REVIEWS

A Difficult Place to Stand

Frank Davey, *aka bpNichol a preliminary biography*, ECW Press, Toronto, 2012. xv + 338pp.

Some twenty-eight years ago, I wrote a small piece entitled "Paternal Body as Outlaw" for a collection of essays, *Read the Way He Writes: A Festschrift for bpNichol* (77-80). It *wa*s an exciting time to be writing especially for women who were challenging conventional and traditional forms and questioning assumptions that defined what "a woman" should be. We explored new themes and forms; some women bolstered these with various theories, some preferred not to, although most of us were often herded as either "language" or "experimental" writers. I, personally, never fully understood the term "experimental." Few writers think of their writing as "experimentation." Nor have I ever understood the rigid line drawn between so-called "language" and "non-language" writers.

Through fundamental questioning of the past, women and men were injecting new vitality into their literary texts. It was important that their voices be voices of difference, a concept often identified as a feminine economy of language, or, as French theorists called it, *écriture feminine*, until it too was marginalised and branded either as essentialist or overly influenced by a male elite. Faced with so much dissension, some women found solace and strength within intimate and protective communities, until the creative imagination, in striving to set itself free from one set of limits, could no longer remain indifferent to new ones. Writing, regardless of form or content, was not the exclusive right of any one group. Women and men were exploring untraditional forms and challenging the definition of legitimate literature. Canada even had its own upstarts, and what better example than the performance group of The Four Horsemen? What better example than the anchor of the group—as everyone secretly acknowledged—than bpNichol? As he wrote at the beginning of *The Martyrology Book I* ,"so many bad beginnings / you promise yourself / you won't start there again." And a few pages later, "the hierarchy's a difficult place to stand."

There is a strong sense of history throughout Nichol's work, but the story behind the history is of the writer at the moment of writing where "feeling / knowing the words are/i am" (Book I). In breaking away from prescriptive rules traditionally identified with the authoritative figure of

the father, the son channels himself through his own, innovative forms. Nichol's use of hierarchical terms such as *The Martyrology*, "Book of Common Prayer," "Book of Hours," are not retrievals of religious history, but a retrieval of the mood of chants and incantation that draw upon language's most communicative rhythms. His songs, word-play, puns, and games (such as making up the names of saints from words that start with "st") emphasize a departure from mythical saints and embrace an unsanctified devoutness to the primacy of language. A literary conversion if you will, a symbolic event leading the writer toward self-definition and significance. Which brings me to the recently published, *aka bpNichol a preliminary biography* by Frank Davey.

I wondered at the use of "preliminary" in the title. Was this meant as an incomplete biography, an introductory, preliminary sketch that would eventually lead to a fuller portrayal? It reminded me of Nichol's *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*, one of the many metaphoric personas Nichol adopted in his creation of stories. Facts about Billy the Kid's life are scant but the story grows with time as all stories are apt to. Was this what Davey envisaged, a true eventual "story" of Nichol? Many of Davey's inferences and interpretations are couched with qualifiers such as "presumably, "quite possibly, " "probably," "seems likely," "most likely," "hints of," "suggests that" "perhaps because," and so on. It isn't long into the book before it acquires less of a legendary tone and more of unsubstantiated gossip.

Davey bases his biography on the postulation that there were mainly two Nichols—Barrie Nichol, his life outside writing, including his early years as a writer, and bpNichol, his life in writing, the latter a signature that he adopted as an alternative to the many personas he used while deploying an expanding number of genres. Much of the book revolves around attempts to negotiate a passage of legitimacy between Nichol's private life (Barrie) and his written life (bp). Anyone who has read Nichol is aware of his multiple doublings, the elusive identities that refuse to be pinned down into a singular "I" or, for that matter, two of them. Nichol's use of the title *The Martyrology* for his life-long poem reflects his need to deflect, even sacrifice, the ego or what he often referred to as the writer's "arrogance" or "narcissism" (Davey 64).

Few writers believe that autobiography or biography offer faithful reconstructions of a historically verifiable past. Most understand the differences among the remembered, the imagined, and the written lives. Most are aware that in writing, memory is retrieved and staged for different intents or genres—story, poetry, diary/journal, drama, performance, chil-

dren's literature, chants, songs, opera, comics, visual art..., all of which Nichol explored during his twenty-five years or so as a writer.

Davey's Introduction is headed by a Henry Miller quotation found in one of Nichol's notebooks, "Houses of the Alphabet." The quotation is from a Jay Martin biography of Henry Miller, *Always Merry and Bright:*

> I am highly suspicious of well-documented biographies, just as I am skeptical about historical records and events. If on the other hand, the biographer would write about his subject purely from his imagination, from what he thinks the subject was or is, that is another matter. (ix)

It would seem that Davey uses this quotation to justify whatever he *imagines* about his subject; however, the quotation misleads in at least two ways. The entire quotation in Martin's biography ends with the following: "It's this business of writing as if [the biographer] knew all about the subject that bothers me" (ix). According to Miller, "biographers are mistaken when they think they know an author by reading his letters, meeting his friends, picking up scraps of one sort or another here, there, everywhere" (x). Miller makes it clear that he doesn't regard what a biographer writes "from his imagination" as representing a true or even relevant image of his subject. In addition, Davey doesn't tell the reader that the Miller quotation is part of an idea for a game or novel based both on the Miller quotation and a Ludwig Wittgenstein concept. I believe that Nichol had read an early edition of a biography of Wittgenstein by Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir,* at about the same time as the Miller biography. The Wittgenstein biography gives several examples of how Wittgenstein thought of philosophy as consisting of jokes and games. Many sources, including Steve McCaffery's and bpNichol's *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book-Machine, The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group*, have indicated that Nichol was influenced by Wittgenstein's investigations emphasizing variable uses of language as substitutes for orthodoxy. Nichol was also influenced by Wittgenstein's interpretation of philosophical problems as puzzles that do not necessarily lead to definitive answers.

I'm not pretending to understand Nichol's exact intentions in the two notebook pages in question, but it's evident that whatever he was planning was more complex than simply sanctioning a biographer's imagination. The first page has a drawing of front and back book covers. The front cover bears the number 252, whose significance I'm not aware of. The back cover bears Wittgenstein's name. This is followed by rules of a "game" and notes "for Novel." He "plays" with algebraic equations using an unknown

factor of "x" multiplied by "changes" inside brackets. This is followed by the Miller quotation but also by Nichol's own words: "different operators could be reading different books, performing different functions and could be reading (a) biog of a bpNichol." On the second page he again identifies "x" as "the structure," then draws a slash down the middle of "x" to form * —an asterisk. In historical linguistics, an asterisk indicates that a symbol has been reconstructed on the basis of linguistic material. In programming language, the asterisk is used to refer to aliases or variables on a given name, all of which played important roles in Nichol's writing. He is clearly suggesting that basic structures are changed according to different readings and "operators." The variable "x" becomes other than the original, perhaps an asterisk, maybe a star, or even a footnote. In another notebook quoted in *Rational Geomancy,* Nichol writes:

> [H]istory (is) simply a way of making a particular sequence "meaningful..." [I]f you go far enough back or far enough forward in time you step outside of it—you are less & less tied to verisimilitude because there is no "reality" to oppose your "Fiction" (195).

When Davey claims both in his Introduction and at the end of his biography that Nichol would have wanted his writing to be read as autobiography, it is unlikely that Nichol meant traditional or prescribed concepts of "autobiography." Having been influenced by Gertrude Stein's own autobiographical writing, he was aware of the creation of a self as an art/fact exploring a process of consciousness for both writer and reader. *Art facts: a book of contexts,* was the name of a manuscript that Nichol sent to Chax Press in Tucson, Arizona which was published posthumously in 1990. Both Stein and Nichol wrote extensively on the *artifact*, the art/i/fact of the self. Both understood that where biography is likely to delve deeper into what is presented in a traditional autobiography, it cannot delve deeper, *biographically,* into a work of art or an art/fact. Biography can analyze the merits of a work of art, it can theorize, and intellectualize, but, as regards any relevant biographical information, it can only presume or construe. There is no reliable synthesis between biographical information and a poem, for example. Each is developed on a different plane and, more often than not, each travels in opposite directions. A work of art doesn't lead to "true" biographical fact any more than biography leads to the true meaning of a work of art. Martin's biography of Miller ends with the following:

> Miller wasn't much happier with those supposedly responsible, serious university critics who sought to put him in what they regarded as his proper

> place... Even more he found that critics now possessed an annoying tendency to think their own thought…The problem was that he had created a Henry Miller, which for him, was the true Miller… (488-89).

Nichol created a bpNichol whose history was "literalized," which, as far as he was concerned, was the true Nichol. Writing for Nichol was a mix of truth as fiction and fiction as truth. To ignore this is to negate the constructs of Nichol's literary games in which the reader is invited to participate. Throughout his biography, Davey emphasizes Nichol's fascination with variability and his multiple self-constructed identities, his semi-fictional versions, yet he insists on establishing a binding synthesis between the private life of Barrie Nichol and the writer, bpNichol. He purports to uncover, through notebooks, letters, and what Miller calls scraps of one sort or another, autobiographical "truth," whereas Nichol's art exceeds "truth" within a genre that would best be described as *autofiction.* For example, Nichol's novel, *Journal,* implies a record-keeping activity, but the usual definition of "journal" is displaced as the text maintains a vertiginous performative act described by Stephen Scobie in *bpNichol: What History Teaches* as a "sequence of events broken up, rearranged, overlapped, repeated, to prevent the reader from getting caught up in the seriality of a story" (82). Davey refers to *Journal* as a *nouveau roman* (xiv), a genre that subordinates plot and character to objects and details of a visual world. *Journal* does subordinate plot, but in its dreamy stream-of-consciousness the narrator is featured as being split between "I" and "he." The novel presents an emotional rollercoaster as narrator(s)—child and young adult face loss—loss of childhood, separation from (m)other—not merely separation from the personal mother as Davey implies, but the frustration of a subject who must accept that he is no longer the centre of an other's attention, including that of several ex-lovers. It captures the emotional conflict that arises from failed love, and anger at the hierarchy represented by the name of the "father." Again, this does not imply simply the familial father, but the authoritative social order traditionally represented by patriarchy. The narrator/dreamer of *Journal* yearns for the tenderness and innocence of childhood as depicted in the last section of the "journal" when the child "no higher than [his mother's] waist dances with her (70). n a few lines from the end of "journal," the adult narrator writes "…when you put this book down I won't be there," thus emphasizing that events are happening within the performative act of writing (80). Both Scobie and Davey describe the book as Oedipal desire on the part of the dreamer/writer, although Scobie believes the novel moves through and beyond the Oedipal (103). Davey wonders if, according to a Nichol notebook, the dancing recollections

aren't "fantasies or descriptions of innocent scenes" (30). He also speculates that they "might" have happened at a specific address during a specific time in Nichol's childhood and adds that this "isn't clear" (30). Immediately, on the next page, he describes how these possible innocent fantasies taken from the notebook have been transcribed in *Journal* as "lurid and hallucinatory passages of Oedipal desire…[that] offer even stronger hints of why Barrie's teenage years would be so tumultuous" (31). Once again he tries to establish a binding correlation between fantasies or innocent scenarios and a piece of creative writing described as "lurid," a word Davey uses more than once.

Having read *Journal* several times, I must admit it never occurred to me to distill its meaning to instances of Oedipal desire. Yes, the novel yearns for innocence and bonds of affection that exist within all but the most troubled families, but this novel's family far exceeds the personal family. It is within the family of humankind that the split narrators are trying to find a place. The worst that can be said about J*ournal* is that it is very dramatic and that all women are portrayed as incarnations of a single life-force, women as Woman.This and the difficult transition from family to autonomy are not unusual in the work of young writers. Many find resolution in the recreation of a world through writing, as Nichol did. Where Davey, via Freud, suggests that much of Nichol's unhappiness stemmed from an unhappy childhood due to Oedipal feelings, I detect an attempt to sensationalize what seems to be a pretty normal family in its imperfection. In reading Davey, it's as if from the age of two Nichol had been at the mercy of perpetual childhood.

There are interesting aspects to Davey's book such as the history of writing and writers during the 'sixties and 'seventies. There is also ample evidence that Davey admired bpNichol and his many talents. As already intimated, I find one aspect of the book extremely problematic, namely, Davey's persistent allusions to Freudian concepts, especially the Oedipal, to explain Nichol's various relationships. Davey not only assigns the Oedipal to Nichol's real-life mother and, by association, to his father, but also to women Nichol's own age who, according to Davey, also awoke "old Oedipal feelings." Davey returns to Freudian scenarios so often that I wondered if he wasn't affected by what Freud calls "the compulsion to repeat." For Freud, repetition is a means of lending energy to what could otherwise remain imperceptible. Gertrude Stein uses **r**epetition in her writing for similar reasons, as does Nichol. Is this also Davey's strategy, compulsively repeating to better unveil what he interprets as the imperceptible in Nichol's work? Lines or segments from poems that Davey cites as proofs

of his premises are sometimes so forced that it's as if he were trying to make Nichol's writing fit his own pre-conceived ideas. It reminds me of the man who, having been given a hammer spends the rest of his life looking for nails. For example, the line from *The Martyrology, Book II* in the "Auguries" passages, "she is a ghost who walks among my feelings," is, according to Davey, "probably" Barrie's mother and "probably" refers to his increasing Freudian insights into his unhealthy relationship with her." He follows this by asking if Nichol was "recognizing the Oedipal trap he was in" (46). One is tempted to ask, "Does Davey?" He then adds that Nichol's reflections were pointing that way, but were in no way "*explicit*" (my italics). Why should any reader trust what Davey himself admits is not clear?

Another example of how Davey tries to synthesize what he perceives as biographical material and poetry is his interpretation of a poem from Chain 3 of *The Martyrology, Book 5*. The poem is offered as evidence that at the age of "three or six or eight months of age," Nichol might have tried to commit suicide but ultimately chose to live:

> My sister Donna died
> six weeks old
> as i almost died
> six months old
> Rupert Street in Vancouver
> choking to death for no reason
> the no reason was inside me

Davey then "clarifies" that in this poem Nichol got his sister's and possibly his own age correct, but that he got the place of his near-death wrong (4). This is akin to saying that a detail from a painting, say a Picasso, is wrong because an eye is not realistically positioned. Davey's reading of this poem echoes Freud's habit of providing his own hypotheses and theoretical speculations to substantiate what his patients were not telling him. Davey writes that "Words are not to be taken at face value" (183), yet he expects readers to take him at his word. He adds that "meanings can often be hidden." Is he the one to "unveil" them? Has he appointed himself Nichol's analyst?

Theories and hypotheses are as relevant as they are made to be in one's own time and culture. Freud, as much as he believed he had transcended puritanical Victorian mores, never did. Suggestions of sexual behaviour or deviation were sources of scandal and titillation in Vienna in the early part of the twentieth century, which made Freud's psychoanalytical theories

quite popular. The more Freudian language was used around sexual issues, the more logic it supposedly embodied, the more it reached the hypothetical regions of the true "self." By postulating the existence of the subconscious—admittedly a brilliant postulation—Freud stumbled upon a way of presenting it on an empirical and scientific basis. This placed him in a position where he could supply evidence to substantiate any theory he formulated. Freud's biographer, Ernest Jones, introduced the Oedipus complex as the breakthrough that allowed Freud to escape from the tyranny of his (failed) seduction theory, a theory that seriously implicated young women and their fathers. Freud, according to Jones, eventually recognised that his father was innocent of everything of which he had accused him and admitted that he had projected onto him ideas of his own (1:287). As to Freud's mother and the Oedipal complex, Jones goes on to say that Freud admitted he never actually saw his mother naked as he had claimed when positing his Oedipal theory but that he was engaging in characteristic psychoanalytic activity of "empiricising" something that had not been part of his experience at all (1: 319). According to Jones, less than two weeks after confiding this artificially reconstructed memory to his friend Wilhelm Fliess, Freud used it as the basis for a universal law—not a law restricted to Victorian and puritanical mores in Austria, but a universal law according to which all boys, from the age of two to three, feel pleasurable sensations in their penis and fantasize becoming their mother's lover. Two and three-year-olds seek to replace their fathers' role by plotting to get rid of him, until such time as they eventually identify with the father and seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere. As many critics of Freud have noted, including Ernest Jones and Richard Webster (the controversial author of *Why Freud Was Wrong*) his writings give much more attention to infantile sexuality than to its mature expression.

According to Webster, Freud tended to become trapped within the logic of his own theories. (One of my favorite is how children make the imaginative equation between babies and faeces.) He had, in his "penis-envy" phase, come up with the theory that, for a woman, a baby is a replacement for the much envied penis, but he also tried to establish an organic equation between the penis and faeces, disregarding the fact that, according to his own logic, the mother's nipple and the child's thumb had prior claims to that same penis. In view of all this, Freud established a theory of correspondences in which penis, baby, faeces, nipple, and thumb are equivalent and can replace one another freely (289). In order to protect these great insights, Freud maintained that his theories were not accessible and intelligible to those who were not trained in psychoanalysis, an attitude I per-

sonally encountered during my two years of private and group therapy at Therafields. Freud did not recognize women's justification in questioning Freudian interpretations that implicate mothers and women. Once, when I brought up a similar concern during a group session of ten or so people, only Nichol came to my defense. As Betty Friedan pointed out in the early 'sixties, Freudian thought led men and women to misinterpret their mothers' frustrations, their fathers' resentments, and even their own emotions and choices.

What is so frustrating and sad about Oedipal reasoning is how it fails to encompass one of the most intense and complex of all human relationships, that of a child and its *nurturing* caregivers, especially the mother. It's as if multifaceted emotional and nurturing relationships had to be suppressed and reduced to a two-year-old's penile sensations. Oedipal reasoning robs men of emotional complexity, a quality I never found lacking in Nichol's writing.

Davey's reliance on Freudian hypotheses is a surprising strategy considering so many of them have been questioned, if not entirely discredited. Given Freud's views on various matters such as the hysterical female, his seduction theory, and his notion of penis-envy, it is difficult to take his theory of infantile sexuality seriously. Yet, according to Davey, even songs that Nichol wrote as a mature adult for a musical revue, *Group: a theradramatic musical,* carry undertones of Oedipal angst: "Australopithecus" Davey writes, is about family transferences; "Ordinary Man" is about psychic masochism; "Great Men Sleep Til Noon" is about narcissism, and "I am Obsessed with my Mother's Breasts" is about the persistence of Oedipal desire (206). To which he adds that insiders who knew something of Nichol's past—including Davey—had, at the time, additional reason to laugh (316). I saw *Group* at least twice and I remember laughing hilariously, not because I "knew of something in Nichol's past," but because the play was so obviously satirical. Satire pokes sardonic humour at subjects, ideas, or institutions in order to be critical in a self-knowledgeable way. *Group* achieves this through humour and wit. Wit, in fact, played an important role in Nichol's writing as it did in his everyday life. It served as another example of wordplay that breaks down social inhibition, just as his habitual telling of groaningly bad jokes at dinner parties or breaking into song in public. Challenging social convention and the Establishment is what Nichol did. Davey briefly touches on this side of Nichol's personality, but merely as an aside (196).

Nichol's language is perhaps at its wittiest in *Organ Music*, which, yet again, Davey claims is "most likely related to Nichol's Oedipal preoccupa-

tions" (318). Nichol's exploration of various parts of the body in *Organ Music* explores the relationship between the inside and the outside of the body through language. If we were to compare Nichol's writing to the Freudian sexual paradigm, as Davey insists on doing, it would be less phallic in the usual tradition of pen/penis as fetish and less historically Oedipal since the mother's body, "The Vagina"—the first poem of the book—is presented as birthplace, as entrance into the world. It is an entrance that reaches beyond the phallic order of language. In fact, the phallus/penis in Organ *Music* is referred to as "The Lily," hardly an image that conveys the power of a phallic order. Wit, when used as an aesthetic, is a means of access to subjects that are usually socially repressed—that is, "the vagina," "the anus," "the lily." *Organ Music* not only defies the normally unacceptable; it outwits it.

Few subjects remain untouched in Nichol's writing: Son, friend, lover, husband, father constantly offer new chains that intersect with the physical, the temporal, and the textual. The birth/death cycle he shares with his wife, Ellie, in the powerful "Hour 13" in "The Book of Hours" (*Martyrology book 6)* doesn't simply depict a real-life experience of gestation, birth, death of a son when "briefly / the heart does break"; it underlines the extraordinary impact of language's restorative power.

For all his speculations, Davey provides few reliable details of Nichol's years of therapy at Therafields since all their records were destroyed. Nor do readers interested in Nichol's literary work need to know details of his therapy. In the intermediary world where writing and history mingle, plasticity should be achieved without the reader needing to know where the principle of this malleability lies. It is certainly plausible that therapy freed Nichol to write. There's little doubt, according to his dedications of the first five books of *The Martyrology*, that he was indebted to his therapist, Lea Hindley-Smith for being a catalyst through which he explored his many voices as a writer. It's possible, from Nichol's notebooks, to conclude that he may have struggled with certain issues, but I would be wary of issues couched in Freudian suppositions. It isn't unusual for therapists to seek out hypothetical traumatic experiences and to create false memories of those experiences. I'm not saying that this happened at Therafields, nor am I saying it couldn't have happened. Davey makes the point that "the marks of a successful therapy is the extent to which the patient has internalized the therapist and begun asking oneself questions similar to those the therapist has posed" (136). In other words, therapy is deemed successful to the extent a patient lets himself be directed by the therapist. Similarly, would

Davey's biography be deemed successful to the extent that a reader lets himself be directed by Davey's reading of Nichol?

Davey claims that *The Martyrology* is "the epic life-journey of a psychoanalysis…as Freud had written in 1937…the ongoing history of a modernism founded in Freud and Darwin and elaborated by Stein…" (296-97). A page later, he admits that Nichol might have transcended the dominant international aesthetic of his period, mainly postmodernism. I suspect that in most of his writing Nichol had also transcended the 1937 Freud. Especially if he had read a 1945 letter written by Wittgenstein as it appears in Norman Malcolm's memoir:

> I, too, was greatly impressed when I first read Freud .... Of course he is full of fishy thinking & his charm & the charm of the subject is so great that you may easily be fooled. He always stresses what great forces in the mind, what strong prejudices work against the idea of psychoanalysis. But he never says what an enormous charm that idea has for people, just as it has for Freud himself…Unless you think *very* clearly psychoanalysis is a dangerous & a foul practice, & it's done no end of harm &, comparatively, very little good (39).

On the same subject, Wittgenstein warns Malcolm to "hold on to your brains." The self-knowledge that Nichol acquired over the years came mainly from the production of his art. According to the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Birth To Presence*, Freud himself admitted not knowing how to penetrate the creative mind, and that art is a gift that remained inaccessible to analysis (211-33).

I'm reminded of a conversation I had with Nichol around 1981 when he would have been 37 years old. He was editing my first collection of poems *Color of Her Speech* for Coach House Press. Because the book had been written partly during the year I attended a writers' group overseen by Nichol and Grant Goodbrand at Therafields, I had acknowledged this at the end of the book. Barrie suggested I keep his and Goodbrand's names, but was adamant about removing "Therafields." The conversation subsequently turned to psychotherapy. I distinctly remember him saying that it was sometimes necessary to go through a process in order to get beyond it. I came across a similar comment by Julia Kristeva some fifteen years later in an interview on the subject of psychoanalysis: "We may need to move beyond that work, but in doing so we have to pass *through* it—Kristeva's italics (225). Oh, that Beep, I thought, always ahead of the game. His interest in Wittgenstein also indicates that he was ahead of most in language games. In Malcolm's memoir, a mutual friend and colleague of Wittgenstein at Cambridge, George Henrik von Wright, is quoted: "Wittgenstein

felt he was writing for people who would think a different way, breathe a different air of life from that of the present-day men" (3). I am not trying to make Nichol appear flawless or greater than he was, but there is no doubt that he thought differently and that he processed those thoughts into original art forms. To paraphrase Scobie, Nichol's originality and creative language do not report reality, they create it (90).

A review by David Staines in the *Globe and Mail* on Saturday, 3 November 2012, suggests that Davey's book will be a great asset to those who study or read Nichol in the future. I would urge those students or readers not to frame their readings with Davey's biography. Nichol's writing is far from lifeless, yet if you let Davey's analysis creep into your reading you will soon feel the joy and inventiveness weighed down by speculation and pseudo-Freudian gloss. I tried to imagine what would happen to those extraordinary scenes in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* when the child anticipates his mother's visits to kiss him goodnight if the reader immediately branded those scenes as Oedipal. Proust's astonishing form and language in those particular passages would suddenly take on very different connotations, and the emotional complexity between child and mother would be lost. What would happen if we were to apply Davey's various adjectives "lurid," "vulgarly," "chilling," and so on to Proust as he's done to Nichol?

For people who knew Barrie as a friend, the grief immediately following his sudden death was all-consuming. We mourned until it was thought best to relinquish the mourning to his wife, Ellie, and his daughter, Sarah.

For those who knew and appreciated Nichol mainly as a writer, the memories were and should continue to be of his writing. It is within this autofictive space created by the many names of bpNichol that readers will encounter a multi-talented writer and innovative thinker. For those who do not know of Nichol's art I would encourage them to read *The Martyrology*, but should they feel intimidated by its nine books, I recommend that they ease their way with samples of Nichol's other work as in *An H in the Heart*, *A Reader*, published by McClelland & Stewart as part of their Modern Canadian Poets Series. It features the many talents of Nichol as poet, maker of music, visual and conceptual artist, and more. Davey tries to make a case that Nichol wouldn't have wanted to be published by such a large publisher as M&S and quotes Steve McCaffery on the issue (320). Nichol himself had obviously changed his mind on this matter since one of his children's books, *Once a Lullaby,* illustrated by the well-known illustrator, Anita Lobel, was published in 1986, two years before his death, by a large American company, Greenwillow Books, a division of William

Morrow & Co. Davey's statement does raise the question however: would Nichol have wanted his life and body of work interpreted according to Davey's paradigm? Nichol, as part of the Canadian literary canon, achieved a far-reaching national and international reputation, and it is appropriate that he should be recognized by both small and larger presses. Nichol trusted his wife Ellie implicitly—the reason he named her as his literary executor. As such, she was fully justified in giving two of Nichol's good friends, George Bowering and Michael Ondaatje, permission to edit *An H in the Heart* for M&S. Its contents, the Introduction by Bowering and the Afterword by Ondaatje, capture the essence of Barrie, bp, and a multitude of names adopted by Nichol during his too brief career.

Davey mentions several times that Ellie Nichol, after reading the first draft of his manuscript, refused him permission to quote material from Nichol's archives and published material (viii). In this she was also justified. As executor of his will, she has the right to protect her husband's legacy as she sees fit.

I've had reason to be thankful to Frank Davey over the years. He invited me to teach creative writing at York University when he was Chair of the English Department; he invited me to be Writer-in-Residence at the University of Western Ontario when he was Carl F. Klinck Chair in Canadian Literature; he has given me the opportunity to edit a few issues of Open Letter. For this I am indeed thankful. I looked forward to reading his book on Nichol and told him so. After reading it, I had occasion to tell him that I sympathized with Ellie Nichol's objections. He answered that perhaps I would have preferred if he hadn't written a book at all. Well…I wish it had been a different book. I wish, in recognising Nichol's talent as one of the most innovative Canadian writers of his generation, he had offered more concrete evidence of who Nichol was in his everyday life and as a writer instead of consistently trying to make him and his work fit old and tired Freudian clichés.

(Note: For over thirty years I had on my shelves *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, London: Hogarth Press, 1956-1974.* A few months ago, not anticipating I would ever need to write on Freud, I gave the books away. Because of this I've had to rely mainly on secondary sources when referring to some of his theories. For more general comments I've relied on memory.)

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