

Review: How The Light Gets In

To edit and assemble four weighty anthologies of poetry since 2003 is by any standards an excellent achievement and John Ennis has achieved all this and the first two are sold out and becoming collectors items. Waterford and WIT should be immensely proud of a poet and academic who has brought fame and acclaim to his adopted city.

This new work, *How The Light Comes In . . .* (with suitable acknowledgement to Leonard Cohen), is over six hundred pages of contemporary Canadian poetry featuring a fine selection of the work of sixty-five poets. I like the way Ennis gives such a chance to get the measure of a poets work rather than two much selected examples you so often get.

Getting started on such a mammoth task, even to review the work, is pretty much open at random and read until you find work that pleases you, interests you, or challenges you to read again and share or consider another way of looking at a topic.

As Ennis explains it, he was browsing in the well-stocked bookstore in UBC in Vancouver and he came across many of the works he included in this anthology. This is the child in the toyshop, the sense of wonder and surprise and Ennis manages well to convey this essential curiosity and wonderment.

Often the work is light verse, very free verse, or chopped up prose but frequently you will turn a page and sense the thought structure and the engagement of new poets with the poetic experience. You will experience small scale concerns more than the vastness of a continent but you will feel the poetry. Perhaps many choices seem too academic in tone but that is how poetry in the main is supported, nurtured and fostered and clearly many smaller presses in Canada have academic supports to promote creative writing courses and literature streams.

John Ennis is himself a poet, a fan, a supporter, a dreamer, an encourager and a defender as much as a promoter and he slots his choices well between A to Z. Opening with Joanne Arnott, you get Conception and reality, childbirth and diapers. In a beautiful poem, Song About, you will be non the wiser but you will recognise your own story. The last poet, David Zieroth looks at family and our place in the small aspects of life. His Had I Strayed On The Farm will take your breath away with nicks and cuts and the shock of death brings new meaning to that hippy phrase - buying the farm.

Elizabeth Bachinsky will wow you with a fresh-faced newness especially her How To Bag Your Small-Town Girl and the raw Punk Rock Boys. Sheri Benning will grab you with an image of a man pulling Christ from a Cross and the moody song of yeah-i-love-you-so-what-ness. E. D. Blodgett from Alberta will bring all life all meaning into an Elegy to share with you the stillness and fragility of bright necessities.

The poetry of Rosanna Deerchild, a Cree from South Indian Lake, Manitoba, will open a new world for you. Michelle Desbartes will reassure you with a poem - Winter's Heart, while Don Domanski will take your senses on Riding The Train In Secret.

Alice Major, a Scot who emigrated to Toronto, then Edmonton, will chill you with a poem about abortion and a marvellous insight of A Harsh Mistress.

The poetry of Sharron Proulx-Turner, a member of the Metis Nation of Alberta, will impress you with how her ancient culture infuses contemporary poetry.

I had never read any of the poets I've written about here and Andrew Suknaski, of Polish and Ukranian heritage, from Saskatchewan, just blew me away with the Bitter Word about Sitting Bull.

Another excellent feature is the many painting and photo inserts, used in the book, especially the work of Brian Macbeth, who exhibited last year at the Granary.