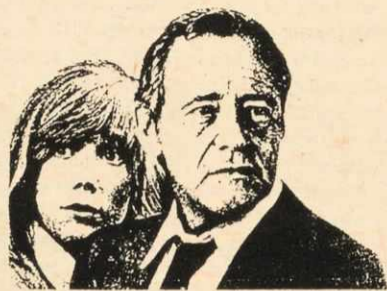


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## Pottersfield Portfolio: Travel brochure to local literature

by Alec Bruce

There are so many bad poems in the world, I sometimes wonder how poetic standards are kept. After all, what prevents average readers, exposed more to inferior than superior verse, from lowering their expectations of literary merit? Contrary to what many think, poets pay careful attention to what people — with the possible exception of professional critics — expect. Part of what gives meaning to poetry is the poet's mindful appeal to the reader's humanity.

For these reasons, I'm offended when anthologists sometimes decide merit is not a sufficient criteria for publishing poetry. I know I'm in trouble when I read, in the introduction to some new collection, "Good verse is just good verse; but poetry aspires to some higher purpose." Editors and publishers will have their reasons for filling the world with lousy poems; and readers, ignorant of these reasons, complacent amid mediocrity, will demand less from poets.

The most recent example in Nova Scotia of an anthology composed mostly of bad poems; and justified by the editor's peculiar vision, is **The Pottersfield Portfolio: Fiction and Poetry from Atlantic Canada**. Released by the Pottersfield Press earlier this year, this volume, in a mere 50 pages of text, represents work by 75 local poets and writers. Its editor, Lesley Choyce, is unabashed about his aims.

Says Choyce: "We have work being submitted by writers from all corners of the region, and our readership has grown so that we now have a solid national distribution to insure that our poets and fiction writers have a strong voice across Canada."

That Choyce considers himself an agent of social change in local publishing circles is evident throughout the **Portfolio**. The poems, taken together, ponder virtually every topic worthy of verse: from broken dreams to regional disparity; from unfulfilled love affairs to male-dominance in Nova Scotia fishing communities. The variety of technique and form is amazing. There are poems written in blank verse; poems scrupulously metered; with rhyming couplets; and poems of some undetermined hybrid variety. The artists' works are distributed so widely, a poet is never represented on the same page twice. All of this makes the reader feel as if he/she is reading an advertisement for Nova Scotia culture, rather than a careful collection of Nova Scotia literature.

Still, this wouldn't be so bad if the works, themselves, were any good. Unfortunately, most of the poems are extremely limited, reminiscent of my own youthful attempts on lonely Sunday afternoons. I wince when I recal one Halifax poet's claim:

*The poet is a tough creature:*

*she has a large vocabulary,  
 (some of it coarse) and no  
 shame:*

*her feelings boil over, and  
 set hard, (like toffee) into  
 poems -- you could break your  
 teeth on them, they are real.*

I hope readers are at least as tough as poets. The quantity of 15-word flights of self-indulgence, such as this, haphazardly arranged throughout the **Portfolio**, burdens the reader before he/she is barely 15 pages into the text. It's not only bad literature, but not very good advertising for Nova Scotia's artists.

The small number of really excellent works — yes, there are a few — are crippled by Choyce's travel-brochure approach to editing. One brilliant young poet, for example, has work separated by 20 pages of text. His first poem, "Hammonds Plains African Baptist Church", is located at the end of a lengthy short story by another author. His second, "Sydney African Methodist Episcopal Church", is embedded in a sea of mediocre verse by other poets. The reader can't see the breakers for the backwash. The eight short works of fiction are, by and large, quite good. Yet, Choyce uses them merely to divide the volume into sections of verse. The prose genre is badly represented and misused in the **Portfolio**.

As long as Lesley Choyce remains in Nova Scotia, I suspect he'll be publishing regular editions of **The Pottersfield Portfolio**. In view of his mission to bring Nova Scotian writers into national prominence, his anthologies will probably contain vast quantities of poetry and fiction from all over the maritimes. He might remember nothing sells culture quite like excellence.



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You won't want to miss this..

by Geoff Martin

In retrospect, the movie **Missing** will surely be regarded as one of the finest American films made in 1982. This coming Tuesday, January 25, it will be screened in the McInnes Room, to be followed by remarks by the author of the book, Thomas Hauser.

The film is based on the death of an American, Charles Horman, during the September 1973 *coup d'etat* in Chile. The pain of his wife Beth and father Ed provided interesting action with the everpresent coup in the background. Essentially, the movie alleges that the Nixon Administration had foreknowledge or ordered the killing of the young journalist because of his knowledge of the American involvement in the ousting of the democratically-elected Marxist Salvador Allende Gossens in favour of General Augusto Pinochet (who still reigns, much to the chagrin of Amnesty International).

Throughout the movie, Ed and Beth Horman are seemingly given the "runaround" by the local American embassy and consulate officials, as well as the native Chilean authorities. The action primarily concerns the search for the missing Horman, although we are never allowed to forget about the coup, and the "Search and Destroy" mis-

sions, as they are referred to by the hawkish American officials.

There are at least three very powerful and memorable scenes involving the military which are effective in representing their character. In one case we see soldiers with guns blazing "joyriding" in a jeep chasing a white stallion. In another, we see a friend of Charles and Beth, Terry Simon (Melanie Mayron), being "patted down" by a soldier while a dead body lies in the corner of the room under a sheet.

Finally, we see Charles Horman looking out of a hotel room window at a procession of military vehicles passing a 'high society' party while the band plays "My Ding-a-ling". Of course, the formally-attired crowd on the terrace stops dancing to applaud the soldiers.

On several occasions, there are sudden outbursts of fire between government troops and pro-Allende guerrillas. It all seems paradoxically self-critical: On the one hand we are continually shown people being killed, yet the death of Charles Horman is the centre of attention. Perhaps the director, Costa-Gavras, is both saying that only the death of an American can sensitize Americans and using the technique to sell the film.

The real strength of the film is in the directing, with the associated

technical arts, and the acting. Jack Lemmon, Sissy Spacek and John Shea star as Ed Horman, Beth Horman, and Charles Horman, respectively, and, along with the minor characters, put in flawless performances.

**Missing** is definitely a movie worth seeing, and Tom Hauser's remarks will provide intriguing detail as to the American involvement in Chile and the present American policy in Latin America. Before **Missing** was released this past February, the U.S. State Department issued a three page statement denying the film's accusations. This in itself is a good reason to see the film.

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