think, ever become the essential book on motherhood; it does not have either the tone or the quality of a definitive work. It is, however, something of a "first," and as such it deserves careful reading and genuine respect.

Wendy Katz
Acadia University

A Stone Diary Pat Lowther. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. 96.

In the Fall 1975 issue of Contemporary Verse Two (Vol. 1, Number 2) a fairly long review appeared of Pat Lowther's third book Milk Stone (Borealis,1974). Entitled "Between the banal and the beautiful," it is a good example of constructive criticism, laying a deft finger on passages of coy whimsy and applauding with both hands the imaginative power and controlled verbal exuberance of the best work. In the next issue of CV II tributes appeared to the murdered poet as well as a letter from Leona Gom saying that Pat Lowther thought that the review was "the fairest and most perceptive criticism of Milk Stone that she had read." Oxford University Press has now brought out posthumously her last collection, A Stone Diary, a work of no banality and great beauty. One likes to think that good criticism can divert poets from the depths, though finally all have to soar on their own wings.

As both titles suggest, Lowther was fascinated by stone, and one could hazard a guess that one of the myths most fundamental to her work is that of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the only survivors of the Greek flood. Wishing to renew the human race, they were ordered by the goddess Themis to cast behind them the bones of their first ancestor. Heads veiled, they walked across the plain throwing over their shoulders stones torn from the earth. For they were the descendants of Gaea, the earth, and rocks are the bones of the earth. Like these two survivors Lowther is a poet very conscious of destructive forces, but is herself essentially a preserver and renewer. At the core of survival she sees the strength and beauty of stone:

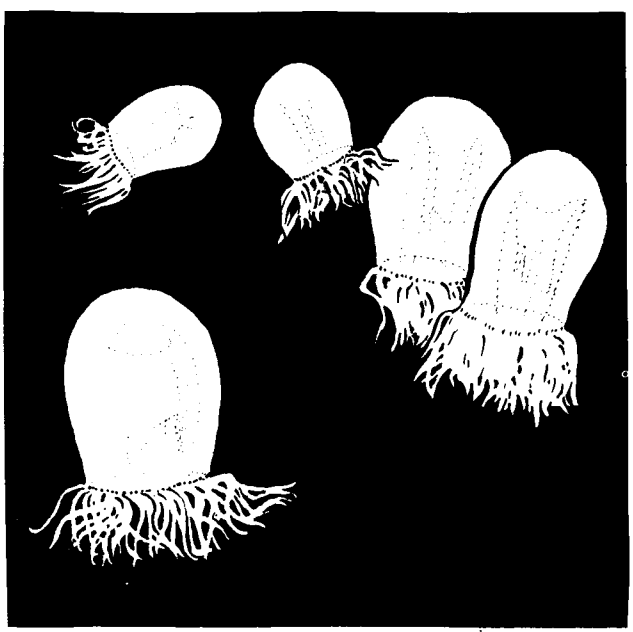
> Last week I became
> aware of details
> cubes of fool's gold
> green and blue copper
> crystal formations
> fossils shell casts
> iron roses candied gems. . . .
>
> Do you know
> how beautiful it is
> to embrace stone
> to curve all your body

against its surfaces?
(A Stone Diary)

A remarkable parallel of her vision could be seen in a drawing by Carol Fraser shown in Halifax in her exhibition of March 1977. A woman, head bent, is kneeling among mostly ovoid stones, her breasts smooth and rounded as the stones themselves--flesh made stone and stone made flesh. It is, one imagines, a drawing that Lowther would have recognized immediately, for it has the same suggestion of a oneness with the world that is so strongly present in her poems.

It is this vision of a marvellous, complex oneness that makes her a political poet, as the long sequence, Chacabuco, the pit, about a concentration camp in Chile, shows. There is not one false note of sensationalism in this poem. Its aim is to rouse us to pity and anger--a difficult feat. Many poets writing on the horrors of war and torture tend to lay it on so thick that they draw attention to their lurid language rather than to the tortured themselves. Lowther's point is that human beings cannot be whole while others are reduced to something less than human by inhuman devices:

> Choirs of young boys
> exquisitely trained
> sing hymns in cathedrals;
> jellyfish swim in the ocean
> like bubbles of
> purity made tangible.
> whole cities lie open
> to the stars;
> women bake bread;
> fruit trees unfold their blossoms
> petal by petal;
> we are continually born
>
> but these, captive, stumble
> in gross heat
> in stupor of pain:
> they are the fingers sliced off
> when the wood was cut,
> the abortions born living;
> they are the mangled
> parts of our bodies
> screaming to be
> reunited.



Her vision of the brotherhood of man has none of the cold rationality of the Enlightenment which has fostered much of today's radical chic. It seems rather to be an offshoot of the Christian view of men as all forming part of the mystical body of Christ: to hurt one cell is to injure the whole body, oneself.

Pablo Neruda as poet, communist and patriot, is the subject of one poem in Milk Stone and of five "letters" in A Stone Diary. (Here again one can judge the advance made in the power and authority of her style). The letters reach out to a poet who is similar to her in his sense of the wholeness and beauty of the earth and his indignation at those who want to carve it up for selfish profits. He too is close to stone:

> But you warmed the moon
> in a loving cup,
> in the thawing
> water of your eyes,
> you the man who moves
> under the hill,
> the man who kisses stone.
>
> (Anniversary Letter to Pablo)

"Last Letter" is an elegy that hints at the circumstances of his death and concludes with a magnificent affirmation:

> From the deep hollows
> water comes out like stars;
> you are changing, Pablo,
> becoming an element
> a closed throat of quartz
> a calyx
> imperishable in earth
>
> As our species bears
> the minute electric
> sting, possibility,
> our planet carries Neruda
> bloodstone
> dark jewel of history
> the planet carries you
> a seed patient as time.

Five particularly attractive poems on sea and shore life ("Anenomes," "Octopus," "Craneflies in their Season," "Hermit Crabs" and "Slugs") show a sense of delight in creatures that are all part of earth's mystery. The slugs look revolting singly "like live phlegm" until they are seen in twos copulating:

> they are twined
> together
> in a perfect spiral
> flowing
> around
> each other
> spinning
> gently
> with their motions. . . .

In the "Octopus" she draws on a range of metaphor and simile (taken from everyday life, anatomy, modern technology, Renaissance art) and in a short space evokes an exciting, complex creature:

The octopus is beautifully
functional as an umbrella;
at rest a bag of rucked skin
sags like an empty scrotum
his jelled eyes sad and bored
but taking flight: look
how lovely purposeful
in every part:
the jet vent smooth
as modern plumbing
the webbed pinwheel of tentacles
moving in perfect accord
like a machine dreamed
by Leonardo

She has a wonderful sense too of the bones of the past as well as the stones and bones of present and future. This is most evident in "The Dig," a sequence that could be interestingly compared to Seamus Heaney's poems "Bog Queen" and "Punishment" in his latest collection North. The subject of these is also excavated women but the poems are specifically Irish in theme, marvellously resonant with Irish history, landscape, politics. Pat Lowther's excavated women are obviously Indian, but without losing their specific origins, they become Everywoman and Everywoman's ancestress. In the section, "The Diggers," a gently ironical comment is made on the awe we feel for the past but we don't or can't feel for the present:

The diggers
with very gentle fingers
lift up the bones of a woman;
tenderly they take off
her stockings of earth;
they have not such love
for the living
who are not finished
or predicted.

In "The Bones" the whole life of a tribe is evoked, the men

their hands infinitely
potent, working in blood,
commanding the death of animals,
the life of the tribe.

But it is mainly the women she deals with in lines which, though not stridently feminist, stress the female rather than the human condition:

Their work bent them
and sex, that soft explosion
miraculous as rain
broke in them over and over,
their bodies thickened like tubers
broke and were remade
again and again crying out
in the heave of breaking
the terrible pleasure
again and again till
they fell away, at last
they became bone. . . .

Will our bones tell
sister, what we died of?
how love broke us
in that helplessly desired
breaking, and men
and children ransacked our flesh,
cracked our innermost bones
to eat the morrow.

It is characteristic of Lowther that the last word is "morrow" not "marrow."

The measure of this collection's strength is that one wants to quote almost every poem and share it with the reader: "100," a very beautiful, compassionate and quite unsentimental evocation of an old man; the exciting and disturbing "City Slides;" "Notes from Ferry Creek:" the lovely mountain poems "Early Winters" and "Coast Range"--the list is almost as long as the index. The only poem I have some misgivings about is "Kitchen Murder" where one catches a lethal whiff of Atwoodian attitudinizing.

In nearly every poem there is the delight of the unexpected but just right simile or metaphor: "the Fraser River/ which is immense/swollen like throat-veins;" of the old man whose "lips tremble/like black moths' wings, his eyes blue/ as watered milk startle/ through lenses of tears;" of a woman "your heavy scarlet smile/ held out like a credit card." And one could go on.

On the cover a noted "media-person" is quoted as saying that her death is to be deplored because she was "on the edge of whatever fame and success Canadian poetry has to offer." The real pity is that she is no longer here to feel the exhilaration of her own developing poetic power and to share with us her splendid, all-embracing vision of stone. She has, however, left some of the best part of herself behind and it cannot be taken away from us. Much of this is implied in "Suspended:"

> When you choose silence
> I shall be like
> the last rain drop
> on a tree branch
> waiting to fall
>
> Imagine that I contain
> branch tree
> butterflies snakes
> the entire forest
> a sun
> hardly a pin-prick's size
> but bright enough
> to spear your eye
>
> and our hearts and memories.

Elizabeth Jones
Cambridge, Nova Scotia

The Proper Sphere

Women's Place in Canadian Society. Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson (eds.). Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976. Pp. 334.

Have you ever wondered why it is a man who sells carpets in your local department store and not a woman? Or whether bad cooking leads to crime? The answers to these and other more serious questions lie tucked away in the ma-