

Report on the Talon Books Launch of THE COLLECTED BOOKS OF ARTIE GOLD at the Anza Club, Vancouver, Wednesday, Nov. 24, 2010.

Wednesday's child is minus 3.

It was a dark and wintry night. I arrived on time when the doors opened at 7:30; all the Talon people were there, setting dozens of books out in neat piles on a table. George Bowering came soon after, wearing the black "cape" (a bobby's uniform) I will always remember him for during my sophomore days at SGWU in the late sixties. We exchanged pleasantries as only two poets can.

The Anza Club is an upper floor extension of the Anza bar next door. "It used to be a bingo hall," I was told by Garry Thomas Morse's mom, who was sitting in one of the booths along the two walls surrounding the chair-lined audience section. A well-lit narrow 3-foot-high stage was equipped with an inconvenient wobbly music stand and a microphone that cut out here and there during the readings. At 8 o'clock, Talon's Kevin Williams took the stage and introduced me to a (surprising) cheer from the crowd of about 30-40 people who had braved an unreasonably cold evening to attend the launch of three books: Artie's, Adeena Karasick's and bill bissett's (in that order). The Canucks were beating Colorado on the other side of town, but I doubt that we missed having a better turnout on account of a mere hockey game. After all, this wasn't Montreal and we're only into the first quarter of the new season.

I mounted the stage with half a bottle of some sugared drink which eventually fell off the music stand, spilling over the stage and leaving me with a parched throat for most of the reading. I began by announcing that Artie Gold passed away on Valentine's Day, 2007. Then I read the following:

"The last time I saw Artie was in 2004; the Musee d'Art Contemporain had sponsored the Vehicule Poets 25th anniversary celebration, *Cabaret Vehicule*, at Place des Arts. It was a great night. Artie was too sick to make it; his poems were read by Ruth Taylor who tragically passed away just a year later. Ruth Taylor's initials happened to be R.T. We all met up with Artie the next day at a cafe across from his apartment. He wasn't in good shape. We signed each other's books, had a few laughs and thus ended my 30-year friendship with Artie Gold. Tonight is my first opportunity to honour Artie by lending my voice to his words.

A few thank you's are in order. Thank you, Talon Books, for publishing Artie's life work only three years after the end of his life. Artie would be proud.

I would also thank the weather for cooperating with this event; the snow, the temperature, the wind chill factor suggest many evenings of Montreal poetry readings in the seventies. Artie would be pleased.

Two former Vehicule Poets, Endre Farkas and Ken Norris compiled and edited the poems in this book. Artie would have appreciated the compiling; "edited by" would be edited out.

We were a group of seven in the seventies. Notwithstanding his occasional protestations – notwithstanding I think is a Quebecois verb – about the group, let me assure you that he was more the instant glue than dissociative member during those early years; along with Endre Farkas and Ken Norris,

Artie became the third member of the editorial board at Vehicule Press. The three governed poetry publishing at the press for the first few years.

Artie's life was 80% poetry, 20% everything else. The photo on the cover of this book is an amazing freeze frame; it shows Artie at his most serious and, for me, most fearless. It was this fearlessness that he demanded of us and it was because of this fearlessness that we were able to set off on our own adventures; I began producing videopoems and performance poems; Endre Farkas wrote poems for dancers and actors; Stephen Morrissey wrote and performed sound poems; John McAuley wrote concrete poems; Claudia Lapp chanted and danced; Ken Norris collaborated with anyone who asked him to; meanwhile Artie just kept on scribbling and doodling. We first published a mimeograph magazine; Artie drew all the covers. We put poetry on the buses, held poetry marathons, ran readings, hosted poets like Gerry Gilbert, bp Nichol, the 4 Horsemen, bill bissett and Michael Ondaatje for the first time; we showed Cocteau's Blood of the Poet and I could go on.

But I hear Artie's voice from the back of the room yelling, 'HEY, Codfish, just get ON with it!'

George, Garry and I had contacted each other before the event, listing the poems we had selected for the reading. I had decided to read from the early books: "I want to make the space around the poem"; "This is not a list"; "Sun filters through my window" (I mentioned that it was the poem we used for the Poetry On The Buses project in 1979); the 5 Jockey Poems (which, read in a clipped "visual" style, were greeted by great laughs). I would have liked to have read one of the cat poems, "I confess I cannot put broken cats together" as well as "Calendars are very much like Snakes and Ladders", but my mouth felt like it was filled with sand. The last poem I read was "I am a surfer at 12 o'clock high", which ends with the lines, "and suddenly one day I'll reach in/ grab that bag of loot/ and ride off on my horse." On the way down the steps, I noticed 6 bottles of water in a row along the wall of the stage. As George Bowering was coming up the steps, he leaned down and handed me one. It felt like a torch.

George began with some wonderful anecdotes about arriving in Montreal to teach at SGWU, how he met Artie, who was in his class (with me and Dwight Gardiner), how Artie handed him 400 sheets of poems that first day, then 400 more a week later; he told stories of Artie's voracious appetite – for other people's food: "He would clean out a fridge, shelf by shelf." George then read the following poems: "There is a space in my life a woman could walk into"; "Postcard"; 3 RW poems - RW 14, RW 15, RW 22. He ended with a poem I had also marked as a favourite:

I have been thinking a great deal
about my bike that will be stolen.

I don't like things whose inevitability
works against me.

Why have you driven through my heart?
Make that what.

Garry Thomas Morse read well Artie's "Sex at 31" which he followed with his own poem, "Sex at 33" (he was turning 34 that night at midnight), followed by "when I speak to you the cities cease to exist" and "Alison".

After a break, Adeena Karasick and bill bissett read, but I couldn't stay. I had a previous engagement.

– Tom Konyves, Vancouver, Nov. 25, 2010