

# Sorestad: debating prairie poet myths

by Lisa Trofymow

Poets must be losing public appeal: The only people who came to poet Glen Sorestad's reading last Thursday were other writers. But we who were there enjoyed listening to his colorful narrative poems. His works included *Prairie Pub Poems*, *Pear Seeds in My Mouth*, *Ancestral Dances*, and *Jan Lake Poems*. Sorestad's work is very accessible even for those not familiar with poetry. The language is informal and the subjects range from fishing, to pool, to laundromats. After concluding his reading, Sorestad granted the Gateway this interview.

**Gateway:** What is a "prairie poet?" Does a prairie poet have more responsibility to his public or private self?

**Sorestad:** I'm not very good at definitions of anything, particularly when it comes to poet-

**Sorestad:** Well, for me place has considerable importance. I think that can be seen in my work. I use place as a kind of touchstone from which to work.

**Gateway:** Your own backyard?

**Sorestad:** Yes, and not only my own backyard. It seems I respond to place wherever I go. It's one of the initial handles I have to get into the act of poetry. But again, it's a very individual approach, and I'm not sure that we could say that place is a more important determinant in prairie poets than in poets that live on the west coast or east coast or Ontario. Place has been important in any number of poets you may wish to single out.

**Gateway:** So no matter how universal you may want to be, you're always going to take something from where you are?

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try. I think prairie poets are described rather than defined, and there's so many ways they can be described. I suppose there is a certain poetic that comes out of the prairies. There is a certain narrative tendency that seems to be strong in many prairie poets. But you can't say that it is a dominant characteristic, because the minute you say that you exclude the prairie poets who are not the least bit dominated by that. I don't know how useful definitions of prairie poets are. I'm not even sure if I care if someone describes me as a prairie poet.

**Gateway:** It seems that because of the dominant motifs in your poetry — the landscape, "the desert of Saskatchewan" — prairie poetry seems to be more of a matter of "place" than a way of thinking. How much validity does place have in poetry — as far as the universality of poetry goes.

**Sorestad:** It's finding the universal in the particular, I suppose. That's only one way into the act of poetry, and I wouldn't say it's the best way. It's certainly a way that works for me.

**Gateway:** How many people have compared your work to W.O. Mitchell simply because there's so much of that prairie imagery in it?

**Sorestad:** I can't recall being compared to W.O. Mitchell — except in appearance. But not in what I'm writing. I'm very much experience-based.

**Gateway:** Which comes back to your prairie experience.

**Sorestad:** Well, some of the subjects are obviously prairie. But I don't think the idea of responding to particular experiences is more common to the prairies than it would be to any literature anywhere, I mean, what do we

write from? From a personal response to our lives, the accumulation of little details and images that we experience.

**Gateway:** Which is why I have trouble with the "prairie writer" tag. You're a writer, foremost. There seems to be some quirk about being from the prairies and to write

to them.

**Gateway:** I wonder how much of that has to do with the fact that Canada is such a large country and we feel the need to package it into little areas, just for the sake of getting things into our own backyards.

**Sorestad:** Yeah, and interestingly, one Amer-

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from the prairies — it's no different than being a west coast poet or a Newfoundland poet.

**Sorestad:** Well, yeah, we like to classify, and we like to find common themes and motifs that give us a way of seeing perhaps a much larger literary framework. So instead of approaching Canadian literature in a totality, we like to look at different ways to approach Canadian literature. We might look at themes which have run chronologically or historically through Canadian writing and approach it that way, or we might look at it geographically and say, "It's interesting that such-and-such seems to emerge from this particular geographical area. Why, for example, should some of the best poetry in the 1960s have emerged from this particular area as opposed to somewhere else? These are very useful academic and critical kinds of seeing and exploring literature. And in many cases, I suppose, the critics are helping the writers to see things that are not necessarily apparent

ican anthology of poetry published a few years ago out of New York was called *A Geography of Poets*. The whole collection, while trying to encompass the contemporary poetry that is being written across the length and breadth of the United States, found that it was appropriate for them to approach it in the way that we've often tended to look at poetry in Canada. That is, the west coast poets, the urban poets, and the east coast poets. So, I mean it's useful, but any way of approaching something that's so multi-faceted can only have a limited usefulness.

**Gateway:** Yeah, considering our culture is so much of a mosaic, maybe this is where it comes from.

**Sorestad:** Yeah. I suppose it would be useful to look at an anthology of Italian-Canadian poets, to see what similarities exist between them. To explore Canadian poetry on a purely ethnic base would be as limited as a geographical view. Perhaps more so.

## TRIVIA ENTERTAINMENT

by Don Teplyske

### MUSIC

1. What was the title of Darkroom's debut EP?
2. Who won the first ever Grammy for video of the year? (The year was 1982.)
3. What was the name of Joan Jett's all-girl band?
4. Who produced Lesley Gore's early hits?
5. What was the last Chicago album not titled with a number?

### HOCKEY

6. How did the Boston Bruins acquire Butch Goring?
7. How many Stanley Cups has Brad Park won?
8. Randy Carlyle broke into the NHL with which team?
9. Name the team Richard Brodeur broke into the NHL with.
10. Who led the WHA in scoring in 1972-73?

### LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

1. Los Lobos debut mini-album was titled "And a time to dance."
2. Alison Moyet was formerly a member of Yaz.
3. "Careless Whisper" was released as a George Michael single.
4. George Jones and Johnny Paycheck sang "When You're Ugly Like Us (You Naturally got to be Cool)!!"
5. Chevy Chase was the first to leave *Saturday Night Live*.
6. Mary Crosby's character shot J.R.
7. Stalag 13 was the setting for *Hogan's Heroes*.
8. Ivan Boldirev entered the NHL with Boston.
9. Ted Hampton won the Bill Masterton Trophy in 1968-69.
10. Carol Vadnais was traded from California to Boston for Reggie Leach.

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Wednesday, March 20, 1985  
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Arab Student Association  
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Campus Eritrea Support Committee  
Canadian Crossroads Association  
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Chinese Library Association  
Filipino University Students' Association  
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U of A. Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai Students' Club  
Nigerian Union of Students  
North American Jewish Students Network  
U of A. Scandinavian Club  
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