

## Poems

Richard Arnold

Richard Arnold, a native of Alabama, has lived on Vancouver Island, B.C. since 1985. He is a long-time explorer and defender of wilderness, belongs to several ecological societies, and teaches English and Environmental Literature at Malaspina University-College. His first collection of poetry will be published in 2002 by Leaf Press (Lantzville, B.C.). Recent journal and anthology publications include *The Wayward Coast*, *Wind Magazine*, *Sunstone*, *Terrain.org*, and *The Trumpeter*.

### A WOLF IN THE CHOIR

Although essentially I hated school,  
I had one brilliant outlaw for a teacher.  
"When it comes to truth, I'm lazy," he used to say.  
"I find it in close-by, ordinary things."

The Literature he showed us was thunderclouds  
Swollen like dark cheeks with a prodigious message  
In the fearful moments of silence before they open  
With tongues of fire to teach the listening earth.

In Economics he taught us the constant debit  
Of forests and rivers, the credit of concrete and greenhouse.

Religion we learned by standing in April rain,  
Hats off, in silence, seeing it soak the ground.

Politics, he claimed, would quickly go extinct  
If we all simply heard the steady song  
Our reason sang, then tuned our living to it.

In Music, he'd talk about the genius of Bach-  
But weep for joy when he heard the evening grosbeak.

Our Sociology was dropping to hands and knees  
On beaches to watch the yellow sand-verbena

Fling its fragrance of sex to pollinators.

The years passed on. At last we graduated.  
We packed the hall, and our commencement speaker  
Talked stagnantly about how noble Science  
Was waiting for us to run its budgets of billions  
And ride in rockets to learn the universe.

But afterward, shaking his head, our teacher took us  
Aside and quietly gave us our last lesson.

"Science? The universe?  
Ride a fifty-cent bus to the creek and study the eyes  
Of a wolf-spider preparing to launch on a cricket."

Then sidled away, hunch-shouldered, almost arachnoid,  
Leaving us (our first moult finished) with fledgling fangs  
To pierce and suck the truth in uncouth ways.

## WE HEARD NO OWLS

We did not hear a single owl this winter.  
Our neighbor logged his hundred acres clean,  
And now deep midnight wild has lost its splendor.

He claims that he'll make pastureland to rent, or  
Turn into trenches sprouting soybeans:  
And we heard not a single owl this winter.

Trees gone, the man is not afraid to enter  
Where once he heard weird cries and sweeping wings--  
The place where midnight wild has lost its splendor.

Always the Great Horned whooped beyond our window,  
Bass rhythmic mutters in our December dreams--  
But we heard not a single owl this winter.

What fiend would scorch a gorgeous wood to cinders?  
Quiet snows bereft of feathered hunters mean  
That our deep midnight wild has lost its splendor.

He goes to church, yet God knows he's a sinner;  
The stars frown down on this diminished scene;  
We did not hear a single owl this winter,

And now deep midnight wild has lost its splendor.