

by : Paul Strickland

'Glazed iced eyes,
too cold and sticky
for my maggot army to liberate . . .
Just hanging around till spring,
the scabs make (good eggs). . .
foxes and coyotes
and flightless birds housing
in your cage. . . .'

A journalist can find too many northern B.C. stories end like this. A reader can also question the standard of toughness that calls on a person to just 'move on' from such horror:
'It was the woods that would label me,
not the hard men that never cried,
and would never let me.'

In this chapbook, reflecting White's experience working in Northern mills, industrial processes find poetic expression, recalling the work of Stephen Spender. Small creatures are inevitably caught up in them, both literally and metaphorically:

'A beautiful day for rounds,
staring into the washers
which spin whistling song birds
with lung damage into a thick
brown pulp
'strong birds,' I think., 'tortured, but strong.'

And larger creatures are also drawn in and destroyed:

'deer . . . /drink from the lime ponds
while their fur erupts like
a drunk camper's unattended stew,
sending smoke signals
into the whooshing screech
of red effluent skies
Strolling workmen will find
their bones come spring. . . .'

'Blue Horse Pill' is something to which older readers can relate, but also expresses hope about the human spirit and the concept of *elan vital*:

'Another trip to the doctor is done.
There is a slight possibility
that I have developed
a good ol' case of the shingles. . .
I have developed the body of an old man,
and the head of an Andronicus. . .
I'm still here to dance.'

White is pessimistic about the future of what's left of intellectual and artistic freedom in northern B.C. -- indeed in all of North America. The legacy of the Beatniks of the 1950s has turned out not to be liberty of expression but a stale ideological conformity. In the first poem in the chapbook, 'Justice,' he raises the question of the return of Bolsheviks to northern climes. These would not be the actual Bolsheviks of 1917-24, the ones who caused the murder and starvation of millions in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and who in turn were put on trial and murdered by Stalin in the late 1930s.

Rather they are people of intellectual influence who have a Bolshevik sensibility -- those who think they have the only approach to helping the oppressed and who seek to silence anyone who disagrees with them, whether through ostracism or frivolous, maliciously trumped-up complaints/

"The critics cannot withstand the criticism. . . .",
White says in 'The Separation of North and State.'

In this connection one becomes especially concerned about political phenomena like the "Check your privilege" movement, which enjoins all potential critics to "shut the f--- up!" If this kind of thing goes very far, we might see, in a way, the resurrection of actual Bolsheviks.

One looks forward to White's next chapbook and more of his realistic representations of life in the North.