

News from the Feminist Caucus, by Anne Burke

This month news from Bernice Lever, Heather Spears and Penn Kemp; reviews of *Safe Words, Poems*, by Michelle Brown; *Tell: poems for a girlhood*, by Soraya Peerbage; *Narrow Passageway* by, Connie T. Braun, and two reviews of UNSPOKEN, also by Connie T. Braun.

News from Bernice Lever:

I have Carla Shafer—head of World Peace Poets, in Bellingham, WA, her Feb.1–5, here. —and having fun & writing poems, too, between walks, etc. Mild here... know of the Quattro books as I am a pal of Allan Briesmaster who did edit and work with Luciano Iacobelli who is BIG force in Toronto literary events! I'm always happy to encourage active talented poets/writers to use their energies for LCP! I need the time to sort my boxes of old LIT. papers & journals for archival deposit:

Just getting my energy back—flew to Trail, BC on Dec. 20 and was to return Dec. 28— as I had a big book launch I was involved with—

“CANADA 150—“FAR & WIDE” a multi-cultural collection of 140 writers and 10 art’photo-people!! I was 1 of 6 main editors—under Sophia Zhang, who helped with trans. from Chinese: Mandarin.

I did get some very good entries—all genres—NOT just poetry—and so I await... we had hoped for “I love Canada” messages or theme? Many languages involved—3 good entries from Morocco, Nepal, and Nigeria—all 3 have never been here!! — but admire what they learn from books and TV—especially our YOUNG leader has once said— “Young men with children do NOT want war—just old guys wanting some big attention in their last years!!” Worth an article/review somewhere.

enough for now..

Snow and then runway ice, etc. kept me 6 days extra in Trail, and small South Van. airport fined for 6 extra days of parking —of course. Well all my girls and grand kids had me promise NO More winter visits for me—I will be 82 yrs. in March—and said YES—good idea. Christmas in July in Kootenays—or all go south, south, somewhere!! OK+

A surprise, Dec. 16, I got a oak and metal inscribed award—I am a “Humanitarian” by Nehru group- private foundation that helps India born students do Asian students here & give award —no dollars —to people who support multi-cultural efforts— I translate or comment for many & am in the Vancouver Tagore Society board, etc. Yes, I keep busy at what I enjoy —

Rushing more than usual ==leaving Dec. 20 to Dec. 28 for Rossland/Trail, BC for family time in the snowy Kootenays .

Getting a “Nehru Humanitarian Award” on Sat. Dec. 16 - sponsored by Ashok Bhargava of the Writers International Network via the Goel Family Charitable Foundation at a

UBC annual banquet that was held on Nov. 13, 2017 for Nehru's birthday anniversary  
===annual event! Super impressive wall placque.

Now I am off to Toronto—Oct. 30—Dec. 5—to celebrate with Kirk Howard/ Dundurn Press is celebrating 75 years as plans to retire: Dec. 3—/2017.

I worked with Kirk for 4 years—after he had a yr. as national treasurer for Can Authors Assoc.  
Then Seneca College full time!

Dec. 7—but I am in Kootenays—Trail/Rossland from Dec. 20—28— family time! December is a busy month!

All good cheers for You and Yours—

News from Heather Spears:

Hello Anne

How are you?

Your letter got into some mailbox called Spam that I just found and somehow I have deleted it instead of transferred it, could you write again? thanks!

Sorry cannot be at League AGM - just does not fit - bur intend to come to Canada for a couple of months. I am on a CC grant to complete a collection of poetry, and am having a book of poems out in Danish translation - and a play being made of my Scottish murder book - that is great fun. I am still teaching drawing a bit but long courses are beyond me now, so planning just 2 weekends, in BC and 3 readings and otherwise enjoying myself and beautiful Canada. I just had another drawing book accepted and must polish it - too much to do!

It is comparatively calm in Denmark where people seems to be unbothered or just amused. My heart is with the beautiful Salish Sea archipelago and the threatened hungry Orcas and am following this horror story closely and protesting from a distance however I can.

love to you

Heather Spears

News from Penn Kemp: for my friends at Candlemas, remembering Brigid! and Groundhog Day.

### **What Women Want**

It used to be horses

when we were ten.

Then it was lovers.

Now it's chocolate.

Is it an age thing,  
what we crave?

In my last stage, I  
hope for *darshan*,  
for transmission.

<http://pennkemp.weebly.com/>  
[www.pennkemp.wordpress.com](http://www.pennkemp.wordpress.com)

A review of Penn's *Barbaric Cultural Practices*, Quattro, 2016 by Katerina Fretwell  
TBA.



Remembering Brigid painting with Mary Condren

### **Forecast at Candlemas**

O whistling pig! Mark this quarter turn.  
Persephone, goddess of flowers, returns  
today in Greece. Here, she wears thick

brown fur and burrows up through feet  
of snow to determine by a nod whether  
winter will surrender soon to spring or

not. After quick survey, she ducks back  
down the cold tunnel of time into long  
distant mythic dream. We don't know

what the groundhog dreams when she  
scurries home to her warm, hushed den.  
Edible flowers from our garden, we bet.

Or the security in curling round herself  
as her squirming pile of pups blindly  
snuffles, eyes unnecessary in the dark.

\*

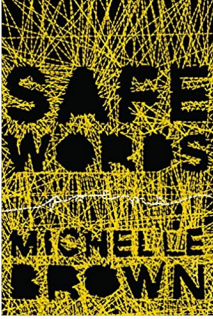
Mary now purified, free of confinement  
shows forth her babe. Forty days respite  
in temenos, in shelter, and they call that  
impure, the labour in giving birth impure.  
Longer light at last starts to awaken her.  
Goddess has recovered to hold her child.

\*

Love,  
Penn

Ancient News:

There are illustrations of women bathing discovered in an early text at Yale University Archives, with images of plants, stars, planets. The piece begins with, "She made recommendations to the priest, man of the house, and me, and people." ("Computer scientist claims to have cracked ancient book's code", by Bob Weber, *Calgary Herald*, January 25, 2018, Section A, p. 11) Some other words are "farmer", "light", "air", and "fire." With artificial intelligence, at University of Edmonton, the 240 pages of the "Voynich" manuscript (from the early 1400s) was translated from code and ancient Hebrew, using statistics and algorithms to decode the reordered letters, and substitute vowels which had been dropped.



**Review of *Safe Words, Poems*, by Michelle Brown (Windsor, ON: Palimpsest Press, 2018) 72 pp. paper Reviewed from proofs.**

By definition, a “safe word” is one serving as a prearranged and unambiguous signal to end an activity, such as between a dominant and submissive sexual couple. It implies at the least, an imbalance of power or, at most, a sadistic-masochistic encounter.

Safewords can communicate a willingness to continue the activity but at a reduced level of intensity. There is a philosophy of abandoning safewords in practice forms of edgeplay or other extreme forms, but choice is a consensual act.

"Safeword" for Sports and "Safeword" a game show retrieved online Feb. 5, 2018.

Of course, for poetry, it involves a code word or series of code words, and Brown uses them to portray all the participants, willing or unwitting, whether in the family home or who take form in the office family interactions.

A safe word may be another signal used by a submissive or “bottom” partner to unambiguously communicate their physical or emotional state to a dominant or “top” partner, typically when approaching, or crossing, a physical emotional or moral boundary.

Let us interject here the poet and reader.

There are five parts of this full length collection: “Safe Words”, “Dark Sides”, “Home Alone”, and “Having Done My Penance, Let’s Try This Thing Again”.

In the first part, the persona of the poet acknowledges the importance of writing to her, not the least of which is commitment, amid the vagaries of relationships. She awaits age thirty, and remember the pain of facial puncturing, while recalling adolescence. (“Sixteen”) At the altar there are girls wearing white dresses, whose long childhoods are marked by spit and blood. (“Altar Girls”) The article “a” is inventive (“Daily Routine”) so too the conditional “If”. (“Streaker”) The predicate of television talk shows, news, and radio distracts the poet from concentrating on her daily life, mutes her intentions to practice dance. (“On Not Being Famous”) Through a series of declarative statements, she reflects on how her friends have each loved a different version of herself. (“All the Parties I’ve Ever Been To”) The mirror plays an important role by progressively reflecting the surface.

“Invasive Species” is dedicated to her grandmother. It begins with “Milk Thistle” which describes the “alien” and “non-native” characteristics of a plant, which suggests its growth is as a wild thing and occurs in winter. “Garlic Mustard” alludes to the smell of a man, her marigold “girls” are blooming, and chronological age appears random. “Broom Daisy” plays with “Marguerite” a woman’s name and “marguerite” the daisy flower, with

personification. A refrain of “naming them as daughter, daughter,/ drum dust, daughter” concludes a lyrical narrative on a policeman. (“Policeman’s Helmet”) Homonyms of “pored” and “poured” are part of a ballad on childhood, “I made a mark. I hurt the world.” (“Advertising”)

The commercial language is also electronic on Youtube, accompanied by the action of “Skip” or “Click”. One’s liver, which “remembers” a past life, is leaping like “a sad brown dog” The metaphor is extended to the abstract “Hope is acidic, and hungry, like bile.” (“After Party”) An imaginary pill factory, with Measuring and Packing Departments, supplies teens. The train tracks attract would-be suicides intent on taking the easy way out. Cellular regeneration means we can be entirely new within seven years, although “blessed// to be stressed”. (“Molecular Baseball”) The persona compares herself in terms of taxidermy, “like a stuffed dodo”, she waxes vampiric, without hyphenating her last name. (“Maiden Name”) “Apt 1 of 4” describes a next-door neighbour, personifying winter as “blowing” and “wind” as speaking. The poet abhors boredom, taught by her mother, and then taking intemperate actions. A falling rock is variously interpreted, building suspense by using the repetition of “That you”. (“Tiger Leaping Gorge, After Descending”) She committed to a rock falling, a road crumbling, unlike some of her friends. (“Confirmation Bias”)

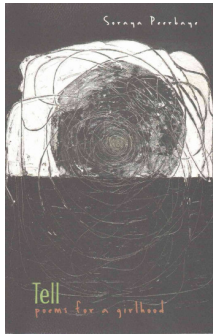
In the second part, “Incognito Mode” is how she remembers sexual initiation, “each body part” and “a hooked comma.” (“Hello, It’s Me”) She felt trapped in a relationship, possibly date raped. (“Cave of Illusions”) She sees herself as less bad than another. (“Double”) Rather than “a little agony”, she has suffered greatly (and grandly). (“You Meant Nothing’ Was Said”) The poet enjoys using vernacular phrases, such as “apples to apples” She reinvents human names as letters: “x, y, and z” as well as “A and B”. The book of life does not have the answers at the back. (“If Not X Then Why”) She dreams of calamitous events but awaits imminent amputation. (“Italian Vacation”) She offers that “It’s like I’m reading/ from a children’s book”, but her fears and hurt are of a mature young woman. (“Once More Around the Block”)

In the third part, she somewhat robotically tends to a household and compares her home company to a dysfunctional work family. (“Company Picnic”) The poet associate “knots” with other connections. Her daughter is tethered by emotion but is also taken away from her, much like the current movement. (“Ebb”) A family patriarch demands recognition, with gifts. However, his name is misspelled in the dirt. “Extrafamilial. Orbital.” If his wife leaves him, he demands recompense. (“Father, On a Camping Trip, Refuses to Leave His Tent”)

The word “comfort” comes with dread, sadness, a wife performing kitchen duties. (“Restaurant Review”) The Christian God was replaced by science, but only in a boy’s imagination or guilty suicide contemplation. (“Boy, On the Nonexistence of the Triceratops”) A funny story is told until the point of it being gothic. (“Betty” a Stepforth wife.) So too “Betsy” who prayed to a lower-case “god” who did what he could to help. The poet takes inventory and she feels psychic (“Memoir Attempts”)

In the fifth part, the body can be replaced as a husk or elsewhere a walnut ("Skin tough and jumping/ as if she were a walnut, or a burning tree, or gristle", from "father, on a camping trip"). Stray dogs are unwanted but left at a sanctuary, without owners who walk them. ("Dog Farm") She identifies with the stray animals. "But someone is digging a hole out." Later, she writes about an "Escape From the Dog Farm", by testing the fence. She is a healthy woman, running. She is reminded of her grandfather who is ninety-three years of age, since long lifetimes should be better. ("When You Go Out in the World Today") Indeed, everyone is born to die. ("Energizer") In "Vows" she cannot recall his words, but said "yes", anyway. The apples "wine" (not whine) and ghosts abound in the kitchen. More "Stories", with double meanings act as narratives and as the nineteenth storey of a building, to begin with "me, young as a pup. I wasn't born yet." The timeline reverses by climbing or descending the stairs from twenty-seven and twenty-nine stories up or down.

Michelle Brown was previously shortlisted for CV2's Young Buck poetry prize and longlisted for the CBC poetry prize. This is her first full-length collection



**Review of *Tell: poems for a girlhood*, by Soraya Peerbaye (St. John's, Newfoundland: Pedlar Press, 2015) 111 pp. paper.**

The poet relies on the locus of place: "Craigflower Bridge", "Tillicum Bridge", the Selkirk Bridge, for resonance. In "Trials", the Exhibits display attitude, before a witness, "open declarative". The "fair-haired girl behind Plexiglass" reveals a perpetrator who could be contrasted with her victim Virk, a fourteen-year old girl of South Asian descent.

In Part one "Rainfall" the victim's body arises in the Gorge, a sense of absence expressed by "*Trace, nil.*" What follow are the ironic "Comfort Inn", the delay in searching ("Tide"), sewage waste, ("Silt" 1), eelgrass which is seaweed ("Current"). Warren Paul Glowatski was convicted in Virk's murder and is serving a life sentence ("Reena"). In "Silt" 2, the sibilant sounds of "slow, sunken spin, slow sweep" contribute to a palatable sense of the body's decomposition. Further, "Silt-stroked eyes. Silt-stroked tongue" and "silt-stroked teeth". Colours mingle in aerial photographs, much like paintings with ink and turpentine. ("Willow") "Saanich" B.C. trades on "saline", a Salish word. An autopsy was done. ("Admission of Facts") The pathology of injury must be separated from the after effects of bloating. ("Washerwoman") The diction of medical remarks is dispassionate and detailed. ("Autopsy") The poet's own direct observation of witnesses and reading of transcribed testimony render the results as chilling.

In Part two "À Pleine Gorge" is based, in part, on the testimony of Glowatski, in 2004, "*We could tell by her breathing.*" ("Gorge Waterway"). The poet borrows "The inlet of her/ mouth", extending the metaphor of place, personifying "estuary", "a shoaling", "drift of tides"; and other visual references, "Saltwater, sweetwater, a whirlpool". There are the sounds of "stuttered", "Seizure, speech". The evocative words, in French, and other gut-wrenching evidence, the throat, bone, skin slippage. Roots resemble old teeth. ("Slow

Time”); analogies with birds, frogs, “*agonal gasp*”(“Stones”). Following the crime, an account of ironic “*Tendre la gorge*” plays with the meaning of cruelty.

In Part three “Who You Were”, we are introduced to warm memories of the sea (“Lagoons and lakes”); a language spoken: “the pebble-click” of lakes. The speaker (Virk and/or the persona of the poet) recalls a science class, in which she feels, paradoxically, “inside a body/ looking out” (“Chemistry”). The adolescent body betrayed by its spinal “scoliosed” shell (“Beauty”). Ethnicity and culture are differentiated (“Nothing, nothing”) as vulnerable as sea urchins. The speaker’s brother was beaten (“Skin”) and scorned with an epithet “*Paki*”. While she strives to evade the visual clues of her racial minority origins, she cannot entirely overcome the societal abuse of incipient and overt racism. She seeks oblivion (“Safety”) hospitalized ostensibly not for an apparent suicide attempt which she denies. One of the predatory girls attempted suicide, reportedly because, as a child, she had witnessed her mother’s death, perhaps a mitigating trigger for PTSD and a defence strategy. The embedded elements are: death, Arabic, tumeric, agarbhatti; Shiva, one of the foreign gods, popular culture, and the accused murderer. The mean girls, in “A good mother”, operate in a school which is Protestant, a private all-girls’ school . In “Tremor and flare” she feels a detached and unemotional separation from the events around her. This disassociation is a crucial factor.

In part four “Tell” the trials of 1999, 2000, and 2004 are enumerated, whether overturned on appeal or a mistrial, respectively. “Examination” is a series of interrogations, patterned on cross examination in court. Another “Admission of Facts” is entered into evidence, part of a plea agreement, possibly. Current events are detailed: The Challenger explosion, “*A spaceship, a missile*” (“Satellite”) The relative impressions of emotional response become a litmus test for the apertures of vision and light (“Shoreline Field”). Then, there are the rhythmical currents of the tide, the shock of awareness, discovery of the victim's remains (“Craigflower Bridge, south”). The poet eschews the lie, since she wants to tell “the truth within a lie” and “what they withheld.” She does that by means of a collage of rumors, contradictions, contestation, protestations, recantations. She insists on taking “care not to distort the meaning”. (“Notice to the Reader”)

The scene shifts from Craigflower Bridge, both south and north, to Craigflower Schoolhouse, sequencing the almost breathless events with a staccato of words; the uncertainty, the prevarications. The *genus loci* or protective spirit of a place is often depicted in religious iconography as a figure holding attributes, such as a cornucopia, patera (libation bowl), or snake. In “Satellite (mistrial)” the omen is a shooting star, a possible meteor shower, whether or not the moon was full. The circumstances are challenging. “Mare-aux-Songes” is a swamp, where the fossilized remains of an extinct dodo bird were found. From archaeology she turns to marshlands, drained swamps, the French Creole Indian (mostly Bihari); African, Chinese and European of French origin. The Republic of Mauritius is an island nation in the Indian Ocean, off the coast of the African continent. (“Inland waters”) The Métis Healing Village, in Voir-dire, alludes to post-traumatic stress. (“See them sang”)



In Part five “The Landscape Without Her” we learn of the trial in 2005, which was appealed, then the conviction was restored, in 2009. Of The Gorge-Tillicum Bridge in British Columbia, “tell is a word from Arabic, from Hebrew; “to untell, to uncover the layers/ of this evidence”; to retell, each site, an event, process, we read it, as artifacts are uncovered.

“Admission of Facts” is a denouement. In “Craigflower Bridge”, there is a series of what “A bridge is”, beginning in the concrete world, with trestle, metal, guardrail. This moves on to an abstract thought: a distance, with steps, and time. An Indian dance gives way to sashay, and underwater grace. The poet posits that “A bridge is held up by belief”, indeed beckoning that you will be safe and welcomed to the other side. Ceremonies of the dead are in order (“Narrows”); a field identification officer surveys the vegetation, “How entangled they are, hunger and greed.” The Myth of the dove, to have a lump in one’s throat” (English translation). The poet alludes to text, whether typewritten, “taloned”, a curious “crooked *a*”.

The Myth of Camosun is from Songhees First nation and the Lekwungen ancestral land. "Camosun’s" shape alludes to the islanders and residents of the coast, the natural features, and strong sense of place. Coastal communities are shaped by the ocean’s role in their experience. Compare the Island “Washerwoman” garbed in saris, washing laundry on the rocks with the "Songhees" (a first Nations government around Victoria, B.C.). Such garments were washed to offer protection from drowning (“Narrows”)

With a reference to carbon dating, there is an argument about “Life in these waters”, vegetation, wildlife, and ghost. Time is bent (“Curfew”) by the return to “Her throat” with tremorous words. Smudge reflects social and religious markings in India (“Chandlo”). (The proverb in "Chandlo" is cited by the poet from *The Grace of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India*.) The white girl threatens her safety. “Grace” is one of the perpetrators, known as Missy Grace Pleich (“Enough”) Kelly Ellard is another. The sari reappears (“To tear with the teeth”) as does the totemic cormorant; compare its appearance elsewhere (“Life in these waters”). Salinity causes a halocline, affects the density of seawater. It is a telling clue with physical evidence of the salt lines on the perpetrator's jacket. A heron concludes the collection, signifying shadow, and reveals that which is “beneath the surface”.

This is an extraordinary collection because, on many levels, it relates not only to the victim and her abusers, but their various viewpoints; which, in turn, account for widely different perspectives on experience, memory, interpretation; life cut suddenly short by violent death.

The sea and vegetation imagery reminds me of the doomed, drowning Ophelia, a suicidal Shakespearean character, whose flower song is poignant and symbolic. The other is Hart Crane’s *The Bridge: to Brooklyn Bridge*, another poetical landmark. There is the device of a female narrator who observes the experiences of a girlhood shared. Among them are the narrator, the victim, and the girl gang which snuffed out Reena’s young life. With Peerbaye’s use of the long poem form, arguably demonstrated by the passages of lyric

poems marked by varying length and scope, she approaches (or attains) a post-modernist epic.

Reena Virk (March 10, 1983-November 14, 1997) was a B.C. girl of south Asian origins, who was violently bullied and repeatedly beaten, before drowning, by the "Shoreline Six". Of course she was much more than a murder victim. "A Notice to Reader" and "Notes" reveal some of the poet's sources and references about the seven girls who killed a schoolmate, and the male who participated. ("Girls kill schoolmate," by Patricia Chisholm, *Maclean's*, December 8, 1997). Text from the transcripts and notes from the poet's attendance at the 2004 and 2005 trials form part of the poems.

Peerbaye's first poetry collection was *Poems for the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names*, which was nominated for the Gerald Lampert Award. Her poems have been published in *Red Silk: An Anthology for South Asian Women Poets* (Mansfield Press, 2004), edited by Priscilla Uppal and Rishma Dunlop, as well as the literary journals *Other Voices*, *Prairie Fire*, and *The New Quarterly*. She has contributed to the chapbook *Translating Horses* (Baseline Press). She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph.

**Review of *Narrow Passageway*, by Connie T. Braun (North Vancouver, B.C.: The Alfred Gustav Press Series Eighteen, 2017) 18 pp. paper**

May Sarton (1912-1995) was an American poet, novelist, and memoirist. In "A Tenebrous Space", there is a May Sarton quote, an "Invocation to Kali", from darkness to birth. In South Vietnam, there begins the story of silk-making, a cycle of women's work, as well as pregnancy, a womb or chrysalis, a pulse of embryo. The intent is breath to that end, which is dark, shadowy, or obscure. *Gilead* is a novel by Marilynne Robinson (2004) which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. John Ames is one of the characters, a grandfather.

The human face is astounding, as it appears in an ultrasound image ("At 19 Weeks"). A second honeymoon is expressed in "waves" (male) and "oceans" (female) by whale-watching ("Anini Beach"). The analogy of a calf gives way to a first child, miraculous, but setting off "carnal dying" ("The New Mother".) A proverb portrays the human heart as broken and size matters; "throbbing", "flashing", as the poet "probes" ("Images of the Heart"). A pacemaker inserted into the heart resembles a Rolex watch, because the surgery makes possible "buying time" ("Timepieces").

The title poem based on a surgical thin and fragile line (open heart surgery) begins with a quote from Tennyson's *Ulysses* "a bringer of new things", about time savoured from "that eternal silence". The scansion moves from part I "Right atrium", II "Right ventricle", III "Left atrium", and IV "left ventricle". The observer's anxiety resembles the narrowing of the patient's aortic valve ("aortic stenosis"). The central symbol is that of the human body which contains a four-chambered heart. The poem cites the passage of time, from a universal or military twenty-four hour clock, (of 0700 to 1700); and when the surgery is over. The "grave" surgeon is a pun.

“The Biopsy” extends the medical context and introduces the metaphysical conceit of breast cancer as “a cluster of cells”; amid wild thistle, another planet entirely, a globe or milk as paltry comparisons not up to “the beautiful and terrible are one.”

“China, Eastern Air” begins with Cohen’s song and *Book of Mercy*, “You let me sing, you lifted me up, you gave my soul a beam to travel on”. This gloss informs the sweet parting for another’s odyssey, simile of moon and world in human form, then “smile” a latitude.

**The Alfred Gustav Press** is a micro publisher of poetry. The press uses home office technology to produce mini-run chapbooks (around about a dozen pages) of either one not-to-long poem or a sequence of discrete, connected poems, concluding with the poet’s illuminating afterword. The author receives ten copies to distribute as desired; the press keeps the rest for its own pleasure, including subscriptions. All copies are signed by the poet.

The press is named after the founder's father, a farmer both serious and taciturn yet not without charm and wit, sometimes melancholy, always hard working and a great lover of winter reading.

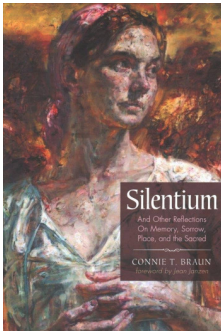
The press's selections may or may not reflect such a disposition toward life. The intention is that the poems published will exhibit some of Alfred's (counsel to the elves) acumen and Gustav's (staff of the Goths) gusto.

<http://d-zieroth.squarespace.com/the-alfred-gustave-press/>

Contact publisher David Zieroth @ The Alfred Gustav Press, 1430 Chesterfield Ave. Apt 301 North Vancouver, BC V7M 2N4.

Other poets in Series Eighteen (December 2017) are: **Russell Thornton**, *Stopping the Waves*, **Bibiana Tomasic**, *Revolutions Per Minute*, and **holm - Lazienki Park** by **Rob Taylor**.

The forthcoming (June 2018) Series Nineteen features **John Wall Barger**, *Dying in Dharamsala*, **Claudia Coutu Radmore**, *On Fogo*, and **Michael Trussler**, *Light's Albi*.



**Connie T. Braun** is an author and instructor of Creative Writing (BA, MA, MFA). Her writing often focuses on narrative as witness and the life-affirming poetics of memory. She has published a memoir, *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia* (Ronsdale Press, 2008); a poetry collection, *Unspoken: An Inheritance of Words* (Fern Hill Publications, 2016); and reviews for various publications. Her academic and personal essays and poetry appear in journals and

anthologies. *Narrow Passageways* (Alfred Gutav Press, 2017) and *Silentium: & other reflections on Memory, Sorrow, Place and the Sacred* (Wipf and Stock) are others. She belongs to the League of Canadian Poets, the Canadian Author's Association, and has served on boards for the arts and writing, including *Prism International* and *Image Journal*.

**Review of UNSP OKEN an inheritance of words, by Connie T. Braun (Vancouver: Fern Hill, 2016) 65 pp. paper.**



The memoir in poems was written for the poet's mother and composed in memory of her grandmother. There are three sections, Part I references Anne Michaels' "Blue Vigour" about storytelling and dislocation from war, immigration, love.

This collection of poems acknowledges many previously published citations, quotes and epigraphs; and black and white photos of immigration, wedding, family members, captioned with dedications and notes.

Beginning with the phrase "forgotten memories" this is a reference to Aristotle cited as an epigraph in Paul Ricoeur's "Oneself as Another", on memory which is "wounded" or "blocked" ("The Place of Memory"). The poetic voice cites memory housed in her own body, however, history is composed of forgotten memories, "Elsewhere" and "Then?" Here auditory images are effective in conveying a family's displacement, "Soil is the taste of belonging". Whereas, language "Syllables and sound of first-language" are entwined with the metaphor of "heart's true home place". A treadle sewing machine is associated with a cancer diagnosis, "not to story me with stitches of loss". ("Polished Buttons")

In Part 2 the poet draws on the *Collected Works by Czeslaw Milosz* for destiny and the Second World War in Warsaw. Stones were like secrets, edible kisses from the vegetable, eyes from the old world ("Memory is a taste in my mouth..."). A former tsarist prison and barracks was named Bereza Kartuska, which means place of isolation, hence "The Prisoner", in Poland (now Belarus) in 1939. Braun takes inventory and supplies words for a prisoner who lacks them. Dictators and captors who make devious packs are responsible for suffering and torture. In "Telegram, 1943", children's bones will grow "ethereal", a frozen photograph of them, frolicking. The living roam, the dead lie, "each foot in a disparate world." Grain grows "blonde", golden, yellow". Acacias cast shade. In "The Older Brother" (1924-1943) a sepia photograph captures a brother at the age of nineteen, who survived Stalingrad.

Part 3 refers to *I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory*, by Patricia Hampl, as in "I wish to trust poetry." Of "What a Grandfather leaves", it is not his words in a foreign language but sign-language, his gauntness, the false teeth, mint scent. "The Plough in Spring" is from *Astonishments: Selected Poems of Anna Kamienska* and

provides context for a vision. “The Daily Bread” from the Bible heartens her grandmother’s spirit with migrations and generations. Crossing the Carpathians through Warsaw, 1945, the River Vistula’s ice skin groans . Her hands “thinned,/ vellum paper skinned.” The poet inherits the unspoken words, cherishes them, and articulates the stories, while her own belong to posterity, those she imagines will come after her.

“The Yard–August 19, 2005” is a companion poem to “The Meadow”, by Milosz. The radiance permeates the overgrown grasses. Family recipes transmute culture in the kitchen for family reunions (“Annie”). Manual labour is reflected in “Hands”, which contains “the map of our lives”. “Couture” represents the craft of clothes-making, working from a pattern with deviations (akin to these poems in careful variations). “My Name” is what was marked “*enemy of the people*”. The Gestapo was the “*black ravens*”. Refugees were given a Bible, a consonant was dropped from his name “as if one less heaviness to carry.” Words become abstractions like God (“A Talk with my Son About God”). The Gulag necessitated belief, this heritage, Siberian bundles for survival. Faith may have its wordless shape, “ephemeral and enduring.” “Witness Trees” refers back to the acacias which opened this collection. They are emblems or totems with Mountain Ash and Olive. The Ukraine, a Polish village,. Old Jerusalem is compared with Olive, the Holy City’s Passion. Even the leaves are “tear-shaped”. Further, “Even trees have chronologies”. This deals with unspoken stories yet “you speak them”. A metaphor of cross-cutting a section will reveal the truth of what is not written but recorded in the body’s bones and veins. The story of love depends on being told by others, since “My Life Cannot be Grasped”.

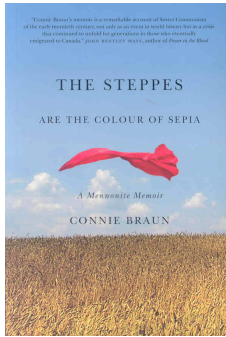
Fern Hill is a micro-publisher of poetry and the title was inspired by one of Dylan Thomas’s most famous poems.

### Mission and Values:

The press is named after “Fern Hill”, the title of one of Dylan Thomas’s most famous poems— the fondest poetic expression of the publisher’s cosmology which also includes the notion that all literature and its genesis are grounded in a quest for lost Eden. The press’s selections reflect such a poetics. The intention is that the poems published will exhibit some of beauty and *pathos* of human relationships and of the natural world.

Fern Hill is a micro-publisher of poetry for emerging and established writers. It encourages writing that has a spiritual impulse and focuses on personhood in its wholeness. The press uses home-office technology to produce chapbooks, concluding with the poet’s artistic statement. The author receives five copies to distribute as desired; the press holds the remainder for sale and for filling subscriptions. All copies are signed by the poet.

**Second: Review of *UNSPOKEN: an inheritance of words*, by Connie T. Braun  
(Vancouver, B.C., Fern Hill, 2016) 66 pp. paper.**



Braun's memoir *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia: A Mennonite Memoir* (Ronsdale Press, 2018) deals with ancestral memory, much like the present memoir "in poems for my mother, IN MEMORY OF MY GRANDMOTHER". Part 1 locates the poetry in an embodied memory, combating Elsewhere, Then, "History is a silent country". Home is a moveable feast. Women's work, a wash line, delineates the generations, transfixed in the garden. And language with foreign first syllables returns. anachronisms of her treadle machine, Singer's sewing pedal, ("Polished Buttons") cancer teaches hidden pain.

In part 2 memory is more than a place and has evolved into a taste, for eyes from the Old World renewed by a grandchild, as yet unspoken. The Place of Isolation was a Detention Camp in the Second Polish Republic. The main prison building now has a post-war Soviet monument dedicated to victims of the camp. A Mennonite farmer, the Germans advanced, and the Russians closed in. ("The Prisoner") There is the lingering "dim resonance of dying" ("Telegram, 1943") a world divided into two by that black current. Before the war, scarcely matters, "in sepia", and memory surfaces "As if in a photograph". Surviving Stalingrad, a paid professional photographer was hired in order to mark the occasion, "The Older Brother" "always, only, nineteen.

In Part 3 poetry has a bold role to play in trust and revelation, the living and the unlive. A prisoner suffering from starvation returns. He compares his wife to a favourite plough horse due to her strength of character. This family is a tribe who triumphs. ("What a Grandfather Leaves")

Ploughing is backbreaking manual labour, but an apparition in sunlight, illuminating the past homesteading. ("The Plough in Spring") The past is framed, "The Daily Bread", your Bible. ("My Grandmother's Strong Name") Lacework represents all those migrations. The land is never the same, more unspoken words, "My eyes are the colour yours were."

The *Collected Poetry of Czeslaw Milosz* has a pronounced and sustained influence. So, too, the epitaphs from Anne Michaels, John Mincezeski, and Paul Ricoeur.

Culture transmission is recognized by family recipes ("Annie"), the round of funerals and weddings. The Vistula River is the demarcation of geographical territory, as well as the time capsule of the Second World War. Family narratives are the work of the poet, based on your life as a survival story, since it conveys love, immigration, and war. In "Hands", the map of lives was inspired by marriage, heritage, and faith. The poet surveys keepsakes, photographs, the commonplace. Sewing involves "Couture" an ironic statement about homemade and self-designed clothing. It speaks to the patterns of frugal accommodation of "waste not want not". "My Name" recounts the events of labour

camps, War, the front lines. As a refugee, the troopship meant safe sailing to Canada, adaptation in the new country, by any other name.

The theme of the unspoken pertains to a continuum of conversation (“Talk with my Son About God”) the existential threat, dogma, punishable by exile to the Gulag. Faith in the next generation diminishes: “its wordless shape like wind through birch,/ ephemeral and enduring”.

A trinity of trees, albeit “Mountain Ash”, “Acadia”, and “Olive” serve as totemic symbols, of the Ukraine, a Polish village, and Old Jerusalem in turn. No wonder the leaves are “tear-shaped” for pilgrims to the Holy City’s Passion. The annual rings of the trunk pertain to unspoken stories, a veritable diary which may be silent no longer. A cross-section like skin and not written down.

The collection concludes with a philosophical observation about mortality, the role of story overcoming absence, and the profound power of love.