

## Some New Sounds

*Sounds New*, edited by Peter Van Toorn. Dorion: The Muses' Co./La Compagnie des Muses, 1990.

*Sounds New* is burdened by too many poems that deserve one reading or less. Their inclusion is unfortunate—they only detract from the authentic poems within the collection. I won't name them all, but here are several of the poems that I found the most tiring: Louis Giguère's embarrassing telephone call "Dating" ("I called her./The phone rang./I hung up./Jeez, that was close!"); Phil Moscovitch's soggy "Water" ("I dream of water—/water flowing./gushing, gurgling,/spraying, falling") or any other of his four poems in the collection: Ian Stephens' self-conscious anger in "Brief doorways" ("Sometimes it makes sense/sometimes/I sorta get a handle.../most of the time it's all just/fucked"); and William S. Neale's male angst poem "Lost caution" ("you become/impaired/break against me/hoping to reach me").

It's up to the editor to prevent these insignificant poems from sullying the collection, to put into print a selection of poems that sound new. If Van Toorn considers these new sounds, then he and I must have a different sense of the words "new" and "sounds." There's no music, no strangeness, no newness there. With an introduction teasing us into thinking that we'll find a "synthesis of mysticism and science," a "revitalized holistic perspective" and "some kind of *ad hoc* animism," how can the reader not help but feel cheated by such poets? If this is, as Van Toorn would have us believe, the "*Sounds New* generation," I'd rather have the next or the last or no generation at all. I feel as though some politician is trying to sell me something both I know and he knows isn't there, and then taxing me with the headache that comes from reading such poems.

I'd rather not begin with the less competent poems but I'd also rather get them out of the way quickly. Once beyond the frustration of such poems, the reader can get on with the sense of mystery, discomfort, colour and fermentation that informs the better poems in the collection. Bruce Taylor's poems are always a curious delight—loquacious, meddling, bright-eyed. And intelligent. Here's the beginning of "Viking winter":

The men sit around in their pronged hats  
getting on with the era.  
Nothing much is accomplished.  
They eat dried fish and feed the heads  
to the king's imported dog;  
they squat in corners of the great hall, squinting  
in the wintry light that comes in  
under the skewed beams, and through chinks  
in the sills, whittling house-gods from  
tether posts and broken oars.

In all of Taylor's poems there is a sense of celebration, of language and idea jousting, bubbling, embracing.

Emanuel Lowl, in "stone point," give voice to the land and the water:

We wing  
past north, far  
from last twigs;  
cliffsides and slopes we  
scan like gyrfalcons  
cloaked in winter-blind.  
We move  
across sinewy  
articulations of water,  
our toy feet  
now white as  
a strutting ptarmigan.

Here the language matches the movement, the meanderings of idea, each word a floating point of light on a shifting landscape. The poem seems effortless, airborne. The reader is allowed into the poem and is told secrets along the way.

When she's good, Ruth Taylor is very good. She is able to instill frivolity and fear into her poems, able to redefine words like "love" and "leaf" to suit her own purposes. Her poem "To The Muses" manages to yoke together raucous historical invocation, sex, and a new way of listening to language:

All you have to do is cooperate.  
Shall I drag out the black roses and the scythe?  
Dry your eyes, the world will get on without you.  
In the midst of the midst, how shall I invoke you?  
Imagine getting goosed by Pan!  
Imagine the Perilous pulpit in Percival's pants...  
a rod, a wand, a wonder!  
Nah! that's hag talk.

And now we're at cross purposes.

O Thistle-tickler Thalia.  
O Terpsichore's hot-tin tap shoes.

Other poets that I find myself rereading include Renato Trujillo for his sparseness and gentleness; David McGimpsey for his clamour and quirk; Kenneth Radu for his quiet conversation; Stephen Brockwell for his sinewy images; Naomi Guttman for what she does with language that simultaneously separates and fuses women and men; Dwayne Perault for working on a better definition of rain; and Mohamud S. Togane for describing humiliation and mutilation. Fortunately, these poets float right past Van Toorn's disappointing introduction and the more tedious poems in the collection. They give a new version of reality, a new lilt to the language and a new sound to the imagination.

—Peter O'Brien