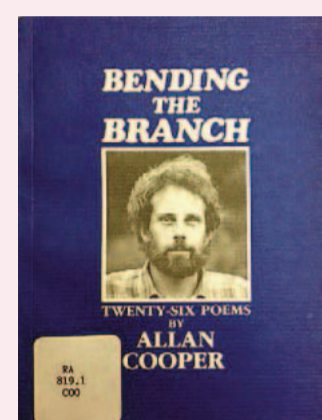
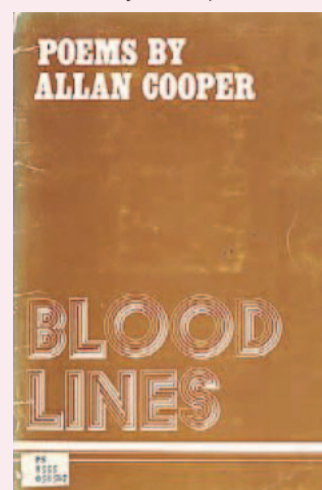


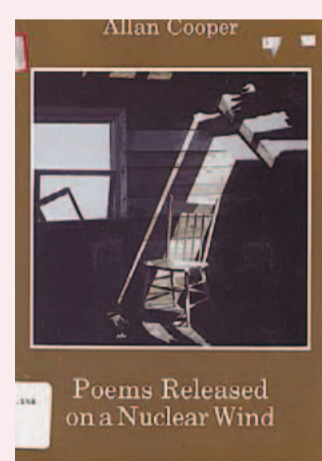
## salon focus

## timeline

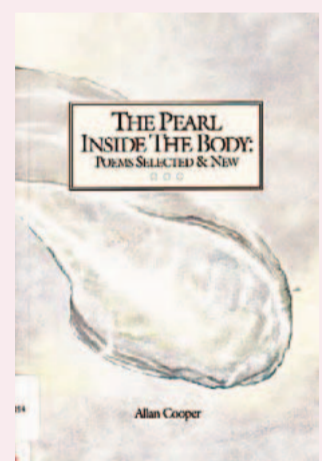
1979 - Blood Lines (Fiddlehead Poetry Books)



1983 - Bending the Branch (Percheron Press)



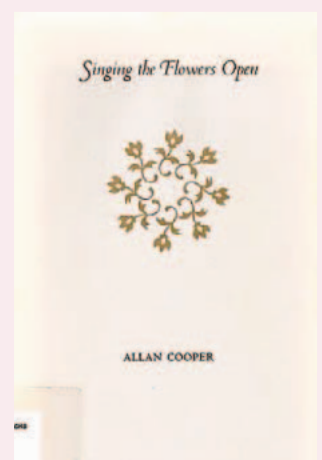
1987 - Poems Released on a Nuclear Wind (Pottersfield Press)



1991 - The Pearl Inside the Body (Percheron Press)



1998 - Heaven of Small Moments (Broken Jaw Press)

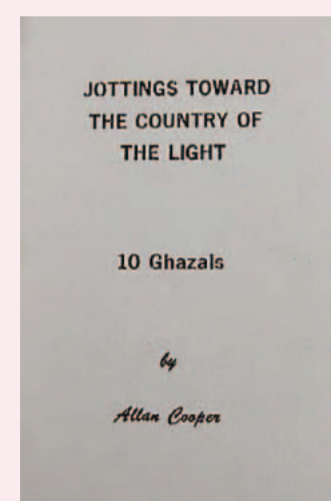


2001 - Singing the Flowers Open (Gaspereau Press)

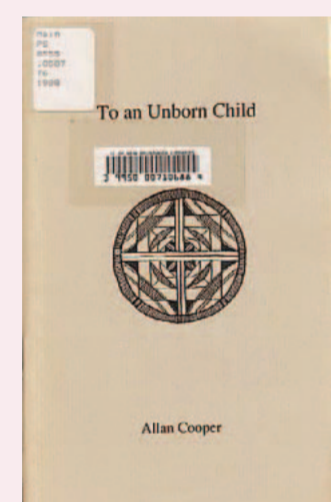
## Allan Cooper by the covers



1982 - Hidden River Poems (Fiddlehead Poetry Books)



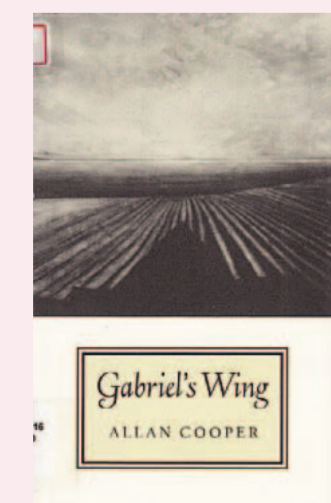
1984 - Jottings toward the Country of the Light (Pierian Press)



1988 - To an Unborn Child (Leaping Mountain Press)



1992 - The Deer is Thirsty for the Mountain Stream (Owl's Head Press)



2004 - Gabriel's Wing (Gaspereau Press)



2006 - Lin Chu: The Black Swan (Owl's Head Press)



Poet Allan Cooper has published a dozen poetry collections, and two translations, over the past 30 years. His 14th book, *The Deer Yard*, a poetry collaboration with Harry Thurston, hits shelves this month. PHOTO: RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

## The soul house

From his grandparents' old house in the village of Alma, Allan Cooper has penned a humble and honoured career as a poet. This month Gaspereau Press releases his 14th book, *The Deer Yard*, a poetry collaboration with Harry Thurston. Story by Thomas Hodd

I'm sitting at a corner table in the Clémentine Café-Deli on Elmwood Drive in Moncton, watching the lunchtime crowd hurry in for homemade corn chowder. A familiar grey-haired gentleman comes in, carrying a faded leather bag and some books. He spots me and walks right over to the table, his hand extended in greeting. It's Allan Cooper, Alma's unofficial poet laureate.

I've known Cooper since I moved to Moncton almost three years ago. I work in the English department at Université de Moncton with his wife, Laurie. I've had him come to my poetry class to speak to my students; a few months

(now the Canada Employment Insurance Commission), his mother was an educational consultant. It was during these formative years that Cooper's parents instilled in him a love of literature, especially his mother.

"She would always leave books for me," Cooper says. "It was through her that I first discovered people like Charles Dickens and e.e. cummings."

One book in particular had an immediate effect on Cooper - Alden Nowlan's Governor General Literary Award-winning book of poetry, *Bread, Wine and Salt*.

"I remember coming home and seeing it on the table," Cooper says. "I picked it up and read it for the next hour. I couldn't believe you could write that simply, but profoundly."

At the time, Cooper had been reading Nowlan's columns in the *Telegraph-Journal* and suddenly felt a new kind of connection to his fellow New Brunswicker.

"I became aware that someone I respected and was a great writer lived only two hours away from me," Cooper says.

The second breakthrough came when Cooper was around 13 years old. That summer he went to his grandparents' house in Alma, like he had done since he was a little boy. But when he arrived he felt that something had changed.

"I remember going there and suddenly feeling a sense of nostalgia and a longing for the past. I was inspired to write a poem about it, and, for the first time, felt like I could express what I was actually feeling."

The watershed moment, though, came shortly after Cooper turned 15. His parents took him to Sackville, to a poetry reading at Mount Allison University. His mother had enrolled in a creative writing class there, and she and some of her fellow writers had been invited to read alongside two of the English department's poet-professors, Herbert Burke and John Thompson. For Cooper, the experience was a revelation.

"On the way home, in the car, I declared from the back seat that I was going to become a poet," Cooper remembers. "And neither of them tried to talk me out of it."

"I'm really blessed because I had two parents who not always agreed with me but always supported what I wanted to do."

While still in high school, Cooper published his first poems, in a provincial student writing magazine. Then he enrolled at Mount Allison in the fall of 1972 to study music and English. Remembering Herbert Burke from his mother's poetry reading, Cooper quickly enrolled in professor Burke's creative writing and modern poetry courses.

"Both of his classes were eye-opening for me," he says. "While at university, Cooper also had the chance to hang out regularly with John Thompson the year before he died. Thompson had already made a name for himself as a gifted poet and translator, and the young writer was eager to chat with him about the craft of poetry."

"I remember the first time Thompson saw me," Cooper says. "He took one look and said, 'You're Muriel's son, aren't you?' He basically adopted me and my friend for the next several months. We'd sit in the pub and drink Coke and smoke cigarettes and talk about life and literature."

It was also at Mount Allison that Cooper discovered the work of poet, Robert Bly, now regarded as one of the greatest American poets of the 20th century.

As part of an assignment, professor Burke told his students

to go through the stacks in the library and find a poet they liked. At first Cooper wasn't having much luck. Then he consulted an anthology he was carrying in his bag. He read a few poems by Bly, which he liked, so he decided to go back to the stacks. He found a few books by the American poet and quickly read through them. Bly's effect on Cooper was immediate and profound.

"I went to Herbert and told him, 'I think Bly's the best modern poet I'd ever read,'" Cooper says.

Of course, what Cooper wasn't prepared for was his professor saying that he knew Bly. In fact, Burke encouraged Cooper to write to Bly and to send him one of his poems.

"I sent the letter, hoping to hear back," Cooper says. "Then, one day, I received a response, as well as a few comments about my poem. He even quoted some of my lines in the letter," Cooper adds.

And so began a life-long correspondence that continues to this day. In fact, when Bly came to Moncton for the Frye Festival, in 2001, he and Cooper got the chance to spend some time together.

"I had him all to myself for three days," Cooper says with glee.

During his remaining years at Mount Allison, Cooper wrote a fair bit of poetry but admits that after graduating in the spring of 1977, "I hadn't found my voice yet."

Not that he hadn't been working away at his craft. By this time Cooper had begun sending his poems to magazines like *The Antigonish Review*, *The Fiddlehead* and the *Dalhousie Review*. He had also been accepted into an MFA program at the University of Alaska for the fall of 1978. Instead, he went to Alma and sat down to write his first book.

Not completely sure of how to proceed, Cooper decided to go to Fredericton to seek out the advice of English professor and publisher of *Fiddlehead Poetry Books*, Fred Cogswell. Energized by their conversation, Cooper returned to Alma, finished his manuscript, and sent it to Cogswell for feedback.

"Soon after, I received a letter from Fred," Cooper says. "But it wasn't full of comments. It simply said that he wanted to publish my book. I was shocked that he actually took it."

Shortly after *Blood Lines* was published, Cooper met Nova Scotia poet Harry Thurston, who was editor and publisher of *Germination*, a small magazine poetry magazine, at the time. Cooper remembers the first time he heard Thurston read from his work.

"I was really impressed with his reading and the quality of his poems," he says.

He decided to send some of his poems to Thurston, and the two began corresponding. A few years later, Thurston asked Cooper if he would be interested in taking over editorship of *Germination*. Cooper enthusiastically accepted.

"I thought it would be a great way to meet people - and to make some enemies," he says with a smile.

Cooper ran the magazine out of his Riverview home for nearly a decade. And, while working on *Germination*, Cooper began to notice a problem with the Canadian poetry scene.

"There was a gap in Canadian publishing," he says. "Younger writers weren't getting picked up by larger publishing houses."

Fueled by a desire to promote these writers, Cooper decided to start a small publishing house specializing in poetry. Since 1985, Owl's Head Press has published 15 titles, the majority of them works by Maritime writers such as Heather Browne Prince, Leigh Faulkner, Don Lineha and St. Francis Xavier University English professor, Douglas Burnet Smith. Cooper also published a small collection of poems by Robert Bly, which includes Bly's translations of several poems by the French writer, Francis Ponge.

"Understandably, the Bly book has been our biggest seller," Cooper says with a grin.

In the midst of all his writing, editing and publishing, Cooper found time to serve as the first elected president of the Writers' Federation of New Brunswick. He also married Laurie and had a daughter.

Of course, one might be tempted to think that all of Cooper's literary activities were part of some strategic plan to get more notice for his own work. But for him, it was all part and parcel of his commitment to the craft.

"I never saw any of this as advancing my career," Cooper

## Excerpts from The Deer Yard

III • The Deer Yard (after Wang Wei)

Not a soul to be seen, but listen -  
voices echo over the mountain,  
and at day's end the low slanting sun  
enters the deep forest, shining again  
on the green mosses.

Your voice, clear and sure,  
carries across the miles between us.  
The green moss bristles in the cold;  
each morning the new light opens the fields.

X • Finger Bells

The little birds in the bare branches  
wear golden crowns. As dusk falls  
their songs are like the ringing  
of finger bells - tolling the end of the light.

Where do the little singers go at dusk,  
after the sun has abandoned the hills?  
Like Buddhas, eyes closed,  
they meditate on the small cones of silence.

Excerpted from *The Deer Yard*, 2013, by Allan Cooper and Harry Thurston, reprinted with permission from Gaspereau Press.

## On the cover

This week's cover features a new, previously unpublished poem by Allan Cooper, entitled *The Winter Oak*.

My friends, what would it be like if we really saw each other? Would that energy overwhelm us, or as Marina Tsvetayeva said to Rilke would we be completely healed, completely whole, like light coming through apple blossoms in early spring? Would we come to the place where language ends and turns to birdsong? Like seeing a coil dividing, the glow of the body of someone in love, like looking inside the trunk of an oak and heaving for the first time the rings beginning to grow? Ring after ring, all of our losses and grief transformed into light and healing power - for the only way we can move forward like the winter oak, the bare branches clear against the sky, no longer carried by the dark continues to fall.

says. "It was simply part of my life as a poet."

And live like a poet he did. For 25 years, after *Blood Lines*, Cooper published nearly one book every two years.

"It got so bad that, at one point, if I didn't write a poem every day, I thought there was something wrong with me," he chuckles.

Much of Cooper's work is inspired by the New Brunswick landscape, particularly the area around Alma. Fittingly, one of his recent collections is titled *Alma Elegies*. In addition, he has published two books of translations, *The Deer is Thirsty for the Mountain Stream* (1992) and *Lin Chu: The Black Swan* (2006).

Cooper has also received many accolades for his work. He is a two-time winner of the Writers' Federation of New Brunswick's Alfred G. Bailey Prize for poetry, was a three-time finalist for the CBC Literary Awards, and, in 1994, won the Peter Gzowski Award.

Cooper's never forgotten his love of music, either. He was part of the award-winning acoustic blues band Isaacs, Blewett & Cooper in the early 1990s, and just last year ago put out a CD with his new band, *Rosedale*.

But poetry will always be his first love.

"I tried to marry the two when I was younger, but it just didn't work," Cooper says. "Music will always be important to me, but I feel more comfortable with poetry."

These days Cooper is busy as ever. In addition to his translation work on Rilke, this month Nova Scotia publisher, Gaspereau Press, is publishing *The Deer Yard*, a book by Cooper and Harry Thurston, modeled on a 1,200-year-old book of correspondence between two Chinese poets, Wang Wei and P'ei Ti.

Cooper and Thurston will be reading from *The Deer Yard* at the Frye Festival, in late April.

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ALLAN COOPER, POET

"It's a group of answer poems," Cooper says. "Harry wrote the first poem from Campbell River, British Columbia; I responded from Alma, and so on. It took us about two years. There are 42 poems in all."

Cooper also recently resurrected *Germination* for a special issue in honour of Robert Bly. It includes poems by several Maritime writers, including Brian Bartlett, Lynn Davies, and Ian LeTourneau, as well as work by American poets Donald Hall and Coleman Barks. It also has a piece by Cooper's daughter, Kate, who is a budding young writer.

"Bly is a major figure, and I just wanted to honour him for what he'd done," Cooper says. "He was also turning 86, and I felt I couldn't wait too many more years," he adds with a smile.

As for his own work, Cooper still prefers to write at his grandparents' home in Alma, the same place where he wrote his first "real" poem more than 40 years ago and where much of his creative output begins. Cooper's mother had purchased the house back in 1972, but now he and his wife own it.

"It's a time warp kind of thing when I go," he says. "I'd sit in the afternoon and jot down images I had seen during a morning drive or walk, or while working in the yard."

"After all these years my poetry still comes out of my connection to Alma."

Thomas Hodd teaches Canadian literature at the Université de Moncton. He can be reached at tomhodd@gmail.com.

## music



Contralto Heather Fleming is completing a professional studies diploma in New Jersey.

## La donna ideale

Rothesay's Heather Fleming gives her New York solo debut at Carnegie Hall on March 6. Story by Mike Landry

Early into rehearsals for Luciano Berio's *Folk Songs*, Heather Fleming started too fast into one piece. She looked at the accompanying chamber ensemble and the conductor, Ken Lam, for guidance only to notice they were right in time with her. This was her fear.

As soloist for the performance, which is happening March 6 at the illustrious Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, it is Fleming's job to act as her own conductor and lead the music. It's a big step for the Rothesay native, who will be making her New York solo debut.

"In my first rehearsal, the conductor said, 'We'll follow you whatever you decide to do,' and I thought, 'Oh, no,'" Fleming says. "I've sort of adopted the mentality that this is what I do, but I don't want it to dictate my entire life."

"I just think of it as another profession."

Fleming isn't sure what she will do after Montclair, though she has been auditioning, and pursuing a doctorate is another possibility.

A contralto, Fleming is in the deepest range for the female voice. This means, although she can train and practise, physiology will dictate when her voice will be at its peak - the general rule being, the lower the voice, the longer the maturation. Fleming's operatic roles - usually older female roles - betray her youth.

She must work to strengthen her voice in preparation. And her time so far at Montclair has given her confidence that all her practice and study is worthwhile.

"One of the biggest revelations was how much I love performing, because in a more academic setting, you're so focused on the academics, it can feel like you don't get to do what you love - that what you love most you get to do the least amount."

"Now I'm preparing for something I love all the time. That makes it seem like less work and what I imagined my life would be like. It's sort of the bridge between student and the career life."

Mike Landry is the *Telegraph-Journal's* arts and culture editor. landry.michael@telegraphjournal.com.

Heather Fleming, left, playing the role of Madre in the premiere production of the Spanish opera *Bodas de Sangre*, Jairo Duarte-Lopez and Michaela Eremiasova, in December.

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