

State of the Art January 9, 2016

The pace of the disappearance of time is a melancholy subject

More to my thoughts on self-publishing: I'm changing my mind about the process. Fashion rules in books as in all commodities. Large publishing houses have to make money if only to pay the editors, so they have to guess at what will sell, taking into consideration what has sold before--the fashion. This must mean that some worthy manuscripts are hidden.

Some years ago I inherited my grandmother's trunk with two diaries, letters, some clothes she made, cartoons, valentines, photographs. This got me started on genealogy, and I soon wanted to know about the people mentioned in the diaries. So that I could share the diaries and letters, my husband typed them into the computer while I read them to him out loud. With photographs, this produced a manuscript of 230 pages. Forty-five of my relatives wanted copies. If I had waited, I could have had a self-published book that would be more permanent than a manuscript, easier to read, more apt to be kept.

Brian Bartlett is compiling *The Essential Dorothy Roberts*. He has done a similar volume on Robert Gibbs—his personal selection of the best work of the poet along with an essay. As Bartlett worked on the book, he became more and more impressed with the quality of Roberts' poetry, with how original it is. She was the daughter of the novelist and poet Theodore Goodridge Roberts, niece of Charles Goodridge Roberts and cousin of Bliss Carman. Her brother was the artist Goodridge Roberts. Brian hadn't realized how prolific Theodore was, with 34 novels.

One of my favourite readers, Audrey Cline, phoned me on New Year's Eve from her home in St. Andrews. I was delighted because I hadn't heard from her in a while. She is working on a sequel to her book, the memoir *Song of the Eagle* published in 2005. She liked my columns on Bliss Carman. She was interested because she had known Grace Helen Mowatt, a friend of Carman. He would write to Mowatt as "Dear Little Nell." I told her about Bartlett's book.

All ten of my immediate family were home for Christmas, the first time in quite a while that we have all been together. As we were sitting around the supper table Christmas Eve, I was strangely aware of the wholeness of my life. I was happy, content, but something even more profound was there. That feeling I think is what artists of all stripes try to achieve in their work: create wholeness out of the various aspects of life, the more the better. Cram in as much as they can into one work of art.

This month the Salon is nine years old. It's been a great contribution to the artistic community. As editor Joseph Sherman said of his Arts Atlantic magazine, anyone writing the history of New Brunswick art will have to consult the Salon. I hope the new magazine, Billie, will have as long and productive a life.

The eighth edition of Tighrope Books' *The Best Canadian Poetry in English* for 2015 has appeared, containing poems by two New Brunswickers. Michael Pacey's "Lightbulb", one of my favourites of his poems, is in it as is Shane Neilson's "My daughter imitates A.Y. Jackson's 'Road to Baie St Paul'".

The day before New Year's Eve Neilson dropped in for a visit. I had previously met him only briefly but knew him to be a great advocate of New Brunswick contemporary literature. There were no awkward pauses in our conversation.

He was interested in the New Brunswick Chapbooks which I edited for 16 years. I could scare up a few that he didn't have.

More to look forward to in 2016: under Neilson's editorship, Goose Lane Editions is publishing "a big fat book" containing all of M. Travis Lane's long poems. "A big fat book" is a tribute to a poet, whose work is usually published in slim volumes. Goose Lane last year published "a big fat book" of the collected poems of Don McKay.

Because everyone has a mobile phone which also harbours a camera, photographs have become ubiquitous. Even gifted photographers with fine cameras can't resist the temptation to post artful photos on Facebook. I'm sent photos of family and friends by email. All these are ephemeral. E-books and e-mails are ephemeral. Perhaps all personal photographs and letters are in the long run destined to disappear, but in the past this didn't happen so fleetingly. I have a photograph of my grandmother that is 140 years old. News gets disseminated on Twitter—and then vanishes. When someone dies, the person in charge of dispersing their goods and chattels often throws out letters. Especially tragic is when a run of journals is thrown out. To someone 81 years old at the end of a year, the pace of the disappearance of time is a melancholy subject.