

*TickieAce: A Journal of Literary and Visual Art.*

Patrick Warner

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*TickleAce: A Journal of Literary and Visual Art*. 31 Spring Summer 1996, 126 p.; 33 Spring Summer 1997, 240 p.; 34 Fall Winter 1997, 136 p.; 35 1998, 128 p.; editors: Bruce Porter, Lawrence Mathews, Susan Ingersoll, Michael Winter. *TickleAce* 36 1999, 125 p.; editors: Bruce Porter, Lawrence Mathews, Susan Ingersoll, Lisa Moore. Poetry, fiction, visual art, interviews, reviews, essays, softcover, annual subscription rates \$14.00, individuals; \$17.00, institutions, ISSN 0823-6399.

## PATRICK WARNER

ASKED TO REVIEW ISSUES 31 and 33-36 of *TickleAce*, I was a little apprehensive. At a quick glance I reckoned I was in for at least 500 pages. This, in fact, proved to be a conservative estimate. *TickleAce* 31, and 33-36, covering the period 1996 to 1999, comprise 727 pages of poetry, prose/fiction, interviews, visual arts, reviews and letters. Broken down into their respective genres, this gives the reader 146 poems, 26 pieces of fiction/prose, 3 interviews, 44 visual art pieces (not counting often strikingly beautiful covers — see *TA* 31, Diana Dabinett's *Midsummer Dawn, Shoe Cove Island*), 25 book reviews, 3 essays and assorted letters from readers. Over the course of these five issues, credit is given to 164 contributors, a small number of whom might be called regulars. A rough survey of all contributors (very rough) breaks down as follows; 40% are Newfoundlanders living in the province; 18% are non-Newfoundlanders who currently live or make their home in the province; 6% are Newfoundlanders who currently live outside the province; 30.5% are from the Maritimes and other parts of Canada; and about 5.5% are from

elsewhere. What can be surmised from this? Perhaps only that *TickleAce* is a journal of literary and visual arts, that it is Canadian, exhibits a strong regional focus (Newfoundland & Labrador) and also accepts material from writers and artists living in other countries. Surprise!

Being the only wholly literary periodical of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador, *TickleAce* has a serious responsibility to the writers of this province and, more generally, to the cultural life of the province. Writers, especially those starting out, need a place to publish their work, as well as a place to read new works by writers living locally and abroad. Newfoundland writers need to be represented to the community at large, as well as to readers elsewhere who wish to know something of contemporary writing within this province. *TickleAce* not only takes this mandate seriously, but executes it with something like panache. The production values of the journal are superb. I looked in vain for glitches. Newfoundland writers, those born here and those who have chosen to live here, are well represented; as are writers relatively new to the scene. The journal effectively places Newfoundland literature within the wider context of Canadian literature, as well as offering glimpses of what lies beyond the pale.

In presenting such a broad range of material, *TickleAce* can't hope to satisfy all tastes. There was, however, plenty of satisfying reading in these issues. Here are a few picks: in TA 31, Alastair MacDonald's group of poems and his interview with Bruce Porter; Jay Meek's poem, *Falls*; Winifred Mellor's wonderful story, *The Night I Peed my Pants in Amsterdam*; John Steffler's poem, *Traveller's Guide to the Geology of Newfoundland*. In TA 33 (the 20th Anniversary Edition), the poetry of Randall Maggs, to which I had not paid attention previously; Carmelita McGrath's poem, *How to Grow Stones*, and her fiction piece, *Pioneers*; Bernice Morgan's story, *Vain Deceit*; and Mary Dalton's poem, *Ravished*. In TA 34, Mary Dalton's group of poems, *Four Poems from a Series: The Tall World of Their Torn Stories*, which were awarded the *TickleAce* Cabot Award. These poems offer a tantalizing glimpse of her most recent work, a fascinating experiment which looks to marry her considerable lyric gift with the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. Also worthy of mention from this issue are the poems of Harold Rheinish; Janet Fraser's poem, *Freshwater Real Estate*; and delightfully intelligent fiction (*Hands: A Tale*) by Marilyn Gear Pilling. TA 35 included a tribute to deceased writer Lawrence Jackson, with whose work I was unfamiliar, but will look for after reading the beautiful, *Connections: Thoughts on This Place*. Other stand-outs included poems by Burt Almon and Tamas Dobozy; a powerfully concentrated piece of fiction by Stan Dragland, entitled *Split Rock*; and Dorian Rowe's fearless portrait of St. John's in his poem, *A Berth*. Lastly, TA 36 delighted with Richard Greene's masterful poem, *The White Fleet*; John Steffler's poem, *Dividing Line*; the memorable *Jody*, fiction by Sam DiFalco; and Jill MacClean's poems, *Haiku from a City Garden*, and *Sojourn*. Whew! Did I miss anything? the excellent interviews, beautifully reproduced visual art pieces, the reviews — ah! The reviews.

The now notorious *TickleAce* 33, included two book reviews which prompted something of a controversy in subsequent issues of the journal, if not also in pubs and kitchens. The first of these was a conversation between Michael and Kathleen Winter (*Talking About the McGraths*), which attempted to review recent volumes of poetry by Donald McGrath (*At First Light*) and Carmelita McGrath (*To the New World*). The second was Derrick Stone's review of Boyd Warren Chubbs' new collection of poems, *And You Blessed Healer*. *TA* 34-36 brought a series of responses to these reviews as well as a call from the editors for a "Reader's Response" on the issue of book reviewing in *TickleAce*.

The primary responsibility of the book reviewer is to engage with the work under review, and, in doing so, to state clearly how and where it succeeds or fails. In this regard, Carmelita McGrath rightly deplored the Winter's attempt at reviewing, which failed to engage with Donald McGrath's book on even the most basic level, while treating Carmelita McGrath's work in an insultingly offhand way. The same can't be said for Derrick Stone's review of Boyd Warren Chubbs. Derrick Stone's review highlighted with brutal clarity what he saw as the shortcomings of Chubbs' work. Several readers seemed outraged by Stone's review, their letters calling into question not only his judgement, but his ability to comprehend the particular talent of Boyd Warren Chubbs. These letters reflect the most common responses to a negative review, i.e. they accuse the reviewer of missing the point, or of simply being malicious. A stronger response to the Stone review might have been an attempt to point out just what he had missed, or just how he failed to understand the work of Chubbs. A much trumpeted literary credo is that of the author's right to challenge a reader's assumptions about art and experience. If it is a correct assumption, then equally correct is the reader's right to question, should he or she see fit, the particular assumptions and artistic licence employed by the writer. This tension between reader and writer is the core of any literary venture. *TickleAce* is to be commended for giving reviewers the freedom to respond unconditionally to new works of literature.

Over the course of three weeks, I read *TickleAce* 31 and 33-36 back to back and cover to cover. Somewhere along the way I secretly hoped to uncover a strand that I might tease into a general statement about contemporary literary writing in Newfoundland. This did not happen. I did, however, come away with the indelible impression that *TickleAce* is the place to look. One general trend in Newfoundland poetry was already pointed out by Richard Greene in *TA* 33. Reviewing Michael Crummy's, *Arguments with Gravity*, Greene says "If I were to identify a prevailing fault among Newfoundland poets, it would be anecdotalism, an assumption that things culled from memory are already poetry." The same thing may be said for much of the prose/fiction published in *TickleAce*, i.e. it eschews experiment, or high-style in favor of fairly straightforward narrative. That said, pick up any other Canadian, American, Irish, English, Welsh, Scottish, or Australian literary periodical and you will find much the same thing. One person's anecdote is another's

poem! Overall, I think *TickleAce* would benefit from cutting down on the number of “anecdotal pieces” and including more work that takes its impetus from language, ideas, and experiments in style. I would also like to see more contributors from overseas, works in translation, and more Nobel Laureates under *TickleAce* covers. Why not, b’y?