

AWARDS

Summoned to the capital

LAST DECEMBER ALQUIN member John Pass travelled to Ottawa to receive a Governor General's Literary Award for his poetry collection *Stumbling in the Bloom*. John has kindly allowed Amphora to print the speech he gave that evening at Rideau Hall...

Your Excellencies, fellow writers, honoured guests, what a singular pleasure it is to be acknowledged in this way by my country, to be a poet summoned to the capital, and without a hint of the apprehension that must accompany such a summons in less enlightened times or places, where a room at the fine hotel might be prelude to a prison cell, a place at the banquet a portal to the beheading. What a privilege it is to write in Canada, where one pursues poetry, if mostly in obscurity, most importantly and for the most part in security and comfort.

I do confess, however, to one tiny apprehension since my nomination—that I might now reasonably be called upon to make profound pronouncements about poetry, or worse, to summarize my own.

It won't, of course, be summarized. Like any art, like reality itself, it is haphazard and orderly all at once, and resists generalities, insists upon the integrity of its particulars.

So from the fabric of *Stumbling in the Bloom* I'd like this evening to tug one thread only, one that is not especially vibrant nor central to the weave but seems appropriate to prizewinning, and has been for me a kind of lifeline throughout this extraordinary experience. A number of poems in the book engage the dilemma, the jeopardy even, of human accomplishment. The most specific of these is the poem sequence *Everest*, which sprang from the coincidence that Edmund Hillary made his famous ascent of the mountain in May 1953, the month that

I arrived, at age five, with my parents and three-year-old sister, in Canada, immigrants from the U.K. From serendipity to the heart of things:

Since Hillary 1200
summiteers, 175 deaths against the tallest question:

what to do with a life?

What indeed? Human endeavour is paradoxical, is brought up perpetually against its antithesis; a mountaineer engages and comes to respect most what is not the mountain: precipitous space, fierce and frigid wind. Alongside my gratitude for this award, the generous certainty of its gesture, I'd like to place these few less certain lines, an edgy moment from my life in poetry where words encounter their antithesis, that is also their bedrock and *raison d'être*—the wordless world. Here is the final section from *Everest*, entitled "Horizon":

Like a streak of morning under overcast,
the wordless under the word, little curve
of earth's surface one covers even going
to the compost bin, even mowing the lawn.

Unknown, unknown but for cadence in us, a pace
participant in permanence, a vibrancy, pulse
not dramatic, not abstract either, of eternal

presences, of everywhere. A steady
light. Where gods move to accomplish
the pointedly pointless, deeply impossible thing.

For helping to sustain the possible—human
imagination, artistic life—against our tantalizing
horizons, I thank you all.

John Pass has also written a brief essay reflecting on winning the award, which can be read exclusively on the Alquin Society's Amphora Web page. Also posted are binder Lise Dubois' description of her design and binding for the award copy of Stumbling in the Bloom.

FOX RUN RAN

Anik See recently announced the end to her imprint Fox Run Press, though happily not the end of her printing and publishing activities. Having relocated to Amsterdam last year (leaving behind her presses and type), See is launching Fish Gotta Swim Press, which will produce books from small spaces in Europe made available to her. The new imprint will employ both letterpress and digital technologies, which will allow her to publish works of longer lengths but still with the political bite and handcrafted quality for

which Fox Run Press has become known. The first book from the new press, titled *postcard*, will be a novella about a young woman's struggle to find a semblance of self and connectedness in the aftermath of loss. It will be issued in an edition of not more than 50 copies this spring. Meanwhile, the few Fox Run books still in print include the deluxe issue of John Pass's *Twinned Towers*, a long poem that also appeared in *Stumbling in the Bloom*.

See www.foxrunpress.com for details.