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**UNDER THE LOGOS OF THE BLUE MULE:
SELF PUBLISHING THE SERIAL POEMS OF ROY KIYOOKA**

A close reading of *Pacific Windows: Collected Poems of Roy Kiyooka* (Talonbooks 1997), reveals much about his poetry and poetics. I had the pleasure of doing the production work on this volume. Many of Kiyooka's publications can only be viewed in this format as they were self published in limited editions, for all intents and purposes artists' books, never commercially available, given to a few carefully chosen friends and colleagues around the world. I got to see some of the original publications as an aid to preparing the text. I also got to work closely with editor Roy Miki, and often had the good fortune to be able to test my reading of Kiyooka with and against his knowledge of Kiyooka and his work.

Editor Miki has assembled a comprehensive bibliography of Kiyooka's poetry published in book form. What becomes clear is that part of his cultural work was as a publisher, ten of his twenty books of poetry published during his life were self published. Self publication was certainly not unheard of, but the manner and volume suggest it might be worthy of consideration. Before I attempt to account for this, it is worth looking at his publication history.

Kiyooka's writing project begins in 1964 with the publication of *Kyoto Airs* by Periwinkle Press, designed and printed by his artist friend Takao Tanabe. The 4th Avenue Poems (written 1964-65, printed 1969) appears in George Bowering's *Imago*, the magazine of the long poem. Then *Nevertheless These Eyes* (Coach House Press 1967), *StoneDGloves* (1970, actually a National Gallery of Canada catalogue produced and printed by the self described mindless acid freaks at Coach House Press) and *transcanada letters* (Talonbooks 1975), which was not a book of poetry per se but contained an early version of seasonal pleasures and small hindrances, which later appeared much revised in *BC Monthly* (November 1978). He then publishes *The Fontainebleu Dream Machine* (Coach House Press 1977), which later appears in the *Long Poem Anthology* (Coach House Press 1979). *Mutualities: A Packet of Word/s* is published in the art magazine *Vanguard* (October 1977).

1977 marks a turning point in Kiyooka's publishing and by extension his writing. Over the next 17 years, until his death in January of 1994, Kiyooka self publishes 10 books, some of which appear in part or in whole in magazines or anthologies. Only one book is published commercially, *Pear Tree Pomes* (Coach House Press 1987) for which he receives a Governor General's Award nomination, and one, *Pacific Windows*, as a special edition of *The Capilano Review* in 1990. Another, *December / February* 1987, 1988, a long letter to artist David Bolduc, is published as a chapbook, posthumously in 1995 by CBC [an imprint invented for the occasion by Victor Coleman, Stan Bevington and David Bolduc]. During this period one rejection stands out. *Wheels*, the book length record of his train trip through Japan with his father and the accompanying photographs, was rejected by Coach House Press, at around the same time they accepted *Pear Tree Pomes*, a trade off perhaps. It is also around this time that with *Struck from the Heat of a Cold December Sun*, published in a run of 11, we see the first appearance of his publishing project *Blue Mule*, named for the photo gallery he had for a few years on Powell Street in Vancouver's Japanese enclave. The other titles in this series are *Wheels*, *Gotenyama*, *An April Fool Divertimento*, *All Amazed in the Runnels of His 60 Winters*, *Excerpts from the Long Autumn Scroll*, a june skylark for kai's air, *Three Nippon Weathervanes*: *Kumo/Cloud/s*, *Toksuka Topiaries*, *Kohama Skies*, *October's Piebald Skies & Other Lacunae* and *A February Postscript: to October's Piebald Skies*.

It would be too simplistic to argue that either Kiyooka's work had changed from what fit into a fairly representative publication history, making him unpublishable, or that he had simply lost all interest in commercial publishing. Since working on this project I have felt a need to account for what I have come to regard as a curious turn of events. The explanation I have come up with involves aesthetic, ideological and structural considerations. Of course the three are intricately connected, but this is the most useful way I have found to look at this phenomenon.

A cursory examination of his work makes a very clear case for his consideration as a serial poet. Kiyooka wrote more than simply long poems, nor were they suites of poems. You will not find his work in many poetry anthologies because I would argue he did not write individual stand alone or discreet lyrics. His poetry works in the context of the book. A sharp reminder of the bpNichol /

Frank Davey essay The Book as a Unit of Composition. The last line in Miki's afterword is footnote 28

The importance of seriality in RK's work in poetry, visual art, and photography, which I can only allude to here, is a subject that calls out for further research and study.

and Kiyooka himself is quoted as saying

...even my pomes tend to work serially. I have always been a serial artist. My books are always whole entities. They are not made up of discrete things. That's how I photograph too.

When Kiyooka started writing it would have been around the time of the Vancouver Poetry Conference of 1963. He had returned from Japan with Allen Ginsberg shortly before the conference began. Kiyooka certainly would have been as familiar with the concept of the serial poem, as advanced by Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan, as he was with its analog in painting, a practice he was leaving at that time for his new medium photography. He also worked in the company of other poets who were producing serial poems, such as George Bowering and Gerry Gilbert, to name but two who were publishing and writing serial poems. The aesthetic alone however is not enough to explain the shift in Kiyooka's publishing pattern.

The demands of publishing had for some time been a difficult negotiation for Kiyooka, who did not write discrete lyrics.

photos &/or poems
may be reproduced by anyone
for whatever reason
'Copyrights' like worn-out
gloves are obsolete.

"only the imagination is real"

The above copyright quote in stoneDGloves is a direct statement of his radical conception of his own intellectual property rights. In fact Kiyooka was repudiating widely accepted property rights. His publishers however may not have agreed with this repudiation. This overturning of property relations reflects many of the precepts of 'the revolution' of the late 60's early 70s and the concomitant overturning of social relations, the motif of much of Kiyooka's work and many other's working alongside him locally and internationally. It seems clear since Kiyooka was literally working on the text when he died, that he favoured the idea of a collected works. What we have is a text that is very similar in many respects to Spicer's Collected Books [Black Sparrow Press 1975]. Two writers with self evident antipathy towards the standards of publishing: Spicer with almost his whole bibliography lacking copyright information, and for Kiyooka the 10 titles which he publishes in limited editions under his own Blue Mule imprint. However, neither did ideology alone altogether prevent publication.

The structural shift I am referring to is the 1977 Canada Council adoption of the UNESCO definition of the book, basically defined as more than 48 pages perfect bound and in a minimum edition of 500 copies. According to bpNichol, another serial poet of note, this pretty much eliminated the chapbook as a viable publishing format, and by implication spelled the end of the serial poem and the book as a compositional unit.

The consequences were enormous for Canadian small press publishing. The decision meant the end of chapbooks, posters, broadsides, ephemera, printed objects, everything printed except standard sized books.

It was also the beginning of a time when, according to Nichol, readers were scanning magazines for a few good poems rather than searching for the 'news' of poetry.

Another way to read the new definition of the book is in terms of commodity capitalism. The poem upon publication becomes just another commodity, mass produced and fitting somewhat uncomfortably within the confines of that very definition. This also heralds the dawn of the oxymoronic term 'cultural industries' as well as the abandonment of serial composition for a shift into the building of collections. Kiyooka and many other poets would have to alter their attentions if

they wished to continue publishing or turn to other means. Kiyooka published only one book, *Pear Tree Pomes*, with a Canada Council subsidized publisher after the new rules came into effect. And it may only have qualified because the accompanying illustrations by David Bolduc boosted the page extent above 48. Either way the implications are clear, no more chapbooks from presses in Canada Council programs. In this case, Kiyooka's serial poetry could for the most part only be published outside the context of CanLit Cultural Industries Incorporated, where he could also enact his ideological antipathy towards copyright.

Texts as rambunctious and open as Kiyooka's did not fit easily within the nationalist project known as CanLit, and his unwillingness to compromise left him increasingly on the outside. Serious study and review outside of the attentions of a few friends was rare. In fairness, his early work was published by the best available publishers, he was nominated for the Governor General's Award for *Pear Tree Pomes*, and Coach House did receive Canada Council funding. There were also disappointments, the failure of *Wheels* to find a publisher, and Kiyooka's short novel, *Tom Thompson*, still languishes in some slush pile somewhere. There were also the unfinished works: *Mother Talk* and *Pacific Rim Letters* (the sequel to *transcanada letters*), one completed posthumously the other in limbo. Another question is that of *Pacific Windows* itself, where, in the afterword editor Miki talks of the revisioning of almost every poem as Kiyooka becomes acquainted with the word processor as a new tool for composition. This is further demonstration of the open nature of his work. Sounding very Spicerian, Kiyooka states 'the text was never completed but "abandoned" or abandoned him'.

These ten self published texts should be viewed as a publishing project of some importance. I remember the Canon copier in Roy's Vancouver home on Keefer Street, and how unusual that was and would still be in almost any 'home office'. I also remember being told that Canon was lending machines to artists as a way of exploring the capabilities of the new technology. I can't say with any certainty that this was the case with Roy and his Canon, but it did serve him well. There was also ephemera, announcements, broadsheets etc. that came out of Kiyooka's 'production house'. Type setting was done on an IBM Selectric; cut and paste was the favoured method. If you had to describe the whole of Kiyooka's published work with one phrase I would choose the term 'Artist's Books', limited edition collaborations between written and visual media meant for a 'local' (at least to Roy) audience. His commercial titles would easily fit the same description. We need to know more about Kiyooka's conception of the serial poem but we can infer a couple of important points directly from the work. Perhaps most obviously the book as compositional unit, the discrete occasional lyric was not present in his published repertoire. Second the text is open, different versions and constant revision, for some publications no two were alike. Finally, and I think most importantly, the texts refuse authority.

The refusal of authority is not only the decision to forfeit intellectual property rights, but the quality of the work itself that refuses to be easily read. The context and presentation are equal to the meaning and together they assert the intention or ideology. Form equals content. Never an easy read but always worth the effort, and in the context of CanLit a useful lesson. The move away from seriality also prefigures a shift in importance away from the west coast and back to centralia, (bill bissett's term for central Canada), an ominous shift for such as bpNichol who was bringing west coast work to Toronto. After 1977 west coast poetry and poetics underwent a shift away from the serial poem and into the lyric anecdote, with little or no place for a writer like Roy Kiyooka.

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