

Writing Paintings and Thinking Physics

Anne Simpson's Poetry

Born in Toronto, raised in Burlington, Anne Simpson has lived in Nova Scotia for 15 years. Her first collection of poetry, *Light Falls Through You* (2000), won the Atlantic Poetry Prize and the Gerald Lampert Prize. The Lampert jury found the collection to be “strongly original—in its supple music and lucid imagery, its range of reference and in the scope of its moral concerns.” In 1999, Simpson earned the Bliss Carman Poetry Award for her poem “Little Stories.” *Canterbury Beach* (2001), Simpson’s debut novel, was shortlisted for the Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award and the inaugural Chapters/Robertson Davies Prize.

In 2002–03, she was Writer-in-Residence at UNB. We met at Molly’s Café, Fredericton, for this interview. Just a few weeks earlier, in March, Simpson’s second collection of poetry, *Loop*, was released. *Loop* was the Canadian winner of the 2004 Griffin Poetry Prize.

Anne Compton (AC): I’ve talked to many poets, but I’ve not yet asked the question “Why do you do it, write poetry?” It’s gut-wrenching, time-consuming, and often we don’t get to where we’re going.

Anne Simpson (AS): I do it because there is no other way to express what I need to say. I painted for a long time, but I’m not painting now. Painting is one form of expression, but it’s as if I want several forms. In practical terms, though, I knew I couldn’t paint and write *and* raise children at the same time. I had to make a choice, and I thought writing was more portable. But to answer the question—I guess there’s something in me that exceeds everything else. Perhaps I come closest to it in poetry. It’s as though there is a surplus. Poetry is a working out of ideas, but it’s also play.

Even if the ideas are serious, the play can be inventive. That's one part of it, and the other part is that in writing poetry, I can bear witness to the world. It's not just a case of me writing about me. I'm more interested in the world and what we can be said about being in the world.

AC Do you wait for a poem to occur? Or, do you write for a certain period every day whether or not you feel inspired?

AS I write fiction every day. Fiction takes longer: you need the timber to build the house, to do the floors, the walls. All that takes longer. I don't do poetry everyday, but I don't wait for the inspiration to come and seize me. I do it regularly, but not as regularly as fiction.

AC Your tone suggests that you don't believe in inspiration.

AS To some extent we are inspired by things—I don't want to be disparaging about inspiration—but there's a lot more to it. There's the hard work of putting poems together. There's also the convergence of ideas, and for me that takes a lot of reading and looking and thinking. Usually three or four ideas will come together at the same time. Once that happens, I can start playing around with them.

AC You published three books in four years. Is this a sudden emergence or a long-nurtured development?

AS For a long time, I didn't know that I was a writer. In fact, I still question it. It was a matter of gaining confidence over a long period of time. Also, I didn't have a whole lot to say when I was younger, or I didn't have it in me to say what I needed to say. I knew when it was time. It had a lot to do with going to the Banff Centre for the Arts, and being treated as a writer, and starting to believe in both my fiction and poetry.

AC Since we are not in your home landscape, would you briefly describe it for me?

AS Nova Scotia is that place right now, but I'm also realizing that it is the place where I grew up, Burlington, Ontario, the landscape of suburbia, coupled with the steel factories of Hamilton. I'm beginning to see now what that childhood landscape was. But Nova Scotia is very strong in my thinking, and I use it in my writing a lot.

AC You seem to be suggesting that you are only now digging down to the first layer.

AS Yes, I guess I am. It was so exciting to write "Altarpiece" (*Light* 59–76) and to use a landscape that is part of me. The American poet Jack Gilbert has Pittsburgh in his soul, and after reading his poetry, I realized some of the places that are in mine.

- AC The observed and the imagined: do you gravitate to one or other of those poles?
- AS Both, I think. In my long poems, the observed and the imagined work together. The observed landscape, for instance, is often peopled by characters who are frequently imagined. The characters often just pop into my head and these two things, the observed and the imagined, come together. I need to observe and think about most things and then discover how they are a way into the poem.
- AC You seem to be describing a sequence here that relates to a paper you presented at Banff—"Bowling Before the Light"—where you say, "The movement from seeing, listening and wondering, to that of imagining, is the beginning of the writer's work."
- AS I often begin to imagine the characters as I am working out the ideas. It may not always be A followed by B, followed by C. I think there are centripetal forces in a given poem, particularly in long poems, but there are also centrifugal forces: the thing can fly apart. The initial ideas are a bringing together, a gathering of various things, a collage, which I try to make something of. It is a matter of "how will these things cohere?" and "will it fly apart, and how can I hold it together?"
- AC Is it a bad thing if it flies apart?
- AS At the end of "The Trailer Park" (*Loop* 80–91), I came to a point where I could do no more. The poem had expanded to a point where I couldn't bring it back from the stars and the cosmos—into the world again. I had to let it go out.
- AC In *Light Falls Through You*, except for narrative-based poems such as "Deer on a Beach" (2–3), "Light Falls Through You" (4–5), and "Sea of Death" (17–18), you appear to favour a very short line, a line one-phrase in length, so that a poem steps carefully from phrase to phrase. Do you determine line, and line length, through sound rather than by grammatical sense?
- AS I often go by what must be some innate sense of rhythm. I have been told by people that there is rhythm in my poetry, but I am not always aware of that as I lay down a line. I am very aware of how the poem looks on a page, so that may have something to do with why the lines break where they do. I worry about the long line. Can I impose control on a line when it gets to that length?
- AC These short lines enforce a quality of quiet in the reading process. As a result, the reader is acutely aware of your word choices. I am struck by certain sounding words—"undulating" (*Light* 1), "undulate" (*Light* 14),

- “elongated” (*Light* 24), “indolence” (*Loop* 73), “embellished” (*Loop* 74)—that occur in your poetry. Do you gravitate toward certain sounds?
- AS I was reading “Altarpiece” (*Light* 59–76) out loud yesterday to a friend, and I realized that the words where I wanted a kind of laziness of tone—you mentioned the word “indolence”—seemed to be appropriate to the sense, the atmosphere, that I wanted. So it must be something done unconsciously. I think I am striving for the same thing that I strive for in visual terms. For me, that involves getting at the sight and the sound of the world, and even trying to go so far as to get at taste and touch. For me, perception is the way we know the world; I mean *knowing* in the sense of deeply knowing. Sensation is our entry point, and from there we can move on to ideas.
- AC Section titles in *Light Falls Through You*—“Souvenirs,” “Reliquary,” “Altarpiece”—suggest a ceremonious memorialization of events or lives. Is poetry itself like one, or all, of these things?
- AS Yes, poetry is a way of remembering. I didn’t realise that it was so ritualistic, but I suppose it is. To go back to an earlier notion, bearing witness has to be ceremonial to some extent. This act must be done with reverence, and I guess this is my attempt at reverence.
- AC If we live in a ritual-deprived world, perhaps poetry moves into that place.
- AS That’s true. I think poetry is an attempt to remember as thoughtfully as possible. So, if this means that it somehow becomes ceremonious and ritualized, so be it. It is true that it’s memory—and how we keep the things we keep and how we lose what we lose—in which I am most interested. When I was painting in Antigonish, during the years when my children were young, I spent a lot of time on very large paintings. At that time, I would often look at art magazines, and I remember clearly picking up an art magazine in which Tony Urquhart’s “Reliquaries” were pictured. I do think it must have had an impact on me to see those things. I must have been thinking of that when I titled one of the poems “Reliquary” (*Light* 53–57).
- AC One of the registers of intensity in your poetry is grief, but there’s also a lot of violence, especially in “Souvenirs,” the first section of *Light*. Do you feel an obligation to face and to write about this kind of violence?
- AS Yes. We live in a beautiful but terrifying world. I think that it is something that comes up in “Altarpiece” (*Light* 59–76): dread is facing something squarely. I am drawn to poets who do this: they look at things and do not look away.

- AC For all the violence, a couple of poems early on in *Light Falls Through You* come down to the words “marvelling” (1) and “miraculous” (11). Looking squarely at violence does not appear to breed cynicism. Is the world still a place of miracle for you?
- AS Yes, it’s a place of wonder, surprise, grace. After all the terror and horror, and the unbearable things that happen, there is yet wonder and beauty.
- AC One poem says, “words, such as love,” are “[k]ites,/ they come back when I pull on them, so I’ve lost // nothing . . .” Similarly, in “Chopping Wood” (*Light* 7–8), an injured man drags himself home by hanging onto memories of his wife. Is love, in all its forms, what this book opposes to violence?
- AS Oh, yes. It’s a kind of “stay against confusion,” to use Robert Frost’s phrase, a stay against forgetting. The important thing is to love things as they are before they go.
- AC Very few poems have been written about the experience of giving birth. In canonical poems, if there are infants or little children, they are either sleeping or dead. I’m thinking of poems by Ben Jonson, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Do you think that it took a certain population mass of women writers before we started getting poems about childbirth?
- AS Short answer, yes. I look around at the writers who are close to me in age and of the same gender, and they write about their children. I often shy away from the personal, but I still do it.
- AC Would you say that the place of poetry for you is not so much a geographical place, but rather—given the number of poems that focus on birth and death—a threshold?
- AS I think I come to the threshold again and again. Maybe poetry is an instance of coming to the entry-place of another world, and looking on that world. There are so many worlds within us. This is a way to at least glance into those worlds.
- AC Asking that question, I am reminded of the work of playwright and poet Wole Soyinka in whose country, Nigeria, you spent two years. Soyinka writes of thresholds. What kind of impact did that stay in Nigeria have upon you as a writer?
- AS Soyinka did have an influence on me. Perhaps more so when I came back and I was doing graduate work, a course on Commonwealth literature. Soyinka is very interested in myth, the myths that concern his world, and they are so different from the myths that I was used to, the Greek myths. So I was rediscovering Nigeria upon returning to Canada. While I was there, though, the impact was profound, but I found I couldn’t

write about Africa, and can still hardly write about it, perhaps because it was such a vivid experience.

AC Did being in Nigeria determine your becoming a writer?

AS There were a couple of things that happened there that had to do with writing. One occurred when I first got there—a woman, a Canadian teacher working there, had just published a story in *The Fiddlehead*, and I thought, “Oh my God, isn’t that something.” I was so impressed. I remember thinking, “I have two years here. I could easily write a novel. There is enough time and no distractions.” But I couldn’t. Of course I was reading a lot because I was teaching. The first year it was a boys’ school, fairly predictable teaching. The second year, though, it was more interesting, an advanced teacher’s college, and I remember trying to teach T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. It made such sense there because it was the dry season, and the poem resonated for me in a way that it never would have in Canada. Eliot’s notion of thirst and dryness, and needing to locate the mystery of things, the water of life, became very significant in that place. So although I wasn’t doing much writing, there was a lot of absorbing of experience there.

AC I wanted to ask you about metaphors in your work that suggest a spatialization of the mind: In “A Head Like Hers,” the mind is one of two “luminous places” (*Light* 13); in another poem, there are “rooms in the mind” (*Light* 17); and a third poem asks, “Where do any of us wander / but in the mind . . . ?” (*Light* 22). Do you think of the mind as a many-roomed house?

AS When I was young—a lot of kids must do this—I remember thinking that there’s a world that I go to in my head. I could roam around in that world. I thought that it was pretty great to be able to go there. Later, I realized that imagination does have many houses, and we can visit each one, depending on the project. It was hard for me to come and live in Nova Scotia. I did feel very much that I had to pull something out of a hat, and it was to the imagination that I turned.

AC Was Nova Scotia, like Nigeria, a turning point in your becoming a writer?

AS At first, I didn’t know what I’d do with myself there. My husband had work; I didn’t. I felt like I had to cobble things together. But it was the first time that I gave myself permission to be creative, truly creative. I was painting a lot and then I was writing a lot.

AC If the mind is figured architecturally in your work, the body is often a landscape: “I see everything planted in you unfurling new leaves / and flourishing” (*Light* 4) and in another poem, “your // heart flowers on

the tip of my / finger, while I respond with several // smaller buds, nested / up and down your spine . . . “ (*Light* 10). In both cases, the landscape season is spring, so is the body a site of hope?

AS I think it must be. I’m doing a series of poems about anatomy. It’s a kind of long celebratory poem though it’s not that there’s praise in every line or anything like that. But the body is so beautiful, and I don’t mean that in terms of young women who are beautiful or that sort of thing. In art school, we had to draw figures carefully, and these could be old guys off the street. There was one I remember in particular, George. I remember thinking how beautiful the body is, despite its ugliness. Despite that, it is so remarkable a thing. It is what we inhabit.

AC “I have closed thousands / of little doors in my skin” (40), the narrator says in the title poem, “Light Falls Through You,” and in “Sea of Death,” the lesson that the snake teaches is “to shed our skins a thousand times // in any given day” (*Light* 18). Does this recurring idea—the changeability of skin—pertain to the slipperiness of identity?

AS It seems to me that we are always in the midst of change and this is one of those ways that we shuck off what we were and begin again. We are always beginning again. Skin is such an interesting thing, and this goes back to my fascination with the body and drawing the body.

AC You studied visual arts for three years. What effect has that training had on your poetry?

AS An enormous effect. I’m not painting right now, so everything’s being poured into poetry. For me, the painting is a threshold—we were talking about thresholds earlier—you move into the painting and then almost past it. Every visual object that I become obsessed with is a door into something else.

AC We’ll talk about the painting as a “door” in a moment, but first two poems strike me as especially paintable—“White, Yellow, Mauve” (*Light* 26–27) and the cherries in the foreground of “Little Stories” (*Loop* 1–5). Do you think in terms of painting when you are writing?

AS I paint when I write. I write paintings.

AC Then I’d describe your palette as predominantly blue, sliding over to mauve, purple, indigo. Would I be right?

AS You would be dead-on—with little hints of red. The man who wrote *The Art of Colour*, Johannes Itten, asked his students to give the palettes that describe their particular personalities. There was one student who came up with four palettes, all different, and I thought that if there was one student I would identify with, it would be that student. It is not

enough to say, “These are the colours that interest me.” That’s not enough. There are more. White, black, red, for instance, would be another palette. Colours, for me, are almost like ideas. They lend the poem its atmosphere as much as its idea. So much of the intellectual working out of the poem has to do with the kind of palette I’m using.

- AC In both books, the most ambitious of the poems—“Altarpiece” in *Light* and “Seven Paintings by Brueghel” (19–25), in *Loop*—link 16th-century art works and 20th-century civilization. What are the features in the work of the German Grunewald and the Flemish Brueghel that enable you to look at our time through their time?
- AS Here’s the weird thing about choosing Matthais Grunewald: I had in mind the book I’d been reading, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1941–1991*, by Eric Hobsbawn. In it, Hobsbawn mentions that the twentieth century was like a triptych. I immediately thought of the Grunewald masterpiece—*The Isenheim Altarpiece*—which has side pieces as well as a perdella, and opens up to present four painted surfaces. The three main paintings, though, are the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. The paintings are bold and brightly coloured. They show us a strange and distorted world. Yet, this altarpiece resonates with the twentieth century. Pieter Brueghel, one of the Flemish painters of the Northern Renaissance, died about the time that Grunewald was born. But the interest in story-telling is consistent in both, and neither of them shrank from what they wanted to portray. They had a vision that took in the whole world. Brueghel revealed so much about human nature, as Geoffrey Chaucer does—all the greed, indifference, cruelty, capriciousness, kindness, nobility—that he observed without flinching.
- AC In “Altarpiece” three historical moments—Grunewald’s painting of the crucifixion; the installation in 1933 of Hitler as Chancellor; and end-of-the-century suburban culture—are folded together. So the poem itself re-enacts Grunewald’s triptych, a folding altarpiece.
- AS The turning points in the twentieth century I was most concerned with had to do with World War II: the advent of Hitler, the war itself, and the dropping of the atom bomb. There are smaller moments in the poem that echo that violence such as the near-fatal beating of one boy by another. All of that is set against the banal landscape of the golf-course, those monster-homes—affluent homes that you find in Burlington down by the lake—the steel factories in the background. So I was setting up a cluster of moments, one juxtaposed with another.

- AC In this, and other poems (the paste and plastic of the Disney theme park noted in “Now What” [*Loop* 7–8]), you are a critic of present-day culture. Although your work, it seems to me, has been very well received, this aspect of your work has received the least attention. Do you think of yourself as a political poet?
- AS I didn’t before, but I do now. It’s not just a case of bearing witness, but it is also a case of—and I don’t want to sound like a moralist—standing apart. There is a way in which you have to stand outside of your culture and look at it, and keep on looking.
- AC You refer to the linked sonnets based on the seven paintings by Brueghel as a “corona written for Staten Island, New York” (*Loop* 92). Could you say something about how these two things, Staten Island and Brueghel, came together in the making of these seven sonnets.
- AS I always need a place to write about—or I often do, particularly with a long poem. I was looking at photographs of the Staten Island landfill site. Staten Island was re-opened, and all the debris from the Twin Towers was taken there. I had a ten-day period to work on that poem, so I was working hard. It was a little bit like breaking stones trying to write that corona because sonnets are awfully hard to do. I was trying to make these two things—Brueghel’s paintings and the landfill site—connect, come together, and it was a bigger project than that one tragedy: it was a lament not just for the debris that was taken from the Twin Towers over to Staten Island; I was also thinking of these paintings, each one a kind of door, as an entryway into what we have made. And what have we made here, but this, a tower of garbage? The life that we have made here has become a memorial. Each one of those Brueghel paintings helped me to structure the thing as a whole. But I don’t mean to talk about just this one thing that happened, the tragedy of 9/11. I don’t mean to talk just about that atrocity, but many atrocities.
- AC In spite of the forward momentum achieved through linking the last and first lines of succeeding sonnets, the sonnets themselves are comprised of fragments of sentences: “Shut in rooms. / Gone. *Tick*. The towers. *Tock*. Of fire. A fold / in air.” (19). Is this syntactical feature—fragments of sentences—meant to instill a feeling of the end of things?
- AS I could not write in iambic pentameter with these sonnets, so they are not true sonnets. I could only write in this disjointed, fragmentary language. No other language would do though I was still trying to make the lines fit the sonnet form. There are ten syllables in each line, and the end rhymes are there, but the flow of the sonnet is not there the way you

would find it in a Shakespearean sonnet. None of these seven sonnets sound like a sonnet. It's a way of getting language to show the breakdown of the world. It is getting language itself to bear witness.

AC The syntax is meant to restate the condition?

AS It is a way of constantly arresting the reader. It's hard to go forward. It does not move smoothly. It does not move like music. It does not move like a lyric ought to move, or the way you are used to lyrics moving. I realised as I was going along that the very fabric of this was different.

AC A broken crown?

AS Yes.

AC These poems originate not with Brueghel's paintings of stolid, contented peasants, as in *Peasant Wedding*, but, rather, in his grimmer work. I was interested in the paintings you chose, but was equally interested in the ones you did not choose.

AS Yes, I know. There is that very famous one, *The Fall of Icarus*. I did not choose that one partly because everyone chooses it. I wanted to choose ones that, yes, were known, but also ones like *Christ and the Adulteress* that are not known well. It is a panel in which the figures look quite austere. Brueghel is known for his paintings of crowds, with lots going on and with many stories being told, but in this case, the painting is stripped down to the bare essentials.

AC There's a little sliver of something wrong even in the paintings that are right.

AS Just as there's a wrongness in the world. In the corona, I realised that I was going to have to connect the last line up with the first line, and the first line—"These watches. Ticking, still. Each hour is cold" (19)—is very devastating. What that image draws on are photographs of watches that were found in the debris of the World Trade Centre. What does a watch do besides tell the time? A watch itself is like a little room, but it cannot do any more than what it is designed to do—it ticks, it tocks. That's the end of it. So for me to come from the beginning to the end—"Love's breath. Things we can't hold: / these watches. Ticking. Still. Each hour is cold" (25)—was the most unbearable thing. There was a sadness in it: that it just comes to this. It's only these watches. We don't have the people. We've lost them. There is no light at the end of the tunnel for me in this corona. There might be little moments of uplift, but there's not a lot. That's the way I thought about that atrocity, but also about atrocity in general.

AC Of the Brueghel paintings invoked in this series, the most placid is the scene *Hunters in the Snow*, one of his most lit paintings although it is a

dusk scene. Your poem of that title seems, however, to suggest that the return to domestic comfort is a deception: “Each thing / deceives. The counters, cutlery. . . . Some children skate; they laugh. / And history has no place “ (24). Is the domestic, then, just another refusal of history?

- AS In this case, yes. In the context of this particular poem—this sonnet—history has no place because people want to forget. As for whether we think of ourselves as being part of something larger going on in the world, well, it’s difficult for us to do that. It means we have to stand outside of the comfortable houses of our lives. But history has a way of invading and disrupting the domestic.
- AC Clocks (*Loop* 9), watches (*Loop* 19), and time would appear to be of great interest to you. I understand that *Loop* at one time bore the title “Time-Piece.” Why is *Loop* the more suitable title for this material?
- AS I am very interested in form now, and in inventing form, in fact. The title *Loop* seemed to say more about the forms, how they circle back on themselves. That was one thing. Then, there’s the theme about things recurring in time. So there are all kinds of loops. The present-title made more sense. “Time-Piece” was sort of static.
- AC Besides the corona of sonnets, *Loop* contains a prose poem series, a villanelle, and the curious circular form, “Möbius Strip” (54–63). Are forms, other than free verse, of increasing interest to you?
- AS I’ve been trying for months to formulate why it is I’m fascinated with form. I think that the content is the saying of the poem and the form is thinking it out in terms of shape.
- AC The prose poems “Gesture Drawings” (*Loop* 26–36), of which eleven follow immediately upon the highly wrought sonnets of “Seven Paintings by Brueghel.” In this arrangement, are you drawing attention to a formal difference between the two series, parallel, let us say, to the difference in the visual arts between painting and drawing?
- AS Don McKay said that these are the two wings of my art, and I think what he meant was one is the very rigorous, highly wrought corona and the other is a series of improvisations. That series is made up of gesture drawings and it’s quick. Those poems were written very fast, and it took a long time to write and re-write the sonnets. I was so intent at that time, I could do nothing else.
- AC In the final piece in “Gesture Drawings,” there are the lines “There’s something else, but the eye alone is not capable, in any case get it down on paper.” Might this explain your shift from drawing and painting to poetry?

- AS Whether it's drawing or poetry, it's always a case of trying to get it down on paper. I'm talking about the elusive thing that resists capture. This is just as much a problem for the artist as it is for the poet. It's the attempt to pin down the ineffable. The task is impossible, but we try to do it anyway.
- AC "Ordinary lives are always / embellished by the papers" (*Loop 74*). What does poetry do with or for ordinary lives?
- AS Poetry can give us whatever limns the ordinary, which can be, occasionally, the extraordinary. I was especially concerned with this when I wrote my first novel, *Canterbury Beach*, because the lives of those characters—ordinary ones—were ones in which I was deeply interested. None of those characters was going to set the world on fire, but I wanted to examine them carefully, with tenderness.
- AC I can't imagine anything more unlike a novel than your poem "Möbius Strip," which is the most minimal of your poems. What do these two forms—the minimalist poem and the novel—answer to?
- AS In the case of "Möbius Strip," I wanted great economy so it would work as a Möbius strip, but also because the poem seemed to expand, paradoxically, the more I contracted it, and I was intrigued by that. Of course, a novel is a different thing altogether, like working on house construction as opposed to making a cat's cradle out of string. You can toss all kinds of things into the novel and it can be accommodated with room to spare.
- AC What urges you in one direction or the other?
- AS I think that poetry is a way for me to work out big ideas in small containers. It's kind of like finger painting was for me when I was young: you can make a big mess and use all the colours you want and have a lot of fun. So while the subjects I choose are serious, the work itself can be enormously playful. The novel is larger, so the play is different for me, but it's still there. In the novel, I want to tell stories: big stories, small stories. It comes of wanting to understand why people do what they do. For me, this is a very rich and intriguing thing: I like to weave the stories together and make a kind of tapestry of the telling. For instance, in *Canterbury Beach*, I was interested in making a novel that was a memory theatre—that Renaissance concept of retaining ideas by means of an imagined memory theatre—for a family, by examining the individual lives within that family. There's nothing to stop a writer from playing around with the novel, and I'm finding this out with my second novel. It's a whole world you can construct, though you have to do it with care

and precision, but the thing is that people will *believe* in this world. I love that about the novel.

AC It surprises me that your poetry and fiction are not more alike. Of course poetry takes place in time, and fiction, or at least plot-driven fiction, takes place in space. But is their difference more than that?

AS I think I want to do something different in each, so it would be easy to think that they're not alike. But I couldn't write fiction without poetry, or poetry without fiction. I need them both. But I want to talk further about what you say about time in poetry and fiction. Interestingly, I see poetry as stopping time, rather than "taking place in time," as you put it. I don't think it depends on a narrative line, or linear time, let's say, in the way that fiction does. Poetry can have bits of story in it, and it can even have a narrative line, but in the end, I don't think poetry cares about story in the same way. It is not *required* to tell a tale. So I see poetry as the knife that cleaves through linear time. Fiction depends on time, though. Even unconventional novels—and I'm thinking of *Time's Arrow*, by Martin Amis, as an example—depend on our knowledge of chronological time.

AC In a conversation with Jan Zwicky, you said, "poetry remains a touchstone for all other writing that I do" (116). Why is poetry the "touchstone"?

AS Poetry is at the heart of things for me. It's that simple. It's like air: I need it to breathe. I didn't always know this, but I know it now.

WORKS CITED

- Carver, Raymond. *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories*. 1968. New York: Random House, 1984.
- Gilbert, Jack. *The Great Fires: Poems 1982–1992*. New York: Knopf, 1996.
- Greene, Brian. *The Elegant Universe*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- Robinson, Matt. "Golden age of poets: Nova Scotian women add their formidable voices to Canadian poetry." *Chronicle-Herald*. 21 January, 2001. C7.
- Simpson, Anne. "Bowing Before the Light." Banff Centre for the Arts. Unpublished conference paper.
- Canterbury Beach*. Toronto: Viking Penguin, 2001.
- "Dreaming Snow." *Fiddlehead* 190 (Winter 1996): 5–17.
- Light Falls Through You*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000.
- Loop*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003.
- "There's No Place That Does Not See You." *Where the Words Come From: Canadian Poets in Conversation*. Ed. Tim Bowling. Roberts Creek, BC: Nightwood Editions, 2002. 115–22.
- Tegmark, Max. "Parallel Universes." *Scientific American*. May 2003. 40–51.