford one record, you could buy this album and pretend that Blue Rodeo was all those other people. After all, that's what the band is doing.

Unfortunately, Canadian content regulations being what they are — the band is from Toronto — they are guaranteed a fair bit of airtime, including regular spots on the Much Music station. It is sad commentary when a cover band like this gets played instead of the originals they are copying because of national boundaries. Maybe free trade will spare us any repeat performance.

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