

**THE YEAR IS A CIRCLE:
A CELEBRATION OF HENRY
DAVID THOREAU**

VICTOR C. FRIESEN. 1995. Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., Toronto. 142 pp. 173 mm x 183 mm, soft cover, \$24.95.

“Good things come in small packages,” they say, and this attractive coffee table book in miniature is a fine example. The glossy, fold-in, soft covers, each adorned with colour photographs, enclose a wealth of imagery, both visual and verbal.

While the book is liberally sprinkled with quotations from the works of Thoreau, the eighteen poems and seventy-four photographs in this tribute are not intended “to describe a specific incident in his life,” or “stem from a specific passage in his writings,” but are inspired, rather, by what most moved the great author of *Walden* fame himself: the sensuous, wonderful world of nature.

The rich imagery of the poems evoke sensations and memories which many readers of this journal will know and treasure — perhaps have already known and treasured, since some of the poems have previously been published in *Blue Jay*. As I read them, I found myself transported again and again in memory and reflection to experiences deeply savoured in times past. The circle of the year, and of the day (for as Thoreau put it “the day is an epitome of the year”), become magically real as the poet speaks of “the chill/Gray ghost of dawn”; of “horizons shimmering in heat”; of “trees in ageless amber”; of “crunching the powder-snow/With swinging steps”; of a “feline wind — playing, icy-clawed, with tufts of grass”; of “April’s modest green”; of “seven tundra swans — crying a white triumph from the sky”; and of “treading moon-washed roads made smooth with night’s/Denial of clear vision.”

Friesen’s poetic flair finds double ex-

pression through the shutter of his camera. The photographs in the volume have captions from the poems accompanying them, but many need no such poetic affirmation. They speak eloquently for themselves: a lone shorebird wading at the waters edge in the first cool light of dawn; a diagonal tangle of multihued grasses and wildflowers; an anvil cloud hovering dramatically over open sea; a mosaic of richly blended autumn leaves; a full moon hanging stunningly in deep blue light over the crest of the gentle, snow-clad prairie hills.

The book is beautifully symmetrical in format. The introduction, preceded by the above-mentioned quote of Thoreau about the day being the epitome of the year, alludes to the smaller of the two circles. It describes Walden Pond as being “fashioned from/The dawn into day” and then eventually, as evening arrives, becoming “a breath of burnished fire/With scattered flames against the sky.” The four main sections of the book trace the circle of the seasons, beginning with summer. Each seasonal section, in turn, has four subdivisions, and each of these subdivisions, introduced by the appropriate quotation from the works of Thoreau, has a poem and three or four pictures. The first subdivision, in each case, celebrates the season as a whole. The remaining three feature specific months of that season. The Conclusion then returns to the theme of the smaller circle of the day and is preceded by another quotation from Thoreau’s *Walden* which echoes the one in the introduction, thus bringing the volume as a whole full circle.

The journey through *The Year is a Circle*, taken several times, was for me a lovely way to celebrate the first month of the year.

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