

WOMAN BY THE SHORE AND OTHER POEMS

ROBERT W. NERO. 1990. Nature Heritage Books, Toronto. 51 pp., black and white illustrations. \$9.96.

In a recent article in *Blue Jay* in which he records a new Great Horned Owl longevity record, Robert Nero marvels at "the existence of a bird in the wild beyond the usual life span" because, as he puts it, "so many things can happen to a bird" (*Blue Jay* 50:92). Over the years many things have happened to Robert Nero himself. He has become a highly reputed ornithologist, nature writer and educator; now, with the publication of *Woman by the Shore and Other Poems*, he has become what many have suspected he has been all along — a poet. The volume is dedicated to Louise de Kiriline Lawrence on the occasion of her ninety-sixth birthday (Lawrence died earlier this year at the age of ninety-eight) and it is indeed a fitting tribute to one sensitive artist from another. The concluding lines of the title poem of this collection of personal lyrics sets the tone for the entire volume:

Listen to the loon
dear lady, let the voice of
the white throat
send you my love.

Though serious in intent the poems are executed with a light touch. The free verse lines (the syntax always clear) rise and fall in cadence; the diction is simple with the figures of speech economically, though evocatively, worded. And as he describes with graphic concreteness many of nature's "small things,"

Nero manages to convey the quiet joy he himself feels as the result of his observations. He notes the "squeaky, hesitant trill" of a grackle, the "filagreed sinews" of plants in winter, "the catkin-drenched" aspen, and the wren in search of "dawn-numbed nymphs." In "Fall Event" he focussed on a single image, "our ash tree" and pictures the "slow trickling fall" of the golden leaves:

until
by evening light
with bare limbs aloft
her yellow dress
lies at her feet.

"No Alarm" is more narrowly focussed and makes, in very few words, a strongly sensuous impact:

A wasp hovers
so close
the breeze of its wings
alerts the hairs
on my arm.

As the title poem, from which I have already quoted, suggests, the ability to observe the miraculous detail of the natural world leads to a sense of serenity and certainty. Such a sense in turn deepens the poet's love for another person of like mind. One of the most successful (and one of the longest) poems in the collection, "Wild Plum Tree," illustrates the point:

Wondrous, that from these
thin, crooked branches
held aloft today in silence
can emerge a billowy white veil
as often crowds the edge
of woods I've driven past and
wished I'd owned.

This will be our woods brought
home;
when we go to test its fragrance
I'll rest my hand on your
shoulder
and be glad.

"Fallen Feathers" sensitively expresses the same mood:

In fresh morning light
a grackle's feather
caught on a spruce bough
black on pale green
is as dramatic
as a living bird
enough to make me
catch my breath
though I like best the one
that fluttered down
as a grackle passed.

The plumes are proof
that autumn lies ahead...
I'll send them to my love.

There are occasional flaws in the poems, either when the poet insists on making his point too explicitly (the last two lines of "First Snow" and the concluding line of "Ladybug, Ladybug," for example) or when he allows himself to lapse into sentimentality (the conclusions of "Robin's Nest" and "Quiet Sunday").

Fortunately, such weaknesses are rare in this pleasing collection which reveals, in addition to the strengths already cited, a number of semi-serious poems motivated by a whimsical sense of fun. "Unmowed Lawn" and "Salute" are two of these and although the speaker never lets us forget that he is growing old, there is an impish youthfulness in the lines which is very appealing.

Fittingly placed at the end of *Woman by the Shore* is "Teacher," which imaginatively provides a

succinct summing up of all that has gone before, including the delicate precision of James A. Carson's sketches:

It takes a tame owl
to show me things
I'd otherwise miss
or overlook
or lose the importance of
such as
dead, dry aspen leaves
still on their twigs
rustling in a cold breeze
set to tapping against
each other —
a small thing
but it caught the owl's
attention for a moment
her head tipped up
motionless, watchful, listening
a delicate fall sound
I'd heard before
but never perceived.

Reviewed by *Jeanie Wagner*, 4930 Dewdney Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4T 1B8

**BIRDS OF EAST-CENTRAL
SASKATCHEWAN:
KELVINGTON TO KELSEY TRAIL**

DONALD F. HOOPER. 1992. Publication No. 1 in the Manley Callin Series and No. 18 in the regular series of special publications by the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Regina, Saskatchewan. 160 pp., 36 photographs, 2 maps. \$8.95.

This new volume by Don Hooper has given the Saskatchewan Natural History Society's (SNHS's) Manley Callin Series a solid start. Don has brought together the records of dozens of people for more than 70 years in a part of Saskatchewan long believed to be extremely rich in its variety of bird life. His resulting list of 286 species proves that supposition,



A sample of photography from
Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan

Donald F. Hooper

not only documenting the presence and breeding of expected species but adding as well the first provincial and/or first regional nest records for others.

He describes in detail the area and its many special features and through habitat photos shows the varied landscape of this relatively little known part of the province. Each species in the annotated list is described in terms of its study area. A seasonal checklist and a table showing species' breeding status in each of ten habitat types complete Hooper's thorough presentation of the birds of his area. Anecdotes accompanying the numerous species photos provide amusing and unique insights into bird and human behaviour. All photos but one were taken by Hooper himself.

Manley Callin envisioned a comprehensive and definitive publication on the birds of Saskatchewan and through a generous bequest to

SNHS encouraged its preparation. The entire sum has been placed in a trust fund and the annual revenue is being used to produce the individual volumes in the present series, which is designed to fill in gaps in our knowledge of provincial bird distribution and abundance. Written by SNHS members who receive no payment, these books will describe the birds of such areas as Last Mountain Lake, the Coteau, Cypress Hills, Yorkton, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. Also to be featured is a distributional geography of provincial birds, with extensive mapping of breeding and migration data. Combined with earlier work by many others, the Callin Series will provide documentation for *Birds of Saskatchewan*, to begin in 1995. (Dale Hjertaas wrote a more lengthy description of the Callin Series in *Blue Jay* 46:109-110.)

Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan is available from the Blue Jay Bookshop, Box 22270, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 7H4