

# The Truth is Laughter

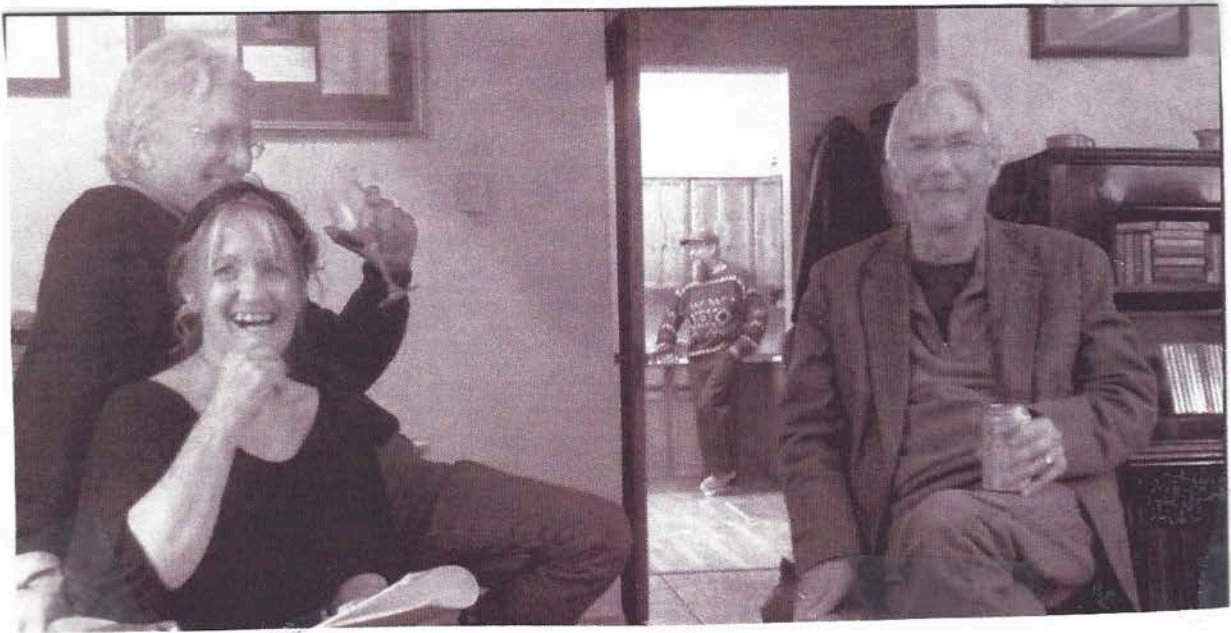
Robin Blaser

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*for*

Brian Fawcett

*Seventy Five*



An Assemblage  
by  
Barry McKinnon

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**Fawcett, Blaser & Simon Fraser** (from *Chairs in the Time Machine*: McKinnon unpublished memoir)

The Simon Fraser University poets were Robin Blaser and his young followers and students, Brian Fawcett, and Sharon Thesen (newly married and both from Prince George where they grew up). Along with Alban Goulden and others, they edited and printed the punky hard-edged *Iron* magazine. After *Iron*, to give a clearer sense of *their* stance, Fawcett started *NMFG* (*No Money from the Government*) which he describes as being "playful and disrespectful", which also inspired Brett Enemark's *NMBS* (*No More Bullshit*) — as a recalcitrant counter attack to much bad writing of the day. They were, in my view, Prince George toughs in the big city out to cause a literary stir, which they did with great intelligence, seriousness and humour.

The first thing I heard about Brian Fawcett was that he once sat in a back chair at a poetry reading in Vancouver with a big rock in his hand and was poised to throw it on the stage if the reader's poetry didn't measure up. That scared me a little, plus the usual Prince George mythology that accompanies anyone who has lived here more than two years: you become logger-tough with a case of beer, and a no b.s. kind of mud-on-your-boots chauvinism that sets you against the cleaner outside world.

Brian left Prince George with rock in hand well before I got here in 1969. But we knew about each other and decided - more so probably on his part than mine - to a territorial stand-off. Initially on my first impressions, I wanted to get to hell out of Prince George fast. I didn't see or care about the place as "poetic subject matter," didn't want to be the chief bull goose loony local poet, whereas he, perhaps, began to sense that Prince George *would* be the central metaphor and subject for his writing life. *His place*. This, as we know, has turned out to be the case. I'm thinking of books like, *Cottonwood Canyon*, *Aggressive Transport*, *the Secret Journal of Alexander McKenzie*, *My Career with the Leafs*, and more recently *Virtual Clear-Cut*, *Local Matters* and *Human Happiness* — prose books (along with John Harris's short stories) that come closest to defining who we are as a complex community bandied about by complex local and global forces.

He ignored me in the summer of 1971 in Vancouver when we played in the Cosmic Baseball League and attended the writers' meetings at Stan Persky's communal house. My diffidence versus his cocky self-confidence either fueled the standoff, or confused us both so much that we couldn't speak even if we tried. Probably what we eventually came to know was our common struggle with Prince George, and that its secret and beauty could only yield its clarity by virtue of the intensity of one's engagement with it. I had to, as it turns out, learn what Brian knew early on: you had to let yourself get kicked around in the raw Prince George social, political and environmental contexts, and then to know these dimensions as the raw source for a poetry and writing that has weight and counts.

In the early 70's with the help of Gerry Gilbert on the Vancouver end, we organized a writing conference and invited a group of coast writers to Prince George and the college. The list was a reflection the Vancouver writers I most wanted to hear: George Bowering, Gladys Hindemarch, Daphne Marlatt, Roy Kiyooka, and Brian Fawcett (bringing with him a reputation as a tough guy from Prince George, who was also damn smart with a quick tongue that could send those weaker who pissed him off into serious hiding.)

Brian was at the top of the invitation list. I figured if we couldn't find a place to meet in Vancouver, I'd have to get him here on his home turf. We could drink and arm wrestle and compare our syntax while moonily looking at the cut banks from the trailer park or some other

vantage point in the pulpy air of the local geography. As it was, the silence continued, but now at least with less paranoia and suspicion.

Late at night after one of the conference sessions a group of us ended up in a downtown motel in a miasma of beer and after hours camaraderie. I decided to stay (so did about 10 others) - and at some point in the party I curled up on the floor. Brian had a double bed all to himself - sprawled and sleeping in territorial splendor until I crawled up, cold with crink in neck to steal the bottom edge of the mattress and enough motel quilt to cut the chill. Before sun up I'd pushed him to the floor at least once. Eventually we both found a boundary line - two straight men in a coexistence, a truce that opened the space for a life long friendship to begin and last over 40 years of talk, discovery, and fun.

During his many visits, we would always, "gumboot the drag" which meant a long stroll up and down 3<sup>rd</sup>Avenue and George Street where he'd point out the places where he worked and hung out as a teenager, telling stories about the variety of characters and misfits who shaped his upbringing and sensibility. One day we hit a suit sale at Morrison's Men's Wear and each bought a cheap gray cotton suit on a clearance rack (\$15 comes to mind) - and not exactly a perfect fit. We put them on and continued the walk, looking as Joy put it, like two dimwitted stock boy clerks from Northern Hardware - sleeves too short, tight shoulders, and pants at mid-ankle. We had a laugh and never wore them again. These sale "purchases" became part of our habit when together - including the purchase of a pair of pink women's clearance shoes we bought from Fichtner's Footware on George Street. We made Joy put them on for a stroll, who then gave us hell for calling her Minnie Mouse. They were ugly, oversized pumps out of style (thus the clearance table), but a good way, we thought, to get even for the hardware poke and our gray suit embarrassment. Either way, we'd end our days in laughter amidst the serious talks about place, poetry and the tasks of writing. As Brian once put it, poetry is the one place "to let all of the burners go". Prince George was a good place to dig in and do it.





Fawcett, Brian. Capital Tales. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984. 204 p. \$8.95 pbk. ISBN 0-888922-221-5. CIP

Fawcett, Brian. The Secret Journal of Alexander Mackenzie. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985. 206 p. \$8.95. ISBN 0-88922-227-4. CIP

Brian Fawcett is a poet and short story writer who's been involved in a long and serious study of a particular territory (Prince George/North America) for the past 20 years. He's a literary surveyor, a persistent lone wolf circling the burning fire — an explorer who looks closely at the world from "odd angles" and perspectives until the complex and haywire truth begins to emerge.

What do we see and what do we learn in these two books? Some of the stories are a kind of unofficial journalism — quick, accurate, "realistic" sketches of northern life and attitude: Two young men who work part-time in a clothing store casually watch, as entertainment, a drunk get repeatedly beaten and tossed from a bar. Friends and enemies fist-fight to prove macho notions, seemingly necessary rituals for young men who want to survive a raw, tough, and brutal place.

Do we know the northern myths? This is a world of loggers, stripped forests, town administrations that justify any form of industrial work in terms of "progress" (sulphur pollution is "the smell of gold"), the real estate/chamber of commerce conball boosterism, foreign-owned mills, fly-by-nights and entrepreneurs, drunks, Indians, the 4-wheel drive moose hunters, and those who are hopelessly boozed-out in trailer parks and shopping malls, etc. These are the common images. This is northern sociology. But these images by themselves are without much meaning or interest. Fawcett's task as true mythmaker, historian and surveyor is to get us beyond these surfaces and clichés into the heart of darkness, and to put us in touch with "the deepest passions and intelligence of the human species". He wants us to "learn" this world, and know it as our "true inheritance". How he does this takes consummate skill, intelligence and imagination.

The Secret Journal of Alexander Mackenzie gives us an imagined history. It is a "secret" journal and the unofficial truth written by an explorer moving dangerously and blindly into new territory, always in anticipation of discovery. The 1793 journal reveals Mackenzie's sense of "the savagery and vacancy of this land" and his own struggle to defeat the emptiness within himself. He also dreams the future: "Should these wilds be one day civilized it will be by men of will and opportunity to whom all grace and soft arts will be nothing." These and other prophecies that come in his dreams define an ethos that ruthlessly informs the world that Fawcett, finally, wants to reveal. Big business invades the town. Two guys named Glen Smith (the "invisible invaders") fly into town, blackmail, threaten, and apply their big corporate "methods" to squeeze out the local little guys. What everyone learns is "screw your buddy before he screws you." This "modern" world becomes an industrial waste land. "The surplus is gone" in the land of plenty. Those who survive it seem beaten, paranoid and stunned and keep their mouths shut, or make simple homilistic excuses to keep the real truth at bay. Others suicide, or lessen the weight of their own failures at "success" by various illusory means (i.e. heavy drinking with pals from the Modified Golden Rule Club). "Hand Grenade Gary", the American-hero-hunter, charged with manslaughter after arguing with and blowing up his hunting guides, blows himself up in his camper before the jury's verdict is given. A young man writes about shooting his brother during a bear hunt. His doctor suggests it would be good therapy to do so. But these characters, whether lost in the woods (or misled in some bizarre way by their own foolish "manly" confidence that usually ends in disaster), never seem to know, in any deep sense, the source of their intense and disturbing alienation. They tell "the stories" as if it's not really their job to understand them.

On the surface these marvellous tales are "entertaining", but Fawcett doesn't want to let his readers slip off the hook, nor does he want to pound them on the head with messages about capitalism, industrialism, ecological stupidity, or about pioneer redneck politicians who could be too easily blamed for mistakes of the past. What finally, then, can the artist say when the field of experience is as complex as Fawcett's is?

A key to Fawcett's vision might lie in the stories that move beyond the recognizable "real" surfaces to a recurring fantastic image of a cottage/castle with herds of tame deer, formal gardens, and flamingos -- a landscape out of time, out of kilter, out of place. It is a "paradise" on an island in the McGregor river that mysteriously exists and then as mysteriously disappears in the mist -- Garden of Eden that creates a puzzling unfathomable dimension for those characters who experience it. Mackenzie tries to write about it on June 18, 1793. "I do not know the purpose of the island, nor how it (the cottage/castle) came to be built upon this wilderness I thought myself the first man of European origins to invade..." The narrator's footnote unconvincingly explains that the physical trauma of Mackenzie's near-drowning "has produced a series of visual and intellectual hallucinations", and that he is a temporary victim of an "altered state of consciousness". August Jenson, a surveyor, comes across the same place in 1932, and tells his "secret" 50 years later: "I had blundered into paradise, into what seemed the Garden of Eden itself". This paradise/garden motif is repeated again in "The Castle", a story about Ozzy Schultz, a hard-nosed self made cat-skinner millionaire. When he returns to this "paradise" a second time, it is gone. He garishly attempts to recreate an artificial version (plastic trees, moss, deer, beaver, and seven hundred plastic flamingos, etc.) -- but the results are an insane parody of human imagination and possibility.

What is this world, what is real, and where lies the truth? In the last story "My Friends are Gone", Don Benson makes his retreat from a corrupt and violent human universe to live in a cave with the bears. he is a kind of self-expelled oddball who glimpsed some of the truth. At night, in the cave, he hears another creature singing. The singing becomes a howl and then a moan. Don Benson knows that the bears will hunt this creature down. And while Benson's fate is not as clear, Fawcett might be asking us to make a guess.

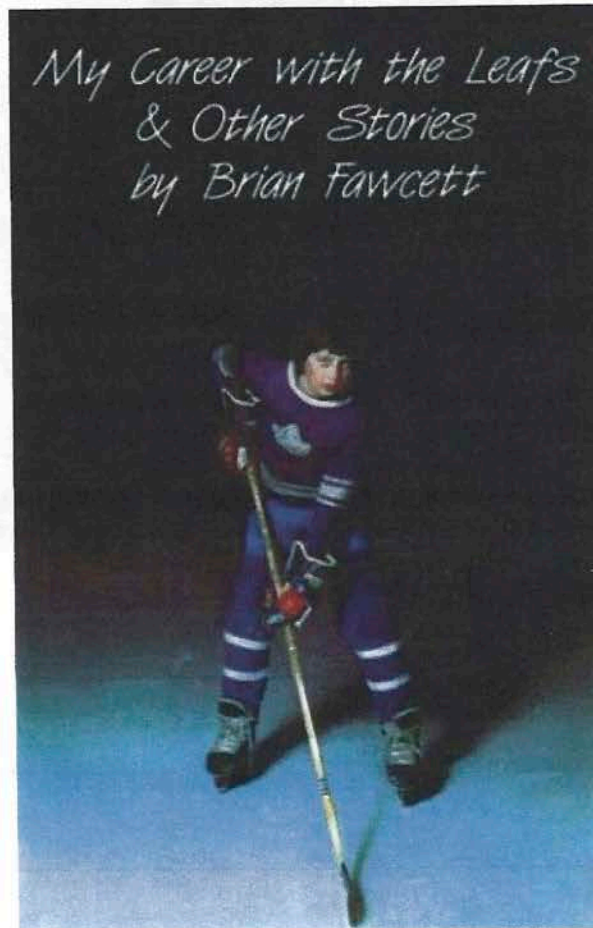
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## A note on Brian Fawcett's Career as a Professional Hockey Player

In 1982 Brian Fawcett wrote a book of short stories called *My Career with the Leafs* – including, as the title suggests, a first person account of his professional career as a hockey player. Who would not believe this claim? The last time I saw Fawcett encountering a winter sport he was impossibly twisted up in a snow bank with cross country skis pointing skyward in a dangling off-centre X. He had been a pro hockey player too?

Fiction is fiction. When I announced to my 40 forestry students that Fawcett was coming to read from his book *My Career with the Leafs*, they began to spread the word: *Hey, there's this PG guy who played with the Leafs & he's coming to read from his book!*

The foresters packed the room to line up for autographs and talk hockey. His prose has always been extremely skilled, inventive, & convincing so those foresters, skeptical or not, liked Fawcett and the reading - and may have changed their minds about the value literature and the human imagination. Whatever other superlatives to describe Brian's writing – we also know he has a lot of fun doing it.





Brian Fawcett: reading at the Words/Loves Conference  
Prince George, 1980



Fawcett sitting; poet and musician Peter Huse standing.

Fawcett read from *Permanent Relationships* – the irony in these poems evident: the impermanence of relationships was as a sign of the times and present at this time in Brian's life – and an amazing long poem, "The Hand", from *Aggressive Transport*.<sup>1</sup> Brian's poetry is risky, political, polemical /hard edged - always with an unembellished intelligence, against as he might say, bullshit as such. Robin Blaser had been his teacher, and schooled him in the modern masters, but I believe much of Brian's poetic and stance a result of growing up in a tough 50's/60's Prince George and a sensibility consistent with the voice below. He taught me, mostly, that the post-lyric possibility was to engage the social, the larger world and to, as he put it: "let all the burners go".

### Working at Night

Nearly everything  
is inspiration:  
The stink of pulp mills, new moon  
some stars or aircraft  
blinking through heaven.

Earlier he groceries cost far too much  
and the supermarket was filled  
with fat people.  
One woman yelled at my child

---

Get out of the way!  
thinking he was her own child thinking  
children oughta get out of her goddamned way.

And he is disquieted by the silences  
wanting to play games of war  
anxious over the absence  
of telephones and running water  
beset by fears of the dark  
inspired by a night that is as infinitely old  
as he is young.

This island shore at night  
is beautiful, restless sea, everything  
I already knew it was.

It isn't Mother Nature interests me  
but the innocence of children  
and the possibility  
of human beings  
bearing down  
in the darkness.



**Breaking Surface: a review of *Permanent Relationships* by Brian Fawcett.** Toronto: Coach House Press, 1975. \$3.50.

In this book, you don't get, "oh that I were in the arms of my love again" – but rather,

a series of a string of, a growth of  
resentments

and – what is under the writer's nose: the fact of permanent dissolution of a permanent relationship, a situation that doesn't allow for poetic gloss. The bust up is the bust up of the man, driven to this kind of action:

looking for someone or something  
to bust up. I'll kill  
myself  
first  
and hate you for it.

*Permanent Relationships* is a book of examinations, admissions, analysis of the admissions, a series of anti-lyrical, lyrical letters and finally a process of the mind itself attempting to take hold of a breaking heart. The heart takes care of itself – moving against the conventions which won't allow hatred (hating enough that that itself becomes the final form of love, when the sense of permanence, bred by conventional marriage, is over) .

I have thoughts of killing everything  
that sings or loves or lives in the rain

Many won't like this book – an achievement in itself – especially if readers expect the old lyric mode – not wanting the real pain and the immediacy of that pain. They won't like the self-indulgence of the writer, consciously writing out of the real state he's in.

no nothing rimes anymore

Not that he can't rime. That is another side of the struggle for some kind of self-legitimacy and the singular voice that must be listened to. Even image and metaphor are suspect. Fawcett believes in the didactic and that writing must become direct statement, out of an insistence to be understood by what's being said. Literally, we are told of the sub-vocal 'mutterings'.

when will they break the surface  
and what or  
how much do they mean?

What *they* mean is a complex clarification that the reader may often feel left out of. We are not companions in this. The threefold push is to the self, the other, and the language. Somewhere along the line, the writing becomes more important than anything else. The other, whoever she is, giving way

and how I talk now

about other things, and think  
only of poetry when I'm alone

to write & get the shit in too,  
to break the lyrical to make  
the landscape clear

They will say, he got the shit in too – the marginalia is often the muse at work – the surprise of what was unintended ... the shit. Saying sometimes, " I can say it this way, but won't." Fawcett's toughness is that he won't yield much. He's stubborn, but something important lies beneath that. Perhaps the new forms arise from the artist's direct treatment of whatever he finds himself in, driven by the fear of what he will say, writing to cease disturbance and not to yield to some pre set of conditions. This book moves freely in that sense and begs several questions. Would you want to mess with this sucker? Yes.

On the surface of Fawcett's other writing, there is violence, cruelty and a necessary toughness in the face of it, without allowable sentiments which would change or colour the facts at hand. Fawcett's pose and personal compensation is perhaps to become as tough as he can – but that he doesn't (almost a 'weaking' at times) – attracts me to his work. I think that's where the energy comes from. The voice is strong, but it is on the *edge* even though his intentions seem to want to exert complete control. Out of this an interesting presence is created. O.K. ! Yeah! and ... the punch! Simply, the revelation and what pokes thru the surface is the language of his vulnerability and for a change, poems that contain intellect, as statement of his relationships with language and women, permanent or not. After it all,

women are splendid, different,  
difficult as hell & I will  
want to lie next to them.

# SERIOUS



# IRON

Serious' Iron, .ca 1971

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## Brian Fawcett

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### *Iron* · NMFG

Brian Fawcett's roots are in Prince George where he grew up and developed a sharp-edged view of the world. At Simon Fraser University where he was an undergraduate and graduate student, he started *Iron* magazine (1967) and gained a presence on the Vancouver literary scene. While many of his generation continued on in the academies, Fawcett entered the civic bureaucracy (The Greater Vancouver Regional District), worked as an organizer and planner, and wrote books of poems that show a deep social and personal / inter-personal awareness (*Permanent Relationships*, *Creatures of State*, and *Aggressive Transport*).

In the mid 70s Fawcett again put his editorial ideas into practice with *NMFG* (No Money From the Government) – a magazine that gave space to writers who he felt engaged the world with sense and accuracy.

In the past few years he has been writing prose full time (*My Career with the Leafs*, *Capital Tales*, *The Secret Journals of Alexander MacKenzie*) – books that show Fawcett's continuing ability to make important discoveries about place, self, and language.

The interview was taped in the summer of 1976, Vancouver.

**Barry McKinnon:** To begin with can we talk about *Iron* to get some of the history of the magazine.

**Brian Fawcett:** *Iron* was started in Simon Fraser in 1967 – 1966 actually (the spring of 66) and at that time what we wanted to do and the kind of notions that we had about printing a magazine was that what you were really imitating was probably the *Paris Review*, or if not that, the *Canadian Forum* or one of those very punchy, glossy magazines from the east. And very quickly, we moved after the 4th issue (we managed to do 14 or 15) – we moved to 8 ½ X 11 because that gave the writers the most ground. The editorial policy that we pursued, or that I pursued (and it got to the point with that magazine that there was really no editing done), was that it was run on an open space basis. I guess the predecessor of *Iron* that I most admired was probably *Open Space*<sup>1</sup> from San Francisco rather, than say, *Tish*, or any

other magazine around. Which is, that the function of the magazine was to give a limited number of writers *ground* rather than to pretend somehow that you're making a public display. At the time, certainly myself and most of the people I knew didn't have any misgivings about why we were writing. We thought it was totally interesting to just simply be writers and talk about writing as if that had no connection with, like, careers or fame.

**McKinnon:** But did you find that you needed a magazine to give some kind of cohesiveness to you as a group and what you were doing as writers.

**Fawcett:** The other magazines that were around at that point, at least in Vancouver, were magazines like *Prism International* and *The West Coast Laroo*<sup>2</sup> – all of which were disasters. I very quickly learned that the standard method of editing a magazines is to edit it like you would run a concentration camp. You make sure that nothing ever relates to anything else in any coherent way. The writers are never allowed to have any association with the other writers, so that what you're doing is essentially promoting an international sense of poetry – which has been precisely what has been wrong with poetry – that international sense of it is utterly powerless and finally it is a bunch of silly academics or a bunch of silly human beings pretending that what they're doing still has the kind of power that it may have had 3000 years ago, 2000 years ago. So we got out of that pretty quickly. In fact, some of the last issues, the last 4 or 5 essays I edited completely. It got to the point where I was at least producing them – I wasn't actually printing them but was doing all of the arranging for it myself. In the beginning it was run by a group of people. We had an art editor, and this is ridiculous given the scale – it was ridiculous – but you've got to remember we were imitating, you know, *The Paris Review*.

**McKinnon:** What connection did you have with the university?

**Fawcett:** Marginal. We never did accept any money from them but we did accept the use of typewriters and we did accept some private help – for instance, I think Ralph Maud financed a couple of issues. So we never took a government grant for the magazine because even then I think we were pretty suspicious about what happened to you if you ended up in the control of the institution. I mean that was a simple anarchist sense of 'don't let the bastards get you.'

**McKinnon:** One of the questions is – what do you want a magazine to do?

**Fawcett:** The people who taught me more about poetry than anybody else – Robin Blaser and Murray Schafer – advised me very strongly not to try and get recognition; in other words – don't publish. If you really want to say something, really want to publish something, work it out so that you have control over it. So as a consequence I've never actually sent a piece of mine out without knowing it was going to be published. I think I knew that what we were doing in the first place wasn't terribly important (and that the scale

most of us are even doing it on today is not interesting except from an in discipline point of view) – but that it was going to be interesting to other writers because they might learn how to write better from it. If they think it's going to contribute to the Truth and Beauty in the world, they are a little bit abstracted about it and if they think it's actually going to effect anything they are out to lunch.

**McKinnon:** What seems important to me are the motives for publishing, in the first place. I suppose one of the problems with the larger magazines is that the motives can be all wrong. In *Letters for Origin*<sup>3</sup> there are statements about what a magazine should do and some of the things that should be avoided. That book seems to establish a starting point that makes more sense than the waste of paper that goes on with some of the larger, slicker literary journals.

**Fawcett:** *Letters for Origin* was edited by Al Glover, whom I knew at that time – just about the time that *Iron* moved into second gear – and reading all that stuff really did affect a lot of the stuff. The interesting thing about that, interesting because it is not surprising, finally, is that we were practising that thing anyway. We were practising essentially that attitude. When you get to the later issues of *Iron* they are getting sophisticated in terms of how difficult it was to get them out – they were big issues. And I started attacking the notion of the magazine itself. Now, until, I think it was about the tenth issue, I would never print any biography just in order to resist that tendency to biographize everything. But in the last 5 or 6 issues I started fooling around with it and it was really a lot of fun. We made Norman Holmes Pearson the butt of a lot of our biographical jokes (Norman Holmes Pearson was the guy who had the rights to H.D.'s work and he sat on them for years and years and years). So that was like a message locally, it was a message to Robin Blaser to get off Jack Spicer's books and it was also a message to 'Normal' Holmes Pearson. I would do these editorials from, you know, from my desk at Harvard, when he was actually at Yale – there was a lot of jackassing around like that. I think the best issue, which was called *Serious Iron*, was generated by a letter of Linda Parker's, who was Charles Olson's secretary before he died. It was a good issue. At that time we were stealing stuff. We would just take stuff – steal it – and print it under the Havana Copyright Conventions, the gist of which is that anybody who wants to read something has the right to read it and that print is the property of anybody who wants to read it. Anyway what happened with Linda Parker was that she'd sent a letter to a friend of mine after reading one of the *Irons* and accused the whole Vancouver poetry scene of being terrifically incestuous. So what we did, was we made her the editor of the magazine – did this heavily serious issue which wasn't serious at all.

**McKinnon:** I came to Vancouver in 1967, and got the feeling that there



were distinct groups of writers working – for instance, the group at Simon Fraser University (and *Iron* as an obvious focus for that group) – whereas a magazine like *The West Coast Review*, which was being printed about the same time, was one of those magazines that was interested in taking submissions from anybody who wanted to submit from any particular place in Canada, or anywhere.

**Fawcett:** Well it was sort of like a log rolling pond. The editor of that magazine would print somebody else's poems who's an editor of such and such magazine. The best thing that ever came out of that, I think, was in the last issue of *Tish* that Stan Persky edited. The editor of *The West Coast Review* sent a letter around – this is standard stuff – and what he did was, he sent a letterhead with this poem, saying my name is such and such and I'm the editor of such and such a magazine (he will remain nameless), and I have published in the following list of magazines – and this big long list of magazines with a space for your mag at the bottom, right – so what Stan did was publish both the poems and the letter with the heading 'Always Glad to Help a Fella On The Make.' We had a really healthy sense of just how ugly the literary scene was.

**McKinnon:** *Tish* and *Iron* were two magazines that seemed to set up a kind of definition. I wasn't in the habit of sending a lot of poems out, but I would not have sent poems to *Iron* because I had the feeling I had no business trying to enter whatever was going on there. I don't know if that's a problem or not.

**Fawcett:** It's not a problem, because of the way that system works. If you grant that we were young writers working out the basic problems of how to do our work – then for instance if you had come to Simon Fraser to study – I would bet fifty dollars that you would have been part of that experience, because simply that's the way it worked. Any good writer (or any good writer who came to Simon Fraser) and who was not academic, who was not bent on a 'career,' had all those values – well shit, yeah, truth, beauty, and writing is the most important thing in the universe – was automatically brought into that thing. They simply became a part of it.

**McKinnon:** I'm curious about titles. I think they are crucial.

**Fawcett:** The title *Iron* has an interesting story behind it. The first time that we thought about doing a magazine was ... I was talking to a writer – he was a writer then – who was in Creative Writing at U.B.C., by the name of David Ristich. He later became the president of the Transcendental Meditation Centre of North America, or something. Anyway, we were sitting there thinking about names to call magazines and he's giving me all those kooky names. Everything had to have some Indian name, or something local and I said, fuck that noise let's call this magazine *Iron* or *Steel* or something – anything but something that has meaning. The whole point about the title of *Iron* was that it didn't mean anything.

**McKinnon:** Maybe too – that feeling of not being able to approach *Iron* – was that it appeared to have a tough and closed policy.

**Fawcett:** It probably may have been from the outside, but from the inside it seemed like ... we felt we were taking terrific risks in the sense of being serious. To be a serious human where I come from is a terrific risk – so you do that with a certain trepidation and you also do it with a kind of intensity that people from a more, say, educated background, a more cityfied background, don't have. Most of the people who were involved with *Iron* were kids from out of town.

**McKinnon:** That's interesting, because if you look at *Tish* too ...

**McKinnon:** Country kids. The only exception to that in *Iron* was Colin Stuart. Colin is an exception to everything – a marvelous exception to everything. What was happening at that time, o.k. – if you take what was going on around the magazine in 1968: there was a whole series of readings – I'm talking now about our social lives – there was a series of about 8 or 10 months where we read every week – oh Christ we read half of the *Cantos*, half of Shakespeare's plays, we read the whole of *Paterson*, we read all of Golding's *Metamorphoses* out loud. It was terrific. We were really engaged in writing and we became during that time very tough in terms of our attitude towards discipline in writing and that when you said something, you were goddamn well accountable for it. What's interesting about that, as an aside about most of the people involved there – our lives came apart at that point because to bring writing out into the open, is usually a pretty dangerous activity. And in '72 (it seems like a four-year stretch, and *Iron* sort of bridged the gap between that period – in fact, yeah, it ended in about 1971) there was another big spate of writers' meetings. At this point we weren't students anymore but we weren't, any of us, mature. That 1972 experience started off with Stan Persky and George Stanley. I came in and Alban Goulden came in and Daphne Marlatt came in and Gladys Hindmarch came in and you were there for a couple of those things, and they were very tough.

**McKinnon:** It was new stuff to me. What seemed to happen in Vancouver at that point, too – these incredible factions and distrusts.

**Fawcett:** Vancouver always had had that because there have always been a lot of writers and some pretty sharp differences in attitudes. None of us were making careers as writers although in some pure sense we were more writers than say the U.B.C. writing department were. We took a lot of big chances with our personal lives and those lives came apart of course.

**McKinnon:** I wonder, just speaking about the attitude of the magazine and some of the things that drove it – are there any points now that you are embarrassed by? It seems that *Iron* would be totally tied with all of your activities and I'm wondering if the things you learned then are still considered important – or dead ends. What can a mag do, in terms of what you do with yourself as an artist?

Fawcett: O.K. I think what happened with that magazine was – a lot of the things that happened were dead ends – a lot of the writers turned out to be dead ends – that's fair enough. We were working in a tradition and that tradition for us was very contemporary. It was Olson, Pound, and we were learning to do all the things they told us you had to do. What happened in '72 was that suddenly we were on new ground. I remember Stan saying one night with an enormous amount of excitement that we were at the point of making manifestos like Pound was in 1910 – between about 1910 and 1916. I remember George Stanley had this concept which was called P.T.P. (La Poesie Polyphonic ... I can't remember what it was). It was some French thing none of us ever understood – but it was like we all had P.T.P power and we were excited. And that was from finding ourselves suddenly on new ground and not being in any sense of the word mature writers at that point in time, not yet ... it really drove us into some interesting areas. I think most of the lessons we all learned from that '72 experience (which was fed by and large by *Iron*, probably more so than any other vehicle in the city ... any other magazine in the city ... because all of us who were deeply involved in it were also deeply involved in the *Iron* thing) – was that we'd sort of finished wrestling with our angels and there we were, out on the fucking street. What we found was that we were on the street by ourselves! We became publically personal (that was the great journal writing summer). Where that's gone since then: it's resulted in 7 or 8 books, none of which are thorough-going successes, incidentally and interestingly enough. And each one of us has gone from there into a different interpretation of what that public personalness gave us. But it was necessary to go through that whole personal business to get where we are now, which I guess is, for me at least and for one or two others, probably *NMFG* and then on the other side would be *Bed*.<sup>4</sup>

O.K., *NMFG* which primarily means NO MONEY FROM THE GOVERNMENT (that was the original title). Now it has some 42 anachronyms. Tom Grieves, one of the editors, reads it, NEVER MAKE FLIPPANT GENERALIZATIONS: that's really his bag and that's part of it too. It had been talked about for about a year before we actually started it and I'd come to some kind of personal impasse with what I'd been doing for the past 3 years. I've been working for the government as a planner which is like working as a domestic diplomat. And my politics had been going on the one hand radically to the left, and then ... another sense I was getting was a very clear sense that the key thing in our society today (and maybe it's always been true, but the most visible thing for me) – is *information*: what's the purpose of it and what do you do with it and how do you propose it? Finally I wasn't able to do anything valuable within the system. I went into that job with the government with a lot of funny notions about helping people from a populist point of view, with a belief in democratic institutions and a belief in ~~co-operative~~

action, which was sort of a residue from the 60s, and I found out fairly quickly that none of that stuff really works. It's not working right now. So after about a year of really intense frustration I said to hell with it and started editing *NMFG*.

**Mckinnon:** Did you find those political ideas a digression from the whole business of literature? You seem to be saying you were moving into an area of politics and then coming back to the fact that, for instance, a magazine or that writing might embody the politics somehow and make those ideas clearer.

**Fawcett:** Not completely. I have a kind of sense of what's going now is that when poets find themselves emeshed in the structure of government, it's usually a signal that it's an interregnum. My own understanding of language was what was making me effective, however effective I was (I was more effective than most people), and was allowing me a kind of edge on other people working within government institutions, but finally I was getting frustrated *and* I was also recognizing *first of all* that poetry *had to* have something to do with politics and that our political and economic lives were creating the models for our personal and poetic lives. I guess what I'm doing with *NMFG* is testing that out. I'm also in the process of testing my own generation. I want to see what it's got. So I made some pretty fundamental decisions after being plugged fundamentally or essentially as a writer with the Regional District working at writing tasks and having access to vast possibilities of distributing information. I mean you do some stupid brochure on jobs or something like that and then print 7000 copies most of which get thrown away and that gets a bit mind-boggling after awhile. What I did find out was if I was going to do a magazine at this point I was going to do it myself and I was going to set it up beforehand with a system which would allow me to work full time, which I think is a fact of life for most of us, and carry on this magazine. The main thing that a magazine would have to do to ever get the writers out of the fucking woodwork would be, first of all, to come out regularly. It would have to have a kind of economy of print, as the same time it offered a basic 8½ by 11 page which offers writers the greatest amount of fluidity in what they are going to do with writing on the page. It had to be cheap. I had to have access to equipment. I couldn't put it in the hands of anybody else. So we've moved back to something that's practically arcane. We're using Gestetner. We're employing some of the advances in printing technology within the past ten years – like using an IBM selectric. We've got our own ball and our own italic ball which gives the magazine a kind of uniformity so it always looks essentially the same. I have a mailing list of 99 people (I began with 99 people and I still have 99 people after 5 issues, but there have been something like 54 changes in that mailing list). We began with a mailing list which was what my definition of the genera-

tion was at that point – what my literary world was, and I included a lot of, not necessarily has-beens, but writers of an older generation who I think are no longer active in any sense of the advance of ideas in literature.

**McKinnon:** And it's interesting that the older writers aren't putting out magazines.

**Fawcett:** Well, no, they're all working for Scribners or something – the big presses. They've either made it, or they've not made it. I mean even Milton Acorn's got the Governor-General's Award, whatever that means. I sort of think that's the kiss of death for him. Those guys are through. When we started *NMFG* it wasn't clear what was happening but after about three issues it became very clear that one of the things we are doing with that mailing list was defining a generation. And it was no longer local – it was no longer strictly Vancouver or even strictly Canada. It was, who are the interesting writers in North America right now, as seen from Vancouver, admittedly. It's been pretty interesting.

**McKinnon:** *NMFG* seems to go beyond the whole idea of 'the local' (which is obviously a crucial concept), but maybe that's one of the shifts that's going on.

**Fawcett:** I don't know yet, because I haven't been confronted with that situation – how interested I am in publishing writers from outside that generation. For instance, the magazine carries as part of its logos that unsolicited manuscripts will be donated to the church. Now that's alright. We can say that because we don't want to be deluged by the creative writing mills in Indiana or wherever else those places are.

**McKinnon:** You just don't have time to deal with that.

**Fawcett:** We don't. The magazine's not sold because that's too much of a hassle. It's easier to just put out 40 bucks. It's good entertainment to do it.

**McKinnon:** There is a statement in one of Pound's essays. He says something about writers taking things into their own hands. You find that it's possible for one man to run a press and take control over the activities from the writing to the editing to the distribution and you can do it cheaply and quickly.

**Fawcett:** Well the other difference between *NMFG* and say *Iron* and certainly any other magazine I know – is that the express purpose of that magazine is to set off discourse. And that's what we're getting. I don't think the whole time I edited *Iron* I got more than five letters about the magazine – and we have a huge correspondence with *NMFG* – people asking to be put on the mailing list and writing long letters.

**McKinnon:** It's as if nothing has been going on for awhile.

**Fawcett:** There was a vacuum – it's also the four year period. It's time for another change of the orders.

**McKinnon:** Some of the work in *NMFG* I don't like, but that's fine. I have to deal with that. And I think that becomes one of the functions.

**Fawcett:** I deliberately publish stuff in that magazine I don't really like because I wanted in the first several issues, for instance, to open up a range of discourse. In the first issue there were sonnets, a collaboration, neither of which I like particularly as forms of expression.

**McKinnon:** That's ironic because haven't people criticized you for being too exclusive in your tastes? – then to have an issue with a range of forms from sonnets to a collaboration.

**Fawcett:** I think that's probably because of the influence of what I've been doing in the last 3 years. *NMFG* has also got a political content and I don't see that as artificial at all because that's where the discourse is now. Politics is in front of us in a way, maybe it always has been but given that we are not kids anymore – that we're at least practising artists though we may not be accomplished artists – that's the next content. Politics is the content that Olson's generation never dealt with. They stayed within the literary world and I don't think that any of us are going to be able to ... it's already apparent that, whether we like it or not, we're thrust out into the political realm.

**McKinnon:** I find more and more I'm looking for instruction which has to do with information, and partly has to do with something you once said about the necessity for poets to deal with what's under their nose. I think that's an important poetic. There is so much ornamental / lyric verse ... which doesn't do anybody any good.

**Fawcett:** Poetry has to be able to instruct or else it has no purpose because it's then just simply the personal, which we can't learn anything about because the personal is always finally inscrutable. Beauty is beauty and it's lovely but you can't learn much from it. We still get hit by trucks or we get run over by our own emotions or by somebody else's emotions. But we don't seem to learn because we think that the personal somehow has sanctity – that was the message that was given us in the past. But the form that instruction will take in the present generation is probably going to be a little more on the outside. Like, what do you know? I think Creeley proposed it in that short poem in *Pieces*<sup>5</sup> ... right at the end where he says,

what do you do,  
what do you say,  
what do you think,  
what do you know.

One of the great frustrations in writing is its disinterest in value questions. Plus no talk. Writers don't talk on the whole. I've always insisted on that as a condition of participation in anything. But it's only lately in relation to my own work that I'm dissatisfied with the kind of attention you get which is simply, like, a pat on the back, 'gee I like your work.' My response to that now is, 'what the fuck does that mean – c'mon, I want something more

solid.' And I think we have to start demanding more solidity in that area. For the poets not to talk about the concerns and connectedness of writing and make that part of the content of poetry is just an abomination. It's what happened with that prick Tennyson in the 19th century – who told all of us that – or copped out on the whole question of the artist in relation to the body politic as like some kind of entertainer for the upper classes – a manipulator of sweet language.

**McKinnon:** Ya, a magazine that's mimeographed regularly and that deals with these issues, becomes crucial. There is another problem too – that the writing that's taken as 'important' or 'crucial,' is often not.

**Fawcett:** Most writing is regarded, certainly in the press – the official big, and even in some of the small presses – as a function of culture. We've got to remember that culture is, like, high art. I don't care what the anthropologists and sociologists have told us it is. The condition of culture is such that if you're talking about commonly available culture it's simply a series of cybernetic manipulations that keep you from getting at the truth. If you are going to take a relativistic description of culture and say that's all it is, anything you do is o.k. You end up precisely in that individualistic bag of saying, 'well you've got your opinion and I've got my opinion,' and that's not interesting. And it's also non-communicative, so we have to go back to some of those kinds of moral propositions about what art is for. It's like Leroi Jones saying, that we have to remember that the thing behind art is thought and not get the order confused. It's the thought that's interesting.

**McKinnon:** Art, whatever we come to define it as, is really the only place, how did you put it? ... that you can let all the burners go.

**Fawcett:** We haven't been doing that. I think that's what we have to do. We've grown up thinking that poetry is, for instance, a display of emotions – that you're not called upon to have your thought clear or your ideas fully worked out and in proper relation to reality in the world. That's not true. If you want to say that all you're doing is arranging words and making prettiness, then you're operating at a range of feeling and emotion which is essentially obscure. Your best friend can't understand what the fuck you're saying except that he can enjoy the play of language which is, like sure, we all enjoy that. Let's not make something of it that it isn't. Because the way that language is being organized in the public realm is considerably more effective and frightening even on that level. Poetry always was 'effective utterance' and we've got to get back to that. Rational diction, as it were, in one dimension. Then you have to get all those things in there together and get the thing operating properly so that at no point are you without feelings, at no point are you without a rational diction which allows you to be understood by another human being. I mean you can attack rationalism, the use of reason all you want, but you can't get anywhere without it. You can't even talk

to your fucking next door neighbour unless you agree on certain things as diction. So we've got to get back to those things. If we want to talk technology then we have to go back to what technique is really about – which is not isolated from the world. The going techniques in poetry have just built linguistic isolation around a lyrical obscurity. That's always been the easiest thing to me – writing the sweet poem. I mean, a lyric is my weakness as an artist. I'm good at it. I spent three years of my life in studying it both on paper and in the streets. I also know the limitations of it. I want my own work to get out of that and I certainly want the magazine to drive itself through that morass. I don't know where *NMFG* is going. I don't have any idea what life it will have. I imagine it will have an organic life in the sense it will run out when its time comes.

## NOTES

- 1 Stan Persky (editor) *Open Space*, published in San Francisco during 1964. See interview with Stan Persky this book.
- 2 Reference to *The West Coast Review*, edited by Fred Candelaria, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.
- 3 Charles Olson, *Letters for Origin: 1950 – 1955*, edited by Albert Glover (Cape Goliard, 1966).
- 4 *Bed* ran for a few issues, 8½ X 11 mimeo format. Edited by Stan Persky, George Stanley and Scott Watson. No dates or editorials. As Persky says, 'we just printed our writing.' Circa 1977.
- 5 Robert Creeley, *Pieces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 81.



## Introduction for rob mclennan's *Collected Sex* (an anthology in process)

The poet Brian Fawcett in our many talks since we met in 1970 always pose and provokes the large questions he believes a poet needs to ask. He once said that the poem was the one place where the poet could *let all of the burners go* in his or her pursuit of truth and beauty. We've also agreed that the poet lives in a context of political, economic, social and historical dimensions – realities & insistences hardly evident in most Canadian magazine verse. Perhaps not so odd, then, that our shared aesthetic and practice of open verse and the long poem would also lead us to add sex as a large “subject” which we could then try to write “about” at some point in our lives. We might have briefly shuddered at the notion of a self-conscious project to direct the poem's event, but instead, I think we laughed like evil twins with a new chemistry set – and eventually embarked on sex at 31. Open sea ahead!

It really began like this: I asked Fawcett: “What is the most difficult thing to write about?” “Sex”! he said.

We were both 31.

If sex is the subject, where to begin? What occasion within the subject's range prompts a poet to write? This may be what the literary snoop wants to know but need not know. The poem becomes evidence of its own detail/energy and in some instances, evidence of the poet's struggle and inability to get to “it”. Sex at 31 was written, if I can remember, in about a week. But I can't forget the intensity of the emotional mess I was in: fear, guilt, and threat of loss – the sexual heat of jealousy. It wasn't a game. It wasn't a subject. It wasn't “writing”. But I knew my life depended on its articulation in poetry. *Sex at 31* was about as close as I could hope to get.

Brian finished his poem in the same year, before we turned 32. He published both poems in *NMFG* (No Money from the Government) – a 100-copy mimeo mail out.

Sex at 31 was now out in the world!

We next decided for some important or arbitrary reason to set a 7-year span before we'd tackle sex so directly as a subject again. Once young men (now in our later 60's) we moved on to Sex at 38, 45, 52, 59, ... poems that became autobiographical reports, & I hope, as well, perceptive measures of age, love, and sex – accounts of where we'd been on the stormy sea.

I confess, I never finished Sex at 45; it's lost somewhere in a file – a few tattered pages of low intensity notes. Sex at 52 is part of a manuscript in process, *In the Millennium*. In the fear of turning 60, I forgot to write Sex at 59, but did write a poem called *Sixty* that moves more so to poetry's other large dimension and preoccupation: *Time*

But sex is still the oldest story in the book.

My thanks to rob mcLennan for his research and resuscitation of the *Sex at 31* story (See *Poetics.ca*) and his idea for the *Collected Sex* project as a prompt and invitation for other poets to write *the difficult*.

### **Sex at ...A Few Other Notes.**

At various times and occasions other poets wrote their versions of *Sex at ...* poems. Artie Gold wrote his *Sex at 31* during a visit to Prince George – and as I often did with visiting writers – we printed the poem on my Chandler Price letterpress as a Caledonia Writing Series broadside. I'm not aware of how Margaret Atwood got a copy of Artie's poem, but she included it in her anthology, *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, 1982. Pierre Coupey and I during one of his readings and visits to Prince George went to a party and in one of our humorous and sardonic exchanges, scratched out *Sex at 31* in a matter of minutes on a cigarette pack. The next day we printed the poem as a literary satire – complete with sewn cover, dedication to Wally Stevens, a minimalist non/poem text, a fake press name (Weasel/Throne) & then preciously signed and numbered each copy with a fine pen. We got to laugh all the more!

Brian Fawcett and I, as part of the 7-year cycle agreement, independently wrote *Sex at 38*, but hours before we were to give a double reading at the Western Front in Vancouver, decided to experiment. We shuffled individual stanzas and verses of each poem to form a collaborative duet. At the reading, he would read his page, and then I would read my page. The commingled text worked well: 2 voices – 2 takes on the same subject. I later printed the duet as part of my Gorse Press series. Instead of the usual 126 copy run, I think I ran out of paper, time, or was otherwise waylaid by a demanding circumstance. I have the 3 extant copies on my shelf. Both of these poems, however, were published by Karen Mulhallen, the editor of *Descant*, as part of the *Male Desire* issue (Fall 1988).

The Peck's bad boy of Can Lit George Bowering, reversed the title & wrote a very funny satire: *38 at Sex*. A few years ago, George Stanley wrote the erotic *Sex at 62*.

This is to say that the various sequences Brian and I wrote exist as serious writing, but that we also had fun with the collaborations and the overall evolution of the project. We might now admit that none of the writing is really about sex at all – in the sense of D.H. Lawrence or Henry Miller's graphic and literal accounts, but rather writing as a temporal/corporeal inventory of one's complex relationship to the other as sexual being – and what that being inspires.

Sex at 38

✦

(a duet)

Brian Fawcett  
&  
Barry McKinnon

## Sex at 38

✦

The writing of *Sex at 38* began independently in 1982. The piece became a collaboration hours before a joint reading in Vancouver at the Western Front in May of 1983 when the writers discovered that the poem's elements (length, tones, images) spliced sympathetically. Surprised notes formed chords as the two voices met to read the duct. Ten years later, much revised, the pages meet again, interleaved. Brian Fawcett's voice begins the poem.

Imagine a fenced field  
covered with snow  
still and abstract  
after an early winter storm.

The ends of things  
become beginnings here,  
but more things seem to end than begin.

Storms don't simplify this field,  
but from the snow and cold  
a skein of lifted crystal  
streams along the wind.

I mean, how much easier sex at 38 would be  
if sex were like this field  
(or like those light-reflecting disco balls  
twisted only outward  
a radiance  
of being.



I'm beginning to think about other things.  
for instance, why  
the perpetual obsession with sex,  
bodily investments in new  
and increasingly obtuse desires  
for the acute  
not a matter  
of cute asses, pointed tits, nah,  
I'm tired of this give-and-take  
that ends up always on the take.

One (I) must choose  
between a self of leering isolation  
and the world  
where things are properties  
without investment possibilities  
or profits.

I'm calmer now, to learn. love may not save us. it is  
a longing, a condition,

(a tree I climbed  
to come out where?

*sex at 38:*

a tongue down your throat -

the impossible distance across the fog in a disco bar  
false beauty, anomaly - & trick mirrors thin you out -

to other lines and thoughts:

drinking sex at 38

I sneak looks  
at the dancing

female shapes



Age 38 and no escape from  
age 40, 45, 50.  
Someday I will be dead, but that  
is far off, *far off*. Here  
day to day drifts and currents  
compel me, deaths  
of will  
and strange pleasures.

I accept the mind as a constant presence:  
the imperative  
to peel the soft curves of desire  
into angles of intelligence  
which, occasionally taken aback  
expose the body.

we'd be intelligent, graced  
if we knew the ends, or the huge gaps in knowledge  
filled by false surety, confusions, and cycles  
of sex -  
or biology,  
when they never say

*I love you*

Up at 4 A.M. writing  
in the empty house  
rearranging my head  
after another disastrous erotic adventure ...

It isn't that the spirit ain't willing.  
Rather, it intersects with a body  
grown hesitant and indirect  
about nearly everything  
not the least of which  
the experience  
of human love.

The "you" once so simple  
has become a confusion of remembered  
bodies, events and infections

wary even of wariness itself, veteran  
of everything but indifference.

But that has crept into my bed  
the way the cat does,  
nestles in but doesn't sleep

keeps me wide awake  
demanding to be fed.

I want

to say -

*stay, with me*

*sex and love*

I guess I'm scarred  
but not quite scared.  
There's a very simple wisdom I've learned:  
Do not suffer unless compensated  
be delight or knowledge.

Maybe I don't like the new painkillers enough --  
Demerol, Atavan, sexual satisfaction  
in an unsatisfactory world.

All this apparently benign misinformation seems like  
an insufferable redirection of our rights  
into institutions (mostly financial)  
out of control and without reason.

Getting fucked takes on an entire new meaning:  
Unsavory moonlight  
and mechanical devices.

we're dummies

Maybe we're just animals  
trying to figure out  
where we will sleep and how  
with the season against us, and  
too distracted from fighting amongst ourselves  
to hunt or rest.

A healthy heterosexual male  
is like the sabre-toothed tiger --  
all dressed up and no place to go  
but the bone-pile. Some scrawny Amazons  
in the distance waving pointed sticks  
and shouting phrases we do not  
through our obsolete finery

understand.

I've imagined myself  
in old stories - big hearts & true romance  
but knew I'd get turned in  
snatched on: stolen paper, & touched  
breasts

- the women -

a preclusion to sex. 38 - January - 83

sense last chance to practice before the darkened mirror

(before

I cross the open

naked

to speak

in the void

of all such places



Yes, but they mean well, these women  
and so do I.

We all want to be loved,  
or maybe we just want  
to do the right thing

in the face of absolute evidence  
that it is situationally impossible  
or irrelevant.

Yet there is something good in it.  
I've stopped thinking of women  
as anything more than human:  
they are women,  
my lovers. And this,

all of it,  
is human love.

revealed

& accused. - at 38

I had to hide  
& have it out

with everyone who thought they knew  
who fucked who

Snowdrifts pile against the fences  
as I try to clear my head:  
cigarette smoke, a hangover,  
Jazz on the radio, books on the bedside.  
Next to one another,  
the Penguin Book of the Physical World  
and a dictionary of Angels.

I start to laugh at my own absurd choices  
but lose whatever mirth I've earned  
in a fit of coughing.

I wanted

a little space. my five year old says:

*-you can do anything you want-*

(this language as I shave ...

There are days when everything I know  
is unspeakable or at least  
not to be spoken of in polite company.

A pimple on my chest just above the left nipple  
is infected,  
a suspicious mole on my shoulder  
I'm convinced wasn't there a few days ago.  
My prostate aches  
from the booze and coffee I drank last night.

I never thought loathing  
would be like this,

not me.

desire

diminished

but I've still got  
hopes -

a cheap bargain  
when the vest in the close-out sale comes  
my way  
- yet I don't forget the line we draw  
and what's learned in & from abandonment

sex includes everything you are & know  
I guess

so I can go on about it

It's nothing personal, of course.  
So out of perversity  
I make a list --  
no longer proud numbers or names  
but rather the streams of events,  
variously sweet and bitter  
mean and meaningless  
that meet in my body as memory  
and the trigger to desire  
I can never quite find  
when it's relevant.

It's like gazing into  
the barrel of a shotgun, knowing it's loaded,  
that the hair-trigger is getting worn from over-use  
and that the gun may not be mine to fire anymore.

Some slick-eyed television sociologist  
assures me that yes indeed  
this is what life means, this is  
what we all want:  
simple choices, a few wild violets  
and the tubesteak boogie. If this  
is my life,  
I fucking well refuse to live it.

But when I try to argue against it  
a government agent dressed up like a pimp  
ambles up and asks with a sneer  
if maybe I ain't getting enough  
and of course I'm not getting enough,  
and of course I'm not getting laid right.

It feels like the entertainers have taken over,  
and the entrepreneurs are in or under every bed.  
The perverts will soon follow,  
wanting to watch from a safe distance,  
children giving blowjobs in the backstreets,  
simulated rape/snuff  
on suburban anonymous videotape,  
no names or faces bared

but the asses pump up and down  
beneath the cheap Kleig lights,  
the cameras whirr in our heads  
and the wreckage piles up,  
dumped over the fence into my field

ancient breathless grunting bodies  
I acknowledge  
with my own.

for myself - I thought I could barely live. I hid away  
in a kind of misery, a kind of periodic  
ecstasy of self possession  
(results of falling apart

yet sure  
of the belly I came from  
( know she held me



In the field a sudden herd of deer  
graze beneath a leafless tree,  
their soft snouts poking through  
dried couch grass --

and thistles.

Oh well.  
I believe that  
no field is utterly desolate,  
that there are things in every field  
impossible to eat,  
and that we eat them anyway.

What am I to make of these deer?

Reversing "normal" consumption economics  
human sexuality craves thistles  
remembering what once were delicacies  
and mouths like velvet

grown brutalized by Time's Winged Chariot  
hurrying near ...

In other words, sex is  
aversion therapy.

there is the outer. here is the inner. there is a point  
where it doesn't make a difference

*Maybe there's nothing to this.*

It seems like nothing holds onto desire except words  
and the strong ones have all bled to death.

Love's liberty consists now of the single  
and not entirely welcome insight  
that the craving for sexual pleasure recurs,  
but with increasingly specific instructions  
about how to get off.

All of which is a complicated way of saying  
most of what I've wanted in life  
is to get laid.  
Then having said it, I wonder  
if it is still true. I shrug --  
the reason it isn't true now  
is that my language has deranged  
too many of the necessary illusions.

And maybe,  
just maybe,  
there are better things for human mouths to do.

*sex*

*at 38*

I wonder will I ever get to it and will  
the looking help or go against that which I think I sought

- in this case, also the gray mind at 38  
closing and opening  
sexless a sea muscle, but

wasn't it only an idea? what we loved - the  
semblance of a coherence - enriched voids of human purpose  
- the cunt as entrance / ecstasy ?

maybe we'd just rather rod around in cars which is not  
sex at 38

sex at 38 is staggering thru the blank world

full of wonder

Look, this is the 1980's.  
Who can fault me?

I expected to be nuked before the age of 21.  
When I survived I made "Forever is 18 months"  
into an operating system,  
and did my best anyway,  
spurred by the erotic nihilism  
that was the spirit of the time and place.

Ah, but in me it bred  
a soft sneer and a muttered "bullshit"  
when the visigoths began to shout "Heil Hitler",  
"Heil California", and began  
to speak the Lord's Prayer of the Chamber of Commerce.

I've loved others,  
been a loyal friend  
and haven't betrayed the children  
I never believed I'd live to have

and who may be nuked  
before they reach 21.

I get thinner, lose weight  
anxious from the belly up,  
silence & the opaque creeping fog of sex at 38 *keep talking* versus

*talk:* thrust of verb and fragment becomes our sex -  
the world opening female, trees & birds & shoots  
& rushing spring northern creeks, dusty grass & fiddleheads

my head is in the clouds. so be it. fuck the tree hug the rock

So at times sex is funny, silly  
easier because I realize  
it was never totally serious  
except inside my head, where  
some cornpones philosopher is always telling me  
I can't have my cake and eat it.

Yet all those months, years  
when I couldn't ever quite concentrate  
on anything else  
weren't really wasted.

Then I grin and think  
I'm free  
but whatever part of me  
is truly free  
begins to laugh,  
knowing better.

I'm learning to talk:

- *no fear here*, starts as a boast, but I half believe it

sex at 38 may be no more

than a little faith, an image:

the beautiful girl in class in bibbed pants with the word *love*

fading on her shirt



I grow bored with blizzards,  
with the dull moans of the other starving animals  
grazing a field that won't sustain them.

I imagine myself wandering off, older  
if not much wiser,  
mumbling to myself  
that sex is a predatory business.

How *did* we come to be predators with  
drool hanging from our chipped fangs?  
And if I am one,  
how did I land up in this field  
once verdant promise  
now nothing  
but a stockyard?

Maybe somewhere there is a forest,  
maybe there  
I am a beautiful predator,  
--and maybe these other starving predators  
I sense around me  
are good to eat.

Or maybe the moans I'm hearing  
are my own.

So I turn to the field,  
convinced once more that  
there is nothing else

but to wait for the paradise  
where no one ever waits  
and everything is revealed.

and what they think, will not matter - almost a curse  
that turns to save you.

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