My father comes back as a draught horse
huge and shiny black. Muscles twitch
and withers ripple
as snow swarms under streetlamps
on his broad back.
His frame is made for work. Powerful hindquarters
and shaggy legs have memorized field
and stone boat haul.

So begins Rosemary Griebel’s Yes (Frontenac House, 2011). This Castor-born, Calgary-based poet and librarian has written a quietly powerful and sophisticated first book
of poetry that is emotionally direct; at times heartbreaking and at others uplifting, Griebel explores the nuances of humanity, of family and home, and of homelessness, in poetry that moves deftly from past to present, rural to urban, from the earthly to the metaphysical. No surprise then the book was shortlisted in 2011 for two prestigious national awards and Griebel’s poetry was included in the *Best Canadian Poetry in English* (2010) ed. Lorna Crozier.

Like Russell Thornton in this country and the late Czeslaw Milosz originally from Poland, Griebel is a poet who lives not in a place, but through it.
And like them, there’s something of the old world and the new in her work, something classic. She’s also equally adept at portraying both rootlessness and rootedness. I was homeless briefly in my youth and my family has known the ravages of poverty, mental illness and the subsequent homelessness that can result.

So when I first encountered Griebel’s poetry about homeless people in the superlative anthology *The Calgary Project: A City Map in Verse and Visual* (Frontenac House/House of Blue Skies, 2014), she was a standout. I said this of her in my review for *Alberta Views* (April 2013):
“Rosemary Griebel’s poignant “St. Stephen’s Church, December Evening” has a homeless person rise from the meal to deliver Abraham’s lesson, while another shares her jug of wine and they celebrate their lot. Amongst Calgary’s enormous wealth, the most vulnerable teach us, if we let them.” That poem sent me searching for more of her work and I found Yes. When I asked Griebel how she came to such an intimate empathy for the homeless, she spoke of her work at Calgary Public Library and how libraries are a refuge. She lives in what has always been “inner city”, the original townsite in the shadow of old Fort Calgary and she works in the city
centre. It’s an area where some have little, others have much. And she spoke of her father, an immigrant, a carpenter and farmer, who came from the old country to make a home from nothing.

Griebel writes elegantly, simply and often elegiacally. In her poem “Places To Look For A Mother” dedicated to Calgary poet Joan Shillington after her mother’s death, she offers her friend this consolation:

....Look for her

in small places: the loneliness of early morning, the hollows along animal trails leading to salt; where the Milky
Way touches the darkness.

You will want to talk to her as you fold empty clothes into a garbage bag. Speak. Later, the aroma of cloves and you will be peeling apples when she calls your name through the clicks of a warming stove. Listen. She is telling you all that’s gone is not lost.

This poem is representative of Yes with its senuous mix of imagism and lyricism.
Griebel is highly-educated and well-traveled. While many of her poems return to the Bow River, poems like “Rue Gay Lussac, 1978” and “Hotel Room Paris”, “The Way Of The Wall: Jerusalem” and others like “Helen Keller To Anne Sullivan Macy” show a worldly poet like Thornton or Milosz for whom place is as much about people as geography or history and is the starting point of a journey that is often metaphysical.

Yes does not read like a first book. There is confidence and awareness in every poem without a trace of world-weariness. There is also a profound recognition of the small and large joys and griefs all of us live with.
Griebel’s ends her collection with the delightfully titled “Walking With Walt Whitman Through Calgary’s Eastside On A Winter Day”. I too know these streets and riverbanks of my hometown she walks, but there’s a universality here in what she sees: Blue-white afternoon. The Bow river churns and smokes as the city rumbles, economy chokes and bundled homeless build cardboard homes in the snow. Yes, Walt, this is the new world....

...as I headed into the white, blurred fields and homeless scatter
like chaff. There, I quaffed the sharp chiseled air, the slow, sad light of merciless winter and said, yes, *this world is for my mouth forever*...

*And I am in love with it.*

Yes.

Griebel’s intimate, resonant poetry gathers the sparrows, the homeless and everything around her. The humanity promised in that first poem I read, is as constant throughout this book as the Bow River running through Calgary.

Rosemary Griebel is a writer who transcends the regional and yet is very much rooted in her community. *Yes* is one of those rare books I keep
giving away. It’s my third copy now that I’m writing this review from. I suspect I’ll be ordering more as gifts for family and friends.