

MANITOBA REPORT

By Gloe Cormie

In May, when our wild mountain ash, and apple trees are covered in white and pink fragrant blooms, we Manitoba poets are getting back to our regular writing routine, after the many literary activities in April and March. Most of the activities are centered around Winnipeg, but in Brandon, we have two recently relocated league members, Di Brandt and Laurie Block, who are both raising the profile of poetry out there. Our most northern member Walfried Jansen holds the fort for poetry in Thompson.

From March 16-19, a National Ecopoetics Symposium occurred at the Brandon University campus and the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, hosted by Di Brandt. Manitoba poets featured included Tanis McDonald, Catherine Hunter, Charlene Diehl, Jan Horner, Alison Calder and Clarise Foster. "The National Ecopoetic Symposium re-imagined human subjectivity and relationship to the natural world in reparative, revisionary, joyful, woman-inflected and sustainable ways, through ecopoetic dialogues between talented poets," says Brandt.

Manitoba had several significant Winnipeg-based poetry events during National Poetry Month, especially during our annual Manitoba Book Week (MBW). MBW opened with the launch of the Poetry in Motion project on April 23 in which eight poems by Manitoba poets were selected to appear on city transit buses until early summer. Two of the fine poets selected are league members Di Brandt and Laurie Block. The next day Sarah Klassen launched a new collection of poetry, titled *A Curious Beatitude*, to a full-house audience at McNally Robinson's in Grant Park. The launch was so successful that Sarah's new book sold out completely and several people, including me, were unable to purchase her book that evening. Book Week culminated in the Manitoba Writing and

Publishing Awards Gala at the Hotel Fort Garry's Crystal Ballroom on April 29. Winnipeg poet, Lori Cayer, won the John Hirsch Award for Most Promising Writer (*Stealing Mercury*, 2004) and Nina Berkhout, another local poet, was a finalist. Lori says she is in process of applying for membership in the League.

A highly significant event for Manitoba poets and poetry was the Lyric Café, Cadence and Coffee, April 22, at St. Augustine Church. The Lyric Café is a fundraiser to establish a Manitoba Poetry Award to be presented at the Annual Manitoba Writing and Publishing Awards Gala. The Manitoba Poetry Endowment Committee has raised a total of \$5,990.75 to date including the funds raised from this year's Lyric Café and the initial one last April. The Manitoba Poetry endowment aims to have an award for Manitoba Poets within the next two years. Remarkably, we are the only province in Canada without a literary award for poetry. The café, an exciting and well-attended event, featured Dennis Cooley, Catherine Hunter, K. I. Press and A. J. Levin, who read from their work. Jazz music by The Maurice Mierau Trio and improvised poetry by Poor Tree, added to the festivity. Classic typewriters, formerly used by eight poets were auctioned off, with signed manuscripts and other souvenirs. The poets included were: George Amabile, Dennis Cooley, J.R. Leveille, Di Brandt, Catherine Hunter, K.I. Press, A.J. Levin and the late Dorothy Livesay. Livesay's Remington manual carriage typewriter, coupled with an early-signed chapbook, received the highest bid.

Two Winnipeg venues have opened for readings. The first one, at Maurice Mierau's home, 43 Dundurn Place, is strictly for poetry. This reading series now called The Dundurn Artist Centre Series, is also known as the We ain't broke yet Café. The inaugural reading in October featured Montréal poet, Carolyn Marie Souaid. The second venue, at Aqua books, called The Free Your Mind reading Series, is open to all genres. Their inaugural reading in April featured three poets, including new league member, Laurie Block.

Winnipeg-based *CV 2* Poetry magazine will be featuring a special summer issue to help celebrate the League's 40th anniversary. League Vice-president, Maurice Mierau, coordinated this project. The *CV 2* summer issue will feature poems by league members that were written in response to the work of, or inspired by, other Canadian poets. There will be a tribute to the late league member, Joe Sherman, and interviews with Glen Sorestad and Heidi Greco. Our other main literary magazine, *Prairie Fire*, consistently publishes fine poetry as well. The poetry published in this year's issues continues that tradition.

As the Manitoba League Representative, I am glad to see significant steps taken to raise the profile of poetry and the appreciation of poetry in Manitoba as well as nationally. Projects such as the LCP Poets in the Schools partnered here with the Manitoba Writers' Guild, and Canada's 2nd Annual Random Acts of Poetry in cities across Canada, including here in Winnipeg, play an important role in raising the level of poetry appreciation in a lively grassroots way.

I sent emails to all Manitoba League members with the invitation to send me information about what creative work they have been doing in the last while, especially in the area of poetry. I was delighted that almost everyone responded with an email. Here's what some of our Manitoba poets have been up to in their creative life.

George Amabile has completed a short new book titled, *Night Window and Other Poems*. He's also almost finished revising and restructuring *Dancing in the Mirror*, the long, poem he started in the early eighties. It is now two hundred and thirty-four pages. Amabile's "Prairie" won first place in the Ontario Poetry Society's "Second Time Around" Poetry Contest, and another poem, "Tivoli: The Villa d'Este", won Honourable Mention. George was the featured reader for the MWG sponsored Out Loud reading series at the New Millennium Library on April 20.

Katherine Bitney received a Manitoba Arts Council Writers' Grant A in December 2005 to develop a new manuscript of poetry, her fourth,

titled *Walking Through Fire*, based on the structure of a shamanic journey. She recently served on a Winnipeg Arts Council granting jury. An aspiring grandmother, Katherine is also toying with an idea for a children's novel.

Laurie Block's new book of poetry, *Time Out Of Mind* (Oolichan Books)

is available in bookstores now but the actual launch won't be until October 10th in Winnipeg. (Brandon date TBA). After these initial Manitoba launches, he'll be launching/reading in Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg again, Toronto, and Windsor. In November (date TBA), he'll be launching his new book of poems in British Columbia. As well as readings through National Poetry Month, short poems of Laurie's are currently riding buses in Edmonton and Winnipeg, sponsored by Poetry in Motion programs in each city.

Di Brandt recently returned to the Manitoba prairie, her home landscape, after a decade away. She is the holder of a prestigious Canada Research Chair in Creative Writing at Brandon University, the first such appointment in the country. She hosted a National Ecopoetics Symposium at Brandon University and the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba in March, featuring more than twenty women poets from across the country in performance and dialogue. She was one of the featured readers at the opening night of the Winnipeg International Writers' Festival in October, at the Forks, where she read a commissioned poem about the site.

Brandt's publications this year include: a dialogic cross-disciplinary, cross-generational, multimedia anthology, *Re: Generations: Canadian Women Poets in Conversation*, co-edited with Barbara Godard (Black Moss Press), *Speaking of Power: The Poetry of Di Brandt*, edited by Tanis McDonald (Wilfrid Laurier University Press), and *So this is the world & here I am in it*, a collection of essays, ed. Smaro Kamboureli (NeWest Writers as Critics Series, 10th anniversary book). She is also one of eight Manitoba poets selected for

the Poetry in Motion project, which features poems on Winnipeg Transit buses until early summer. Di has published numerous poems, essays, and interviews in anthologies, including the forthcoming PEN anthology, *Writing Life*, edited by Constance Rooke, and in literary journals, including *Rampike*, *Arc*, *HERizons*, and *Prairie Fire*.

Dennis Cooley will be teaching a creative writing course and graduate course on Robert Kroetsch this May in Spain and doing a reading in Trier, Germany, as part of their thirty-year commemorative conference in Canadian Studies in June.

Dennis was a featured reader at the Forks outdoor Oodena for the opening night of the Winnipeg International Writers' Festival in October, where he read a commissioned poem inspired by the site. He was also a featured reader at The Lyric Café fundraiser to establish a Manitoba Poetry Award.

Cooley's forthcoming titles are: a chapbook of poems; a selected with Wilfred Laurier; and a new book of poetry, *the bentleys*, with the University of Alberta Press.

Gloe Cormie was a panel participant at The Cold Fusion Festival in March, giving her perspective on what it takes to be a practicing artist for the long haul. She spoke from her primary focus as a poet as well as from her secondary focus as a visual artist. Gloe was selected for the recently published *Herb Barrett Award Anthology*, and she has poems forthcoming in two journals and two anthologies. Cormie was the 2005 participant in Canada's 2nd Annual Random Acts of Poetry (RAP), for the city of Winnipeg in October. As a RAP participant she read her poetry to people in various public places, including at The Forks, at art galleries, jazz venues, the universities, and construction sites.

With the assistance of a MAC Writer's Grant, Cormie has recently completed her second book of poetry, *Under a Different Dark Sky*, and is currently seeking an established publisher. In November she participated in a curated art show and auction. She was a successful applicant for

the Artists in the Schools program this year for her Poem Making Residency and is listed in the 2006-2007 AIS Directory. She has given a few poetry workshops and readings this year and she has several more forthcoming, including one in the north near the tree line.

Sarah Klassen launched a new poetry collection, *A Curious Beatitude* (The Muses Company), to a full house audience on April 24, at McNally Robinson's books in Grant Park. She also had a launch event for her new book in Gimli, Manitoba. Both these launches were part of Manitoba Book Week and National poetry month. This winter she taught a poetry appreciation series at the University Women's Club, as well as several poetry workshops for the Winnipeg School Division.

Robert Kroetsch read at the Harbourfront International Festival of Authors, Toronto, in October 2005. His work was the subject of a number of papers at the Wild Words Conference, University of Calgary, that same month. He gave a reading at that conference. In November 2005 he gave a reading at Green College, University of British Columbia. In February 2006 he gave a reading and participated in two panels at the Creative Writing Conference, Arizona State University. Kroetsch says that he has also done a bit of writing throughout this time, but not a whole lot.

A.J. Levin recently read at the Ottawa International Writers Festival with Paul Muldoon and George Elliott Clarke, and here in Winnipeg at the Lyric Café, Cadence and Coffee, a fundraiser to establish a Manitoba Poetry Award.

Tanis MacDonald has poems appearing in upcoming issues of *Rampike*, *Event*, and *Prairie Fire*. She continues to review poetry and fiction for the *Malahat Review*. She has just finished editing a volume for Wilfrid Laurier University Press, titled *Speaking of Power: The Poetry of Di Brandt*.

Maurice Mierau's nonfiction book about tuberculosis in Manitoba, *Memoir of a Living Disease*, recently won the Margaret

McWilliams Award for organizational history from the Manitoba Historical Society. On April 22nd Maurice played the double bass with his jazz trio at the Lyric Café, a literary fundraiser that raised money to create a poetry book prize in Manitoba. Maurice has a poem and a nonfiction piece forthcoming in *Prairie Fire* magazine's summer issue, and is spending most of the month of May as a writer in residence in a Manitoba high school.

Carmelo Militano gave a reading in Calgary at Pages Bookstore on April 14, and in Winnipeg at McNally-Robinson's Downtown Bookstore, on April 27. At both readings he read from his books *Ariadne's Thread*, *The Minotaur's Keys* and his latest book *The Fate of Olives*. The official launch of *The Fate of Olives* will be in September.

Militano attended a recent conference in Vancouver, where he delivered a paper on D.H. Lawrence, participated in a World Poetry panel, and gave a reading.

The Vancouver Public Library has published two of his poems as part of the annual World Poetry Gala. He has a forthcoming reading July 4 at 7:30 PM at Toronto's Art Bar.

K.I. Press moved from Toronto to Winnipeg last fall and has had readings at the Out Loud reading series at the Winnipeg Public Library and at Cadence and Coffee: A Lyric Café, a fundraiser towards the establishment of a Manitoba Book Award for poetry. She has been editing her next book of poems, *Types of Canadian Women*, which will appear with Gaspereau Press in fall 2006.

Deborah Schnitzer's work has found its way as lyric and voice for Shelagh Carter's short experimental film *rifting/blue* which has been selected for a number of national and international film festivals this past year. The longer version of that piece, "bath," will be featured this spring in *Murderous Signs*. She is currently developing two poetry manuscripts, *nazis*, and *the woman who swallowed west hawk lake*.

Deborah has given readings of work at Winnipeg's International Writers' Festival,

"Golden Girls: An Evening of Feminist Culture," Music 'N Mavens and The Margaret Laurence 2005-06 Lecture Series, "Feminisms Revealed: What Does Feminism Look Like." She's been invited to read at the Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver this November.

She is a member of the Manitoba Poetry Endowment Committee working to develop Manitoba's first Poetry Endowment Fund. She's excited by the opportunity this initiative will create. Deborah's first novel, *gertrude unmanageable*, will be published by Arbeiter Ring in September. She continues to refine two other poetic novels, *jane dying again* and *a dress*, hoping they will find their way in the world.

John Weier has been working on a couple of writing projects, both set in Africa. He's currently writer-in-residence at the downtown Millennium Library, a position he says he's really enjoying. Weier has also been running several writing workshops.