

ALTA holds its next conference in October, in Seattle, Washington. Check out their website for more details: www.literarytranslators.org.

For information on the activities of Canadian literary translators check their site at: www.attlc-ltac.org.

Beatriz Hausner is a poet and translator, principally from Spanish into English. Her poetry is rooted in the traditions of Spanish America and international Surrealism and most of her translations have focused on the writers of those literatures. Her latest poetry collection is *The Wardrobe Mistress*.

The Sadness of Life

The Human Cannonball
Poems by Halli Villegas
believe your own press

reviewed by
C. Durning Carroll

At its best, the despair of others reminds us of the persistence of happiness. When we watch or hear of suffering we may be lucky enough to recognize that for most of us life isn't so bad. If it's successful, the sadness artists express soothes our nerves by reminding us that pain is universal. As Elton John put it so succinctly: "Sad songs say so much." Halli Villegas, in *The Human Cannonball*, (believe your own press, 2005), uses this phenomenon to build a short but affecting collection told in the voice of some of our greatest sufferers—circus performers.

Villegas' collection recalls the once great but now mostly forgotten poetic masterpiece, Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology*. Like that work,

Villegas' book creates a microcosmic society, (for Masters, it was the imaginary Spoon River, Illinois) and through the interplay of poetic voices shows the foibles and falsities in which we all participate. The power of such writing, whether by Masters or Villegas, is that it doesn't take long for us to recognize in these poetic voices some aspect of ourselves. When Villegas writes: "I saw the hesitation./ He held the pose for a heartbeat longer than usual/ his arm went a little higher/ his hand trembled a bit," in the poem "The Knife Thrower's Wife," she subtly evokes the double edge of true passion, the terrible proximity of love and hate.

Villegas calls these "narrative poems," and she is right to do so; they tell intimate and affecting stories. However, while Villegas gains from her narratives much of the power of fiction to make complete worlds for us, her poems can correspondingly suffer from the curse of some prose writing—indifference to the poetic line. Since the disappearance of rhyme and/or metre as essential structures of verse, the question of what constitutes a vital poetic line has been thrown wide open. Being a prescriptivist about this is consequently a good way of displeasing all the people all of the time. Still, in several places: "with misdirection while passing a juicy bit," from "The Shell Game" or "uncontrollable" and "The trick is," from "The Lion Tamer," one wishes Villegas had wrestled a little more with that unruly beast of poetry—the line.

C. Durning Carroll is related to the actor Charles Durning and other illustrious personages but still has less hair on his ears.

Tightrope Books launch

Outside The Social bar on Queen West there is a bleeding mannequin. Inside, the bar is dimly lit with sconces and old chandeliers. On one side hangs a large Smirnoff Vodka sign. Some of the lighting is purple and the couches in the lounge are covered in fake zebra skin. We could be in a mod bar in early post-Communist St. Petersburg. But this is Toronto, 2005.

On the evening of October 28th, I strayed in here for the launch of Tightrope Books, Halli Villegas' new, "multi-arts" press. Among all the elegantly dressed gentlemen and the women in sequined hats were a few recognizable faces: George Fetherling was there and was warmly greeted by everyone; copies of *George Fetherling and His Work*, on sale at the front table. Others, though I didn't know their names, were regulars in Toronto's literary reading scene.

After a late start because of a broken video projector, we heard some good poetry and stories. Myna Wallin, who seems to be everywhere in Toronto these days, read from her forthcoming collection *A Thousand Profane Pieces*. Paul Hong read subversive fiction about the cruelties of love, and Mariella Griffor, a Chilean revolutionary, arrived all the way from Detroit to entertain us.

The feature act of the evening was Emily Pohl-Weary reading from her first collection *Iron-On*



Constellations; small though she is, she felt like a huge presence in the room. The video poems we heard/saw were like whispered flirtations from some-

one you've long wanted to be with, intimate yet unyielding. They left us wanting more.

All in all, a promising start for a young poet and a bold new press.

C.D.C.