



# Chaudiere Books

2423 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1H 7M9  
chaudierebooks.com / chaudierebooks.blogspot.com

## *Singular Plurals: a Background*

Where does any book of poetry actually “come from”? You can politely list the antecedents you suspect were involved, based on your best clues, but there are probably many more perpetrators than you’d like to admit or imagine. However, we’re playing a game of explanations here, and I happen to find games hard to resist. So, having stated this up front ...

The poems in *Singular Plurals* were written between 2006 and 2010 – a period for me steeped in local poetry workshops and performances, monthly meetings with two poetry circles, and email exchanges and lunches with half a dozen other poets; acting as managing editor for *poetics.ca*; re-reading the works of e.e.cummings, Robert Kroetsch and bpNichol; and encountering writers such as Gil McElroy and Monty Reid. In other words: a poetry-hothouse period, during which I wrote several hundred poems.

Up until that point, although I’d kept an ongoing Journal (as a notebook for explorations, philosophical and otherwise), written dozens of short stories, plays and poems, and composed about a hundred songs, I’d considered all this to be “private ink”; I had no inclination to publish. Writing was a solitary pursuit, both in terms of process and purpose.

However, there came a time – with my Journal spanning tens of thousands of pages – where I felt I’d reached the goal I’d set as a 15-year-old boy “to examine life.” Or perhaps it’s more precise to say I decided I’d gone as far as I could go in trying to understand something that’s fundamentally unknowable. I started to look outwards.

I began to feel a deeper appreciation for culture, seeing in a new light how others were putting their work ‘on River,’ making efforts to pass it on. I realized that what I referred to as my ‘self’ was in large part shaped by what I’d found in thousands of publicly shared artworks. Culture suddenly felt like a third, unrecognized parent. So, I added a publication attempt to my creative ritual as many others had done for me. To keep faith with them. In solidarity tinged with thanks.

I was therefore gratified, a few years ago, when my first attempt to publish won the Bywords John Newlove Poetry Award. This offered an opportunity to put out a first chapbook, *Metafizixx*. Now nearly seven years later, with three more chapbooks published, as well as many individual pieces, I am very pleased that Chaudiere Books accepted my first book-length poetry manuscript, a mixture of previously published and unpublished material.

As I’ve already mentioned, the poems in this book were chosen from a body of work sharing a common time frame. In addition, these selections have two other characteristics binding them together.

First, in spite of their varied physical forms and voices, they were generated using a single methodology, one I’d like to describe in a condensed mock-recipe format:

Begin with a spontaneous unrestrained image surfacing in your mind. Quickly write a dozen independent triplets, each of them derived from this original image. Recombine these lines, taking from

this and that triplet, building a new crosshatched poem, and choosing an apt form for it based on its emerging topic and voice. Finally, apply as many edit iterations as needed to complete the work. If you look at the poems in this collection, you can usually find both the original seed image and evidence of that fruitful recombinant process.

Second, almost all of the poems in this collection share a theme. When looking at their subjects and sensibility, you'll notice that a very sizeable majority of them are poems about connections between people. They are about friendships, loves, betrayals, lies, first finding each other, break-ups, make-ups, death, drifting apart, companionship, and loss.

Which brings me to the book's title, "Singular Plurals," and its cover art showing a series of microscopic cells interacting. Somewhere in the middle of my philosophical explorations I read a book entitled *Grow or Die* by George T. Lockland. I credit his book for starting my journey outwards, and nurturing a more sophisticated appreciation for "others and culture". This book covered many different ideas on natural sources for social evolution. It also sparked an interest in certain mysteries of microscopic cellular life. Actually, the life of slime moulds! Doesn't sound very impressive, does it? You wouldn't imagine a fungus would have much of a social life.

But here's the thing. These particular slime cells can live perfectly well as single-celled organisms, in good times, but can also, when times are harder, live as part of a multi-cellular colony. When alone, they can't detect light. But when joined with others, light detection becomes possible. What's more, the individual cells are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to save their larger colony, plus they exhibit many specialized abilities that never surfaced living as single cells. Something about their joining and interacting gives rise to this huge increase in evolutionary potential. Literally, a cell culture.

That's why there are cells on the cover of *Singular Plurals*. It's an apt metaphor for the book's thematic content of connections between people. But it's equally apt for this recent desire to place something back into the River we share. And so, *Singular Plurals* is not just about the many things that happen when people interact, but also in subtext, it's about this unfinished thing we're making together, and what happens in-between, in so doing.

Roland Prevost  
Lac de l'Argile  
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