

Salon, Telegraph-Journal Saturday, April 30, 2016
State of the Art

POETS NOTICE THE SMALL BUT IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE

I was thinking about the finances of arts organizations. Their finances are similar to those of other industries. On the other hand the financing of the artists who feed these industries—musicians and composers, visual artists and craftspeople, writers, actors—is quite different. To do the job full-time, with no teaching, no administrating, requires a patron, often a spouse or a parent, although the artists do get bits and pieces from selling their wares, arts grants, or government welfare. As a writer friend of mine, now 66, says, Her Majesty the Queen is now his patron, a grander way of saying that he gets Old Age Security. When a 9-5 job is required, the artist gets up at 5 AM or stays up until 2 AM. When Robert Gibbs was teaching, most of his poems dealt with the early morning. An awful lot of the public and private funding going to the arts is directed to the arts organizations rather than to the artists.

A Fredericton City Hall planner, Sebastian Salazar-Chavez, gave an informative talk to the seniors of Wilmot United Church. The church, at the corner of Carleton and King Streets, surprisingly finds itself at the centre of the new planning. Starting in June Carleton will be torn up, new sewers better able to handle flooding will be installed and electric wires will be put underground. The street itself will be paved in a way different from other street paving. Carleton will become the central axis of the city, from the old cemetery to the pedway across St. Anne's Drive. Possible plans include relocating the bus stop, making wider sidewalks. An experiment will have the street from the pedway to Queen become a "shared street", by cars and pedestrians, making it easier to cross from one special place, the Garrison District (with the New Brunswick College and Design and the Officers' Barracks) to the library and Sports Hall of Fame and finally to the York Museum and the Officers' Square.

City planning requires many different skills, and its results are permanent and significant. An esthetic sense is essential. The flavour of the city must be kept and enhanced, the heritage buildings, like Wilmot, featured. In Wilmot's case, an empty lot next door is central to the city plan and to Wilmot itself.

But practical things like existing buildings, parking, pedestrians' comfort, flooding require other knowledge. We've been entrusted with a lovely city and we haven't always been faithful to the trust. An architect described King's Place, taking up a whole block in the centre of the city, as "brutal." Brutalism is a technical architecture term, describing a massive, fortress-like building, but brutal is also an ordinary adjective that everyone fears.

Taste is, of course, personal. I admire the apartment building at the corner of George and York. The architect used the colours of the surrounding buildings—the old York Street school, St. Paul's United Church—in a contemporary way that fits the site. Someone said he thought it was ugly. But driving down York Street, my daughter singled it out—"Isn't that a beautiful building." Her mother's child.

Salazar-Chavez pointed out how many parking lots there are in the city, especially along the river. There could be nothing uglier than a parking lot. What a perfect way to spoil the lovely site we have inherited.

I've been wondering what the new hotel is going to look like. Will it be brutal or just ordinary? And who will design the new Playhouse? When I step out of the old University of New Brunswick Memorial Building at night, I see before me the city lights, the river, maybe a moon. I don't see anything from Carleton Hall, a building identical to a building at the University of North Carolina, ugly, not even utilitarian.

Westminster Books hosted two literary events last week. One evening the three nominees for the New Brunswick Westminster Poetry Award gave readings. Westminster is sponsoring the award. I had two of the nominated books by Michael Pacey and M. Travis Lane. But I didn't know Phillip Crymble's work and bought his book, *Not Even Laughter*. The first two lines of the second poem, "Trees and Weeds", spoke to me eloquently and drew me into the book: "How we long for known surroundings—nostalgia's equal mix of home/and pain. Our first day back we waken early, drink our coffee black." How many times have I felt those emotions coming back home, symbolized by black coffee because I haven't been to the grocery store yet? Poets notice the small but important things in life, point them out to us. Thank you Phillip Crymble.

I've been told that all the book award winners are going to get a monetary award, thanks to the various sponsors.

The next night Chuck Bowie's *AMACAT* was launched at Westminster. More about that anon.