

John Grube. *God, Sex and Poetry*. Toronto: Dartington Press, 2002. 79pp. \$12.95 (Cdn). ISBN 1-894130-01-4.

Norm Sacuta. *Garments of the Known*. Roberts Creek, B.C.: Nightwood Editions, 2001. 96pp. \$16.25 (Cdn). ISBN 0-88971-178-X.

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These two recently published collections of poetry by John Grube and by Norm Sacuta are both very worthy contributions to the development of a poetry and poetics grounded in the complexities of gay male experience in Canada. Different as these two collections are in most respects, they both offer intriguing takes on gay subjectivity and culture.

John Grube (born in 1930) has taught at several colleges and universities in Canada — most recently, at the Ontario College of Art, from which he retired in 1992. Grube is known as an inspiring Creative Writing instructor and the poems in *God, Sex and Poetry* demonstrate both his skilful control of language and his concern for bringing the realities of queer life out into print. For the most part, Grube structures *God, Sex and Poetry* through alternating short, witty lyric poems with longer, narrative ones, many of which are autobiographical. Sex and spirituality — considered either separately or together — run through the collection as leitmotiv. Although Grube is seriously interested in spiritual matters, his approach to religion is most often ironic, even humorous:

Metanoia

We are all
Spies of God
in some
absolutely
divine conspiracy.

Perhaps flirtation
with Him
should be
a slow
hesitation waltz. (34)

In other poems, such as “The Ring” and “Mother,” Grube explores autobiographical episodes with poignancy and tenderness. The verbal dexterity of *God, Sex and Poetry* entertains and provokes reflection, while the more personal poems strike a strong chord of empathy in the reader.

Born in 1962, Norm Sacuta was raised in Edmonton, attended UBC and also lived in England for three years in the 1990s. The dust jacket to *Garments of the Known* informs us that “It was in England that he was exposed to the politically charged atmosphere of the Sexual Dissidence and Cultural Change Program at the University of Sussex, and it was there that much of the poetry in this collection was formed.” Sacuta highlights the queer ascendancy of his book of poems with a quote from Djuna Barnes as the epigraph: “There is no truth, and you have set it between you; you have been unwise enough to make a formula; you have dressed the unknowable in the garments of the known.”

These are mostly narrative poems in which Sacuta arrives at a deepened understanding of experience through poetry’s processes of indirection and distillation of emotion and time. Some of the poems in this collection that I enjoyed the most are set in Alberta — a region of Canada that most queer readers would expect to be inhospitable territory for queer subjects. Sacuta makes Alberta a gay space in such poems as “Morning After the Rodeo (Calgary, 1998),” “gay in stock’s time (for Stockwell Day),” and “Alberta Pick-Ups.” Celebrating friendship and acting as a witness to the deaths of friends is a recurring preoccupation in the collection. Sacuta’s poems are accessible and satisfying.

Both of these collections of poems make a significant contribution to the textual exploration of ‘out’ queer lives. I hope to read further volumes of poetry by both these writers.
