

introduction

Planet Earth

O this great beloved world and all the creatures in it.

–P.K. Page, “Planet Earth”

Where we live, who we are, this net, this web we have cast around the strange and holy sphere we call the earth: moss and lichen, cedar, pine, kelp and eelgrass, all and everything that inhabits us, that we inhabit. We are mole, microbe, mountain and sea, the wind, a spider’s web, a wasp, a molecule’s wish that all of us in our untold, unimaginable selves are one beautiful thing, forms that together are one form, our story one story. We are the only earth, the one blue planet. And in what way and how are we to celebrate but in the transient, intimate gestures we call poems. The lyrics and elegies, narratives, songs, ballads, anecdotes, odes and idylls that occupy the pages of this anthology are made from a thousand and one nights of poets who have whiled away their hours in the discipline of writing to at last come out from the dark and the light to read their poems at Planet Earth.

Planet Earth is the title of P.K. Page’s poem that became the name of the reading venue at Moka Coffee House in Victoria, British Columbia. P.K. (Pat) Page was one of Canada’s great poets. We especially treasured her here on Vancouver Island. She offered us the hope that poetry endures through the generations. Her writing life encompassed seventy years. She was part of our history as a people. She was part of our lives. She was as much of the earth as she was of the world.

Her great poem, "Planet Earth," presently travels by satellite in outer space beyond the reaches of our solar system, but it also lives on in our inner space. She is one of the masters, the progenitors of the poems that live among these pages.

Yvonne Blomer is the impresario of the Planet Earth Poetry reading series. This anthology, edited by Yvonne and Cynthia Woodman Kerkham, a guest host of the series, is a gathering of dozens of disparate voices. Each poet brings to this world their simple human concerns: life and love, loss, hope, and death; all the many names they have created to describe the presence of the spirit. They name it in the objects that surround us, the roads we travel down, and the spaces we reside in, a room, a meadow, one another's arms.

In the opening poem to this collection, "Autobiography," Jan Zwicky speaks of the "cold bright years" of her life and says, "how long I spent, trying to die." Her answer to this was:

Such injustice. When every morning
it's spring again. Every morning
the light melts the snow —
before books, before desks, before windows,
before pain, before amazement.

There are many poems I could quote from, many poets I could name. Kyeren Regehr speaks of "the clay matrix of [her] limbs, / the salt-licked kaolin of [her] skin." Rhonda Ganz tells us to "bless the maidens about to be wed," and Donna Kane posits, "So much of what we love / will never love us back." Murray Reiss speaks of men who have "escaped the world / of their fathers and they know / there is no going back." Poems, anecdotes, small songs, the whispered words we speak to children and to lovers that they not be afraid of the dark. But these poems are not fragile. They are strong tough things. They have been made to withstand all that assails us. Osip Mandelstam died on the way to the gulag of Russia in 1938, the year before I was born. He said, "Perhaps my whisper was born before my

