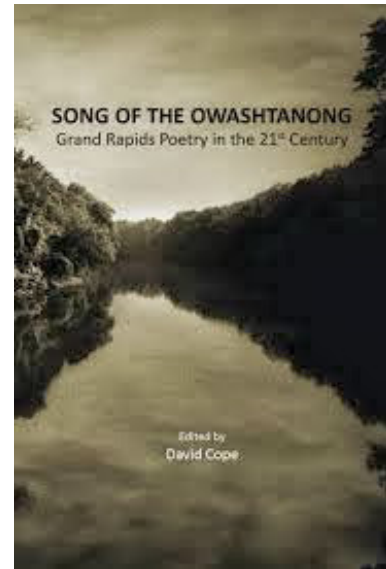


Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

**Song of the Owashtanong:
Grand Rapids Poetry in the 21st Century**
Edited by David Cope
Ridgeway Press
Roseville, MI
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review by Zvi A. Sesling

A number of poetry groups print anthologies of their members' works. In the Boston area for example is Bagel Bards Anthology (in which I have been both included and served as editor twice) and PowWow River Poets Anthology which contain many works of merit. In fact, San Diego, Dallas and other large cities have similar works, so why not Grand Rapids, Michigan.

As editor David Cope points out in his Foreword this volume "...includes poetry that is firmly rooted in the people, soil and rivers of West Michigan, as well as work that ranges from Bucharest and Gdansk to the coast of Ireland, St. Petersburg, the battlefields of the Civil War and the swamps of Vietnam."

Cope began laboring as a custodial worker for 18 year and retired last year after years as a professor. He has served as Grand Rapids Poet Laureate, has seven books of poetry to his credit and has a list of awards and credits longer than most books of poetry. A friend of Allen Ginsberg and other well-known poets he has put together with this offering of 16 poets a fine collection.

Many of the poems are too long to reproduce here and only parts would make little sense, so shorter ones were selected. For example, David Landrum, who teaches literature at Grand Valley State University, had a number of entries of which this is the most poignant dealing with the dark basement of living:

Life Before Age Twenty-Two

*Nightmare after nightmare
but waking up was worse.*

*The bullies on the street were kinder
than the bullies living in my house.*

Life as a bowling pin, life as a cutting board.

*Never being called by my own name
and someone threatening to kill my dog.*

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L. S. Klatt graduated the University of Georgia in 2003 and teaches American literature and creative writing at Calvin College. The "May Day" could apply to any who has experienced troubled times with an ending that may or may not be satisfactory.

May Day

*I am adrift in a burned-out canoe
without a helmsman. It was once a birch
straight & narrow made swift. The planets
revolve behind the blue sky but I don't
witness. The new is good. The willow
has waded into the pond, & the purpose
of the pond is outside of me. The bow
of the boat follows the breezes. Light-
years from Zero.*

A past Grand Rapids Poet Laureate, Rodney Torreson is the author of *The Ripening of Pinstripes: Called Shots on the New York Yankees*, fine poet-ics on the players who make up what used to be baseball's best team. He has several other books and chapbooks to his credit and teaches elementary and intermediate grades at a parochial school. In this poem, Torreson captures moments in the country that city folks never experience, or is it all a dream?

On a Moonstruck Gravel Road

*The sheep-killing dogs saunter home,
wool scraps in their teeth.*

*From the den of the moon
ancestral wolves
howl their approval.*

*The farm boys, asleep in their beds,
live the same wildness under their lids;
every morning hey come back
through the whites of their eyes
to do their chores, their hands pausing
to pet the dog, to press
its ears back, over the skull,
to quiet that other world.*

For those who enjoy reading poetry anthologies from different areas of the country, produced by those local poets, this is a welcome collection from an area that is not always recognized for the fine poetry written there.

Zvi A. Sesling

Reviewer for Boston Small Press and Poetry Scene

Author, King of the Jungle (Ibbetson Street Press)

Author, Across Stones of Bad Dreams (Cervena Barva Press)

Author, Fire Tongue (forthcoming, Cervena Barva Press)

Editor, Muddy River Poetry Review Online Poetry Journal

Editor, Bagel Bards Anthologies 7& 8

Publisher, Muddy River Books