

As the first anthology of British Columbia poetry since Fred Candelaria's *New: West Coast; 72 Contemporary British Columbia Poets* and Patricia M. Ellis' *Western Windows: a Comparative Anthology of Poetry in British Columbia* (both appeared in 1977), Rocksalt could have been an encyclopaedia or a sampling. Mother Tongue opted for the latter.

While there are surprising omissions in the volume – Lorna Crozier, Brian Brett, Patrick Lane and Marlene Cookshaw, for instance – 289 poets submitted work and 108 are included. The collection includes a poem from each, a short biography and a statement regarding their craft. The book would lose little from the omission of the statements (which border on the bafflegab of which Ullmann accused the art establishment), and gain from a more attractive arrangement of the poems themselves. Too often the last few lines of a poem trail sadly overleaf, losing visual contact with its body. Fertig's own "Year of the Dog" is one of these.

Both books suffer from the use of the abbreviation "B.C." for British Columbia throughout the text and even on the covers. Will the abbreviation be immediately meaningful to those beyond our provincial borders? I quibble but these books are so close to real excellence that I lament such imperfections.

REVIEWED BY PHYLLIS REEVE

~ *Pie Tree Press*

By Jim Rimmer

(Gaspereau Press, 2008, \$59.95)

~ *In Black and White*

By Wesley Bates

(Gaspereau Press, 2008, \$59.95)

Gaspereau Press has stepped up to champion Canada's private presses with two hard-back trade-edition autobiographies by British Columbia's Jim Rimmer and Ontario's Wesley Bates. Both books are commercial takes on earlier limited editions by smaller presses; the Pie Tree Press' *Leaves from the Pie Tree* (US \$650) and Bird & Bull's edition of Bates' *In Black & White* (US \$275).

The Pie Tree Press presents what Jim Rimmer describes in his own conclusion as, "a scrap-

book rather than a proper piece of bookwork. But perhaps the apparent lack of direction is its direction." It is an example of both the modesty and clarity evident in Rimmer's account of his life in printing, typography, illustration and type design. Rarely does a career unfold in perfect order, and Rimmer's book is a tale of a type designer's working life, one with its own concentric patterns, its own unity. Part autobiography. part typefounding manual, part type sampler.

Rimmer takes us on a journey beginning in Vancouver with his youthful dissatisfaction with formal education, his apprenticeship to the typesetting trade, later a freelance typography and design career (still in Vancouver), and ultimately the establishment of The Pie Tree Press in New Westminster. He taught himself how to cut and found type, and he spells out his methods and techniques in detail. The book concludes with a parade of digital types Rimmer has created. *The Pie Tree Press* is beautifully written with a raconteur's skill. Rimmer's recollections form short stories with their own shape and he is a compassionate observer of the characters that populate his past.

Wesley Bates rolls out a clever narrative with *In Black & White* that reveals the development of an artist through recollections and insights. Sometimes the narrative flow is a bit choppy, but my great discovery in reading Wesley Bates isn't that he is a talented artist and accomplished wood engraver – I knew that already – but that he's also a cracking good writer.

Bates begins with an early childhood connection to art that he forged through a set of wood engravings illustrating an edition of *Wuthering Heights*. Then he jumps ahead to the 1970s with his first interaction with wood engraving tools. As the book progresses, he draws a word portrait of the city of Hamilton in the 1970s and early 1980s, a vibrant urban environment full of artists and writers. He writes: "I wanted to illustrate texts that were proven and available, yet uncommon." Many neophytes entering the world of the private press will relate to Bates' own experience, such as the description of his early printing efforts, and the pile of waste paper nearly equal to the finished sheets.

We follow Bates' career as a commercial illustrator and his collaborations with some of the brightest stars amongst private presses in Canada and the United States. He also gives an account of illustrating books for authors such as W.O. Mitchell and Wendell Berry.

As for Wesley Bates' illustrations, there is a feeling about them that he has one foot planted firmly in the grandest tradition of 19th century wood engraving courtesy of Thomas Bewick, and the other in the bohemian world of 1960s and '70s folk movements and counter-cultures. The marriage of styles works. Music, dance, a love of storytelling and the bacchanale seem to be the underlying inspiration for many of his illustrations. Bates has a designer's sense of space and proportion, but an artist's sensibility. The careful arrangement of elements, a thoroughly practiced hand and an artist's flourish do combine to create works of art in black and white.

Gaspereau has composed both editions in standard proportions, hard bound in cloth with an embossed illustration on the front cover. The similarity hints at (I hope) an extended series of similar books on Canadian private presses. The margins are generous and the type set with care in attractive and appropriate fonts: Dante for Bates and Rimmer's own Amethyst Pro for *The Pie Tree Press*. I like very much the simple and strong title page for *In Black & White*, classic all-caps in black and grey, which dances well with the engraved frontispiece.

If I have any complaint with the design, it might be the utter lack of letterpress anywhere, save the embossed hardcover. For books that so enthusiastically describe the joys of letterpress, a letterpress printed dust cover, or perhaps a tipped-in hand printed illustration would have given the commercial edition, and its readers, a taste of the private press. One illustration – the cover of *A Christmas Carol* in Rimmer's book – is slightly off-register, in my copy at least. For a private-press book that might be damning. However, given the cost of the fine press editions and their limited numbers versus the opportunity to read well-written words and see illustrations and designs by two of Canada's best letterpress artists for \$60 each – and you guess my point. In issuing these trade editions, Gaspereau Press is giving a greater number of private press

enthusiasts the opportunity to read about two remarkable careers.

REVIEW BY LARRY THOMPSON

~ *Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia,
Fifth Edition*

Edited by Bruce F. Murphy
(Collins, 2008, \$72)

When silverfish attacked the copy of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature* (1939) that I inherited from my grandfather (who I never met, save through his books), I was devastated. The squat blue book was a quick reference when I was an undergrad at university, and always stood out as a paragon of what a literary reference book should be. Yes, it was old-fashioned and conservative, but it spoke from an earlier generation of what was possible in both its design and content.

When the publicist for the latest edition of *Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia* approached *Amphora* regarding the latest edition of a reference work famous, at least in U.S. circles, it seemed an intriguing concept. With the Internet offering so much information in an instant to curious readers, what could a new printed reference work do better? Priced at \$72 for a hefty 1,210 pages, one would hope the answer would be a lot.

And truth be told, it does offer a great deal, particularly for the casual reader who doesn't want to leave the armchair or sofa to Google some obscure reference in the middle of a book. The catholic embrace of *Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia* allows readers to shift from one book to another as they read.

The most recent edition offers entries on writers from the Asia beyond China, Japan and India, including the Philippines and Malaysia (but overlooks Singlish, one of the new varieties of English that gets a nod in volume's introduction). Hispanic writers from Latin America are recognized, too, as is Alcuin of York (who merits seven and a half lines).

Canada figures in entries on Margaret Atwood, Northrop Frye and L.M. Montgomery, among others.

The design of the book is generally pleasing, with bold-face sans-serif type for the entry