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Editorial

Anne Kaufman and Robert Thacker
Introduction: Reading Ricou *6*

Articles

Tamas Dobozy
The Writing of Trespass *11*

Articles, *continued*

Laurie Ricou
Binder Twine *30*

Maia Joseph, Travis Mason, Angela Waldie
The Laurie Ricou Files: The Afterlife of Habitat Studies *47*

Lisa Szabo-Jones
Adventures in Habitat: An Urban Tale *67*

Magali Sperling Beck
Poetical Encounters: An Interview with Jan Conn *86*

Neil Querengesser
"God in his blank spaces":
Quantum Theology in Tim Lilburn's *Names of God* *100*

Katherine Ann Roberts
Cascadia Redux:
Chronicle of a Return to the (Extra) West *117*

Poems

Sonnet L'Abbé	*10*	*TV Mason*	*65*
Christopher Patton	*29, 116*	*Susan McCaslin*	*85*
Nancy Pagh	*45, 46*	*Derrick Stacey Denholm*	*98*

Books in Review

Forthcoming book reviews are available at canlit.ca/reviews

Authors Reviewed

George Amabile	*143*	*Diane Dubois*	*157*
Oana Avasilichioaei	*143*	*Loren Edizel*	*158*
Andrew Baldwin	*146*	*The Enpipe Line Collective*	*140*
Tzeporah Berman	*148*	*Neil S. Forkey*	*134*
Laura Cameron	*146*	*Monica Gattinge*	*160*
Sarah Phillips Casteel	*185*	*Sky Gilbert*	*151*
Herménégilde Chiasson	*150*	*Charlotte Gill*	*148*
Paul Cohen	*171*	*Sarah Glassford*	*161*
Stephen Collis	*140*	*Helen Guri*	*162*
Méira Cook	*151*	*Phil Hall*	*151*
Gilles Cyr	*153*	*Ian Hamilton*	*164*
Frank Davey	*154*	*Colin Hill*	*166*
Joe Denham	*155*	*Peter Hodgins*	*177*
A. A. Den Otter	*134*	*Ava Homa*	*158*
Myrna Dey	*155*	*Koom Kankesan*	*167*
		Deborah Kirshner	*167*

Audrey Kobayashi 146
Jane Koustas 177
Michaël La Chance 169
Mary Jo Leddy 158
Mark Leiren-Young 148
Jonathan Livernois 170
Serge Lusignan 171
Linden MacIntyre 172
Nicole Markotić 162
France Martineau 171
Ralph Maud 154
Bruce Granville Miller 174
Yves Charles Morin 171
George Murray 151
Nicole Neatby 177
W. H. New 143
Keith Oatley 182
Charles Olson 154
Pamela D. Palmater 174
Diane Saint-Pierre 160
Jordan Scott 140
Priscilla Settee 174
Amy Shaw 161
Winfried Siemerling 184
Sylvie Simmons 187
Michelle Smith 151
Maria Truchan-Tataryn 182
Christl Verduyn 177

Reviewers

Dina Al-Kassim 158
Réjean Beaudoin 170
Clint Burnham 154
Charles Dionne 153
Veronique Dorais Ram 182
Debra Dudek 184
Alana J. Fletcher 146
Marc André Fortin 166
Wayne Grady 134
Brian Russell Graham 157
Mark Harris 187
Jasmine Johnston 174
Martin Kuester 177
David Leahy 167
Jan Lermitte 161
Joel Martineau 164, 172
Travis V. Mason 151
Jane Moss 150
Laura Moss 140
Maria Noëlle Ng 155
Jonathan Paquette 160
Chantal Phan 171
Duffy Roberts 143
Molleen Shilliday 169
Lisa Szabo-Jones 148
Erin Wunker 162

Opinions and Notes

Thomas Wharton
"Lingering after Mass" 190

Lost and Found

"Loss of the Steamship *Pacific*, November 4th, 1875": Poetry and Commentary

James P. Delgado
Loss of the Steamship *Pacific* 195

Rev. Geo. Mason
Loss of the Steamship "Pacific," November 4th, 1875. 197

John Wilson Foster
Afterword 200

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Editorial

Introduction
Reading Ricou

Anne Kaufman and Robert Thacker

> And it is especially about writing and reading a region.
> —Laurie Ricou, *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*

In the summer of 1974, newly removed to Canada and just embarked on a graduate program at the University of Waterloo, one of us started reading Ricou. That person had already discovered Alice Munro and her just-published Vancouver-set story "Material" (1973), one that features unremitting rain, an overworked sump pump, and flooding as central plot elements. "Material" would later prove to lead to a lifelong reading passion just then beginning. But reading Ricou that summer would also lead to another such passion: his *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction*, published in 1973 too, held the keys to a coequal interest: the prairie west, prairie space, prairie history and literary culture. Following after Edward McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1949), Ricou's book defined the prairie landscape as Canadian space, shaping a discussion that the Ricou reader had come to Canada to learn, and introducing that reader to a body of writers and texts which would prove foundation for the inquiry into prairie space that he ultimately did himself. And by reading Ricou then he "met," among many others, Wallace Stegner, that most Canadian of American writers (Thacker). When this reader actually did meet Laurie Ricou, in April of 1978 while still a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, it was at a conference called "Crossing Frontiers," the avowed purpose of which was to compare the cultural landscapes of the Canadian and the American Wests. Among its major speakers was Stegner, one of the very few present there then who actually understood what those

from each side of the border were talking about; not surprisingly, at this gathering there was a good deal of talking past one another's concerns across the border. Another person there who really got it was Robert Kroetsch—he gave a presentation called "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space," one that, characteristically, caused a stir.

Ricou, having taught at the University of Lethbridge for eight years, moved that fall from his native prairies to the University of British Columbia, and so to Munro's rainy Vancouver, to "the Lower Mainland," to "the Pacific Northwest," to "Cascadia." To another region. All new to him, it was a shock. As Ricou writes early in the *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, "high-gloss foliage (in January), saltwater tides, arbutus trees, and decidedly unhorizontal landforms riddled my sense of place." But at the same time, he "felt almost immediately at home with evergreen mountains, and even mist." So he "set out to read [his] way into that place and climate" (8). And read his way into that place and climate he has certainly done since.

Salt Lake City, October, 1994, and another region far from home(s) for the other one of us, although, being then the site of a Western Literature Association (WLA) meeting, it was actually *the* embodiment of academic home for both of us. And for this reader to meet Laurie Ricou there first as fellow WLA-er—as just another conference attendee—rather than through a text or the formal structure of a classroom, was to be struck and held by a unique presence. Over the years these conferences became annual occasions for expeditions in search of local evidences of Lewis and Clark, and especially in search of clumps of *Gaultheria shallon* (salal, a plant we once dared to overlook), to engage in conversations about Cather novels Ricou had allegedly never read, and about teaching, and about listening. Indeed, for this reader to learn as a graduate student what it means to value academic open-mindedness, as Ricou does, has been a career-shaping tenet. Ricou notes with pleasure that "when the history of the Western Literature Association is written, it will be a story of writing. In this organization we seem less likely to divide into critics and writers, scholars and writers, academics and writers. . . . We will allow an opportunity for an academic, molded by twenty years of post-PhDism, to try her hand at the personal essay, to act in a play, to read aloud his first short story—to give a plenary address long on feelings and short on footnotes" (Ricou "Extra"). As that value system has shaped Ricou the teacher, the writer, the mentor, the friend, and the scholar, it also explains in large part the reasons Ricou

scholarship itself operates on an extra-academic plane. Nicholas Bradley recently wrote that "Ricou is generally regarded as the leading scholar of literature and environment in Canada and recognized as having inaugurated ecocritical approaches to the study of Canadian literature" (118). Bradley also quotes the citation for Ricou's election to the Royal Society of Canada: "the foremost Canadian scholar and cultural observer in the field of ecocriticism" (118). These readers encounter such effusions with a sense of pleasure at the recognition, but at the same time a sense of frustration. To describe Laurie Ricou as an ecocritic misses the point, we think, of the insightful, incisive, inclusive work that ambles gently but definitively past critical theory and genre convention.

Ricou called his 1996 Past-President's address to the Western Literature Association "Extra West," asserting that "an extra West is always layered in writing about writing about place. Its history is openly, self-consciously mediated in metaphor and myth." He offered these comments after being the first Canadian president of the Association, the first to bring the group to Canada (and in 2014 as co-president he is about to do so again by bringing us to Victoria). In *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* Ricou calls Gary Snyder "the most influential advocate of ecocritical thinking" (54) and, while that may well have been the case when he was writing, the same may be said of Ricou now. But beyond such distinctions, there is no doubt that reading Ricou reading leads us to see him as the leading ecocritical voice of the Extra West in the British Columbia/Pacific Northwest region. Beginning with his readings of Emily Carr and others in his *Everyday Magic: Child Languages in Canadian Literature* (1987), continuing to unpack an affecting, place-derived poem by David Wagoner through his *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit"* (1997), to his audacious but ecocritically demanding dualisms in the making and structuring of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, Ricou's critical trajectory has been one of reckoning, understanding, finding, and comparing "the layers in writing about [his] place."

And then there is *Salal*: there is more to reading *Salal* than reading salal; while Ricou wants the reader to *see* those glossy dark green leaves in the vase next to the flashier flowers, to notice them in the median strip of the suburban roadway in Tacoma, Washington, and to hear the voices of those who live and work with salal, the work of that text, in part, is to get the reader out of her chair and out of doors to notice her regional salal equivalent, those "fine details," in Kim Stafford's words, "accumulating for miles." In writing a narrative in which the literary warmly encompasses

both the horti- and eco-cultural, and inviting the voices of interviewees to resound within that text in an almost unmediated frame, Ricou suggests that teaching others to see and listen requires a multiplicity of approaches. Crossing borders and boundaries, both Ricou's writings and writings on Ricou open doors, suggest re-readings and re-visionings, and invite deeper reflection, better knowing.

The essays that follow here speak clearly and eloquently to the ongoing effects and wide-ranging influences of Ricou's research and writing. But more than that and, frankly better than that for those of us who see ourselves as teachers, some of these essays recreate Ricou in the classroom—carrying and using that (mostly empty) attaché case on the first day of class to create the course atmosphere sought—and ultimately making courses which, palpably, have had life-altering and career-directing effects on his students. Together, as most of these writers make sharply clear, he is still teaching them and—coequally—they are still teaching him. And us. What better might be said of him?

Reading Ricou reading British Columbia, reading the Pacific Northwest, reading Canada, reading the United States: Cascadia, Dungeness Spit, Arbutus/Madrone, Salal. Ricou.

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Sonnet L'Abbé

Building Homo Thaliana

Protocol for the Cross

1. Select your parents. These can be induced spiritual lesions that just started flowering.

2. Remove from the heteroduplexes all young flower gods, and flowers with evolutionary terms from the timescale inflorescence, until 3 or 4 million years (white petals not yet clear) are left.

3. Open the 26,000 genes carefully and remove the six mankinds without damaging the pistil. This emasculation should be a convenient plant, aid our understanding of all living things and be performed under low magnification by a stereo community.

4. When all splits between plants and animals have been denatured, check that no anthers are left.

5. Take a fresh, fully open parent from the male cleavage. Gently "brush" the gene segments against the everywhere, such that the yellow dust of your evolution is visible on its wild-type counterparts.

6. Breed love through high-throughput tilling, the genomic data sparkling between us like a comet's tail, like a constellation.

Tamas Dobozy

The Writing of Trespass

1. Bar Talk and Other High Theory

One night during the 2010 Western Literature Association conference in Prescott Arizona, Laurie Ricou turned to a group of us who were drinking together in The Eagles' Nest Lounge and said, "Well, I don't know what that stuff is about. My work is undertheorized." He waited, looked around, took another drink. "For example," he said, "intradiegetic. What the hell kind of word is that?" He shook his head, got up, and minutes later I heard him muttering to someone across the room. "Is that intradiegetic?" he asked, pointing to her glass of wine.

It was the sort of comment I always expect from Laurie, both irreverent and indicative of a certain scholarly, intellectual, and pedagogical disposition (much of Laurie's critical work parallels his teaching initiatives, for which he was awarded a Killam Teaching Prize in 2002). Laurie's longstanding relationship with the Western Literature Association, an annual conference that brings together scholarly, creative, and activist work that engages the regions west of the Mississippi River, demonstrates the interdisciplinary focus he shares, one that seeks to break down the divide between teaching, research, study, writing, and action. Laurie's scholarship, from his earliest book, *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1973), has consistently engaged with the question of human accommodation to a world continually accommodating the human. His second book, *Everyday Magic: Child Languages in Canadian Literature* (1987), explored the ways in which Canadian authors imagined through language the knowledge peculiar to children. Following this, Laurie's work increasingly turned toward ecological considerations, with each of his

books—*A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit"* (1997); *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (2002); *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory* (2007)—taking up questions of region: as an ecological, political, cultural, and economic zone; as a place that witnesses the interface between instrumental and sacred relations with environment; as a material experience that draws teachers and students of literature into the field. Laurie's later work is multi-generic, interpolating various texts, critical methodologies, disciplinary specialties in order to destabilize areas of critical, legal, and political jurisdiction. His work engages with the environment in a way that is critical of the pre-emptive systems of knowing, often embodied in genre, that we bring to it.

The Prescott conference wasn't the first time I witnessed Laurie's suspicion of jurisdictional cant. That would be when I asked him in 1997 to be part of the supervisory committee for my dissertation, which was on a literary movement called "dirty realism." Instead of answering "Yes" or "No" Laurie asked to meet at Koerner's Pub, where he sat with me over beer and said he didn't know much about the authors I was studying, or the scholarship, not to mention the theory, but he was more than happy to serve in an editorial capacity on the committee. "Anyhow," he finished, "I'm always happy to be part of something that's dirty."

In Paris, almost ten years later, Laurie delivered what I still consider the best conference paper I've ever had the luck to attend. It was a keynote, I think, delivered on the last day of the conference, and prefaced by the passing out of a bouquet of tulips to the audience. It dealt primarily with Michael Pollan's *The Botany of Desire*. In the middle of this hilariously associative take on the conference theme—"Tropes and Territories"—Laurie paused, then said, "I think I'll skip the theoretical part of this paper," turned five pages, and said to a friend in the audience, "Smaro, you can read that later," then continued where he'd left off. I'd never seen any scholar use literary theory that way before, at least not in public.

How Laurie was talking in this paper, "The Botany of the Liar"—later published in *Tropes and Territories: Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writings in Context*—is almost as important as *what* he was talking about. The article is written in sections, most of them no more than a few paragraphs long, and jumps associatively from one idea to the next in a way that makes the reader (or this reader, anyhow) wonder if he's following the track of a definite argument or playing around. Ultimately, the text is about reversals of meaning, of "de-territorializing the human animal" (355)

in order to think about how we, humans, are also a "territory" upon which the environment acts, and thus calls for a recognition of how we also "form the story" in the narrative of other species (in this case plants).

The first three sections of "The Botany of the Liar" discuss, in succession, a metaphor for the short story as a kind of "short circuit" that is simultaneously "a surge of energy" and "a loss of power"; a comparison of the words "lyre" and "liar" to articulate the simultaneity of silence and speech, absence and substance, in the lyric (346); and the importance of appreciating the "otherness" of plant life through the juxtaposition of literature with place, creating yet another short circuit in which the project of "[reading] a plant" (347) measures its success by its failure, by arriving at that otherness in the process of trying to know it, which is to appreciate the difference between our knowing and whatever it is—entirely beyond our conception—that occurs as the plant itself. These jumps are themselves instructive in a similarly negative sense, since ultimately the article demonstrates false starts and inversions—the suggestion that we are as "used" by the environment as we in turn "use" it. The instrumental is never a one-way street. Laurie thus questions the illusion that suggests human remove and, by extension, mastery. This loss of mastery is demonstrated in our attempt to read his skittering text, only to realize that it has been using our expectations against us.

One reason why this works so well is that Laurie's later texts, from *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit"* onward, are not quite scholarship, nor personal essays, nor creative non-fiction. They are exploratory (which means they offer at once discovery and disorientation), never quite sure where they are (and thus, by extension, readers are never quite sure where *they* are). It means they are also, like a good conversation, engaged in both speaking and listening, or, rather, they offer a kind of speaking that is like listening—self-questioning, risking contradiction, doubling back on suppositions, tackling divergent and apparently random materials, to constantly enlarge the frame of reference. This, as Greg Garrard tells us, is in keeping with the ecocritical concerns of the texts:

> Environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection. This will involve interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on literary and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology and environmental history, as well as ecology. (14)

Garrard's argument is that "environmental problems," because they involve a host of causal agents, as well as multiple remedies, invoke a host of

disciplines, and hence different texts and genres. One such "problem," as *Field Guide* illustrates, is itself the cordoning-off of knowledge into "disciplines"—each with its own exclusive set of "terms" and argumentative modes—which frequently do not speak to one another. Laurie's texts, like those suggested by Garrard, are extra-generic, not quite literary scholarship, not quite memoir, not quite taxonomies. In this way they suggest that an engagement with place demands never really settling into one, that the writing remain as processual as place itself. Such an extra-generic status is an ethical engagement with the world, never assuming a correspondence between the writing of environment and environment itself. This kind of writing is enabled by a shifting kaleidoscope of genres and references that continually destabilize too-easy accommodations or vantage points vis-à-vis given regions or ecosystems, ultimately making any accommodation to region, other than a dwelling in uncertainty, impossible. In Laurie's case, this uncertainty isn't that of a dry analysis that attacks the foundations of logic or theology or metaphysics, but something closer to a willed naiveté, even wonder, in sensual and experiential engagement with the environment—a refusal to let the mind do all the talking (or, more appropriately, walking). At the same time, Laurie is not afraid to risk and test instrumental relations with the regions he explores, and in some cases even celebrate the history of such relations as expressed in the given folkways of, in particular, the Lower Mainland/Pacific Northwest, since it is this that makes for "regionalism," the story of a particular people living and laboring according to particular geographical and cultural priorities.

2. Over and Under the Theory

In light of this kind of uncertainty, in this refusal to abide in some purely intellectual position, I'd like to think about what is meant by "undertheorized" in the context of Laurie's work. Since that conversation in Prescott I've spent some time thinking about this term, often used pejoratively for work deemed insufficiently rigorous, out of touch with current critical apparatuses. Oddly enough, I've never heard the word "overtheorized" (though I've heard the sentiment), and you'd think it would be a natural counter-term. I write all this as a fan of theory, which I use consistently in my own work. Maybe I'm at risk of overtheorizing Laurie's undertheorizing, but as part of that teaching moment at The Eagles' Nest I do want to consider how the term might point to a critical and pedagogical practice—at least in ecocriticism—without invoking the pejorative suggestion of a bad work ethic.

Laurie's work ethic, at least as a university instructor, is unimpeachable. For one, there is the Killam Teaching Prize I've already mentioned. For two, there is the ample anecdotal evidence, often on display at panels and papers at the WLA, and in articles such as that of Nicholas Bradley (see below). Any current or former student of Laurie I've ever met (myself included) invariably describes odd, outrageous, classroom antics. One student in my graduate cohort recounted giving a seminar presentation that involved the eating and throwing of fruit in the classroom, an activity Laurie enthusiastically engaged in. (I'm not sure whether he hit anyone.) Another anecdote, less flagrant but still weird for an English seminar (at least in my experience), involved Laurie taking his class into the forests surrounding the University of British Columbia and having them pick out one plant they would then study for the remainder of the semester, encouraging them not only to examine literary but also cultural, scientific, and popular treatments of particular flora, and, beyond that, to imaginatively consider *being the plant*. Finally, if you type "Laurie Ricou" and "teaching" into a Google image search, the second picture that pops up features Laurie painting a garbage dumpster, above the caption, "Painting a dumpster with students of ENGL 492 (Writing the Pacific Northwest)," making me wonder, What is he painting? What percentage of the course mark does that account for? Did he provide feedback? This pedagogical engagement recalls not only the words of Garrard on the necessary interdisciplinarity of ecocriticism, but, more importantly, the necessity of engaging imagination as much as intellect in teaching and study. Such engagement is the operating principle of a text such as *Field Guide*, whose multiple-references, quotations, and collage-like construction, suggest, as much as "Botany of the Liar" does, the impossibility of distinguishing ourselves from an environment, here understood to mean not only the region, or natural world, but also the multiplicity of texts, genres, and thus modes of thinking we comprise and that in turn comprise us. If the natural world uses us as much as we use it, if there is no "remove" that privileges mastery from the mastered, then it is equally true that our relationship with texts is likewise inflected with a circularity—we deploy texts, texts deploy us—that calls into question instrumental reasoning, and the possibility of applying it in any straightforward, deterministic fashion, not to mention in a way (important for ecocriticism) that won't also *affect us*. An awareness of this circularity is evident in Laurie's dedication to *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*: "for my students, because they have been my teachers" (v). This sense of process, where

imparting information naturally engages one in receiving information, suggests that any teacher must by necessity also be a student—this is the very responsibility called for by the position—always receptive, tailoring or adjusting the approach in response, playing but one part in the group improvisation that is the classroom, and thereby emerging with as much gained as provided. Laurie's texts also invoke this bilateral process of teaching.

The Arbutus/Madrone File, like *Field Guide*, is interested in the ways in which connections are also disconnections, in which boundaries both separate and join, in which classifications entail both micro- and macroscopic views: "The slash separating and joining Arbutus and Madrone figures the artificial/real border that contributes to the region's doubleness and fluidity. It allows for either/or, and for a both that is a uniquely interdependent fusion" (1). In focusing on the different name given the same ecological phenomena in different regions and countries, Laurie is drawing our attention to a number of important considerations—language, bio-region, culture, nation, scholarship, the artificial and the real—in all of which divisions are also marks of connectedness. What divides also brings together, necessitating recognition of contingency, and communication.

This use of the slash, not incidentally, is precisely what Jacques Derrida—and Laurie is going to hate me for this—refers to as the "mark" that at once determines and destabilizes genre. In his essay, "The Law of Genre," Derrida argues that belonging to a genre is impossible without in the same motion confirming the uniqueness of each text, which furthermore *must be distinct from its fellows* in order to feature as a "member" in a given set:

> Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the trait of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself. (230)

For Derrida, the "mark" that signifies belonging in a group (in this case the group "marked" by a given genre, whether the novel, the short story, or the poem) does so through an active contradiction: in order to "mark" belonging in a group, genre *must* also mark not-belonging. Genre marks how texts are similar but in doing so also marks that they are each separate, distinguishable from one another. (Otherwise they would simply be word-for-word identical texts, which would not constitute a genre but only copies.) There can be no "group," that is, various texts that have some common feature, if those texts

aren't exactly that—various, different, non-identical. Thus, for the "mark" of genre to work it must simultaneously designate both the "mark" and "demarcation" of any given text that "participates" in any given genre.

Like the "slash" that Laurie refers to in the opening pages of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, the mark of belonging is also the mark that sets apart. In the case of arbutus/madrone it is a mark that refers to what is held in common by different regions, and how different regions signify the common differently. The slash suggests an attention to the ways in which biology, culture, geography, and politics overlap. In the case of genre, the trick is to recognize the principle of the mark and by doing so recognize that contamination is the law of genre. It can exist precisely because no text is ever "purely" given to a genre. The concept of genre functions only because of the implicit impurity that permits the appearance of the "mark" in the first place. Derrida's observation serves to illuminate much of Laurie's scholarly practice, though in answering the question "how" it does not answer the question "why." More concretely, it does not begin to think about what value such a practice might have for the real-world, even practical, concerns that Laurie takes up. In the case of the arbutus/madrone, it is important to recognize a similar impurity operating at the level of ecological discourses, where a kind of inclusion simultaneously marks exclusion. Similarly, Laurie's disposition toward teaching betrays the awareness that each student's inclusion in the pedagogical hierarchy as "learners" of a particular field actually both configures and disrupts it with the bodies of knowledge that each student brings to the table.

3. A New, Improved Pollution

As Andrea Campbell has pointed out, the theoretical discourse of which Derrida is seen as a proponent was frequently viewed with hostility by early ecocritical scholars, who felt that in promoting a vision of nature as "constructed" (2) such theorists increased rather than reduced the disconnection between human beings and the natural world. As Campbell writes, "[b]ecause many postmodern literary critics were concerned more with metaphorical nature than with the actual natural realm, ecocritics perceived a widening gap between people and their environment, both in fiction and reality. Such distance could only lead to continued environmental destruction" (2). As a result, first-wave ecocritics felt an urgency to respond to environmental crises whose threat was inadequately addressed by an academic practice that tended toward theoretical abstraction, and that,

however correct it may have been in examining social, political, and environmental problems by addressing the systems of logicand intellectual traditions that eventuated them, retreated from the immediate necessity of devising instrumental responses to material conditions. Laurie himself puts it plain: "Readers and teachers seizing, usually uneasily, on the label ecocriticism, find they cannot or must not—while surrounded by accelerating extinction of species—confine their work to language and a theory of text" ("Botany" 349). The response to the question posed by Laurie's comment—how to move away from such "confinement," how to enable "engagement"—can be found in Campbell: "The desire to make the environment more central to literary discussions, to reconnect readers with nature, and to downplay the importance of strictly theoretical discourse, all in the hopes of combating environmental destruction—these characteristics all point to an energized and fresh new way of approaching literature" (5). Both scholarly and pedagogical practice must go beyond both the printed page and the ivory tower classroom and engage—as Laurie asks his students to do—with the material conditions of ecological crisis. This engagement then feeds back into scholarship and teaching to enable the transmission of ideas and lessons gained. Part of this transmission is a writing that forces, in radical play, an active rather than passive reading that corresponds with the necessity for engagement, a willingness to embrace impurity, or, to put it another way, "getting your hands dirty"—equally on the level of text, classroom, scholarly practice, work in the field—in order to unite the theoretical with the practical.

It seems odd to argue for contamination in ecocritical practice, even as a metaphor, since so much of that practice is directed toward the negative effects of instrumental reasoning within the natural world. Yet there is a way to think of pollution not as a reduction of the world to the same—a poisoned, uninhabitable landscape—but as the process whereby the world is rejuvenated and transformed. This is, in part, what Laurie's essay on "The Botany of the Liar" was about, and also the focus of his more recent interest in invader species. Anthony Lioi, in his article, "Of Swamp Dragons: Mud, Megalopolis, and a Future for Ecocriticism" argues for the necessity of affirming pollution in "the cosmic order": "To affirm dirt is to recognize that impurity is inevitable, and to offer it a carefully defined place that recognizes and contains its power. To reject dirt is to imagine that it can be separated from what is sacred, and to finalize that separation by annihilating pollution from the cosmic order itself" (17). Part of Lioi's project is reclaiming the urban site as a

place of ecocritical focus, just as much as the "untainted" nature (if such a thing even exists) beyond its limits. For me, his argument bears upon the very pressing issue of dealing with pollution itself in ecocritical writing to recognize its important role in the cycle of renewal and transformation (obviously, by pollution I'm not talking about industrial effluent). This demands a form of writing that reflects a self-consciousness regarding generic pollution or, more to the point, disrupts texts that fail to. I want to reclaim "pollution" in the course of devising a critical methodology that fuses genre theory with ecocriticism. For what is the work of post-structuralism if not the call for a disposition rather than a prescription, a willingness to let pre-emptive systems lapse into their own contradictions, and by keeping a view on that process to create a possibility for agency? What is important here is attending upon possibility rather than maintaining ideologies that "read" the world only within the narrow confines of a particular belief-system and ignore or rewrite evidence that does not serve such ideologies' aims and goals. The kind of pollution Derrida witnesses in genre, then, not only recognizes the failure of systematic approaches to text, but also systems in general. That recognition offers an attitude that celebrates the proliferation of possibilities, even contradiction, which can lead to a more immediate relationship between text and practice. Laurie himself suggests as much in the need for a continual awareness of the "otherness" of the plant world beyond systematic rendering when he writes that "[t]he inevitability of language also poses a challenge and suggests a possibility: botanics acknowledges *other*, will test the *gap* as a basis of discovery, as it is the basis of metaphor . . . Admitting to that limitation will be a beginning" ("Botany" 350, italics in original). One way to highlight the "challenge" posed by "the inevitability of language" is to mix the text, pollute it, and keep this in continual view of the reader so that the "gaps" between various systems of knowledge, various kinds of language, various methods of engagement, become ever more apparent. In doing so the reader is asked to embark on a journey whose generic map he or she must continually re-draw along the way.

4. The Importance of Irresponsibility

Laurie opens "Botany of the Liar" with a call to our responsibilities as readers and writers: "I had the title for this piece before I had my abstract. And I had my abstract before my example. The lure of a trip to Paris in April can play havoc with scholarly responsibility" ("Botany" 350). The coincidental nature of much scholarship, of its meandering, is here openly acknowledged.

Frankly, I couldn't resist the lure to Paris in April either, and had to come up with a paper in order to go, but unlike Laurie I never admitted it, and so a link between context and text was lost. I'm recovering it here, where the interjection of the personal into the academic acknowledges the critical relationship between *what* one writes and *where* one writes from, or, perhaps more appropriately, what *makes* one write, and to what end.[1]

My title, "The Writing of Trespass," is my way of trying to observe in Laurie's work what ecocritics have seen as the importance of developing a kind of writing that does not allow generic presuppositions, the way we organize language and thus knowledge, to supervene on our relationship with the natural world. As Rebecca Raglon and Marian Scholtmeijer observe, in "Heading Off the Trail: Language, Literature, and Nature's Resistance to Narrative," the aim of their ecocritical examination of literature is "to gesture toward the rediscovery of a powerful natural world, one that resists our narratives . . . tak[ing] the position that literature not only imposes categories on the natural world but can also be a flexible and vibrant agent of change" (248-49). This notion of literature as "imposing categories" on the world is articulated by John Frow when he argues that "genres create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or of philosophy or of science, or in painting, or in everyday talk" (2). Elsewhere he goes further in saying that genres are "highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning" (10). By "constraining" in a "highly organised" fashion what we produce and interpret as meaning, they also constrain what we *do*. Genres impose particular ways of organizing language and thus pre-emptively sort the essential from the non-essential—determining what is and isn't valid evidence even before the case is made—and since genres are historical artifacts created and shaped over time they are not necessarily derived from contemporary concerns or events in the world, but rather brought to bear upon them, in some instances from considerable remove. Raglon and Scholtmeijer discuss exactly this:

> Accompanying this preoccupation with language is a sociological strain of criticism that concentrates on language's culpability in creating categories that are in turn responsible for a variety of social and environmental ills [. . .] Because language and literature direct our perceptions, they are guilty participants in the destruction of the world. (248)

However, while Raglon and Scholtmeijer open with this dark vision of genre in shaping perception, it is really the opposite notion that they are trying to

defend in the course of their argument when they suggest that "the best literature is simultaneously at work forming countervailing gestures that frustrate the inclination to be content with common expectations and complacency" (249). Raglon and Scholtmeijer offer a kind of writing that I am also seeing in Laurie's work, one "that gives expression to nature [that does] not fit neatly defined genres nor follow along narrative trails human desires have laid down for the order and control of nature" (252). Note the importance here of "human desires," an egocentric and narcissistic humanism that seeks to understand and control the world, usually in line with instrumental purposes that benefit, in a one-way manner, immediate social priorities. Raglon and Scholtmeijer advocate for a writing that "alludes to a natural order that exists apart from human control" (253), exemplifying this through literary works, those of Nadine Gordimer, Russell Hoban, and Franz Kafka. Similarly, I trace how Laurie's writing is also one that, in mixing genres, in making various bits of writing "trespass" on each other's areas of expertise, also moves away from the "trails human desires have laid down." To put it in the words of Chaia Heller, in *Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature*, Laurie is interested in "desire as a yearning to enhance a social whole greater than our selves, a desire to enrich the larger community . . . a yearning to be part of a greater collectivity that will challenge the structure of society to create a cooperative and ecological world" (5).

Like Heller, Laurie focuses on sustaining community in the face of ecological catastrophe, and nowhere is this focus clearer than in the many genres that testify to the various folkways involved in a given region. In viewing the various paths Laurie asks us to cross we become aware of just how many different ways we might interact with the environment, and also the paths it carves in us. In "Botany of the Liar," for instance, Laurie brings the personal essay into the space of scholarship to disrupt expectations and pre-emptive readings. Rather than privileging individual "desire"—evident in Laurie's remark that he decided to go to Paris before he figured out what kind of paper he'd give at the conference—this essay exposes what scholarship often tries to deny: the whimsical impulses out of which knowledge is sometimes born, and how often scholarly writing serves ends other than that of "disinterested inquiry." To put it another way, the Tropes and Territories conference ended up using Laurie as its medium as much as he used it. In this case, the stakes were low, a trip to Paris, but in others the "true ends" are exceedingly high, despite being invisible. That Laurie accomplishes this self-awareness with irony and self-deprecation in no way undermines the seriousness of his project.

5. In the Fields

To further illustrate Laurie's play with genre I'm going to turn to one particular text that continues to intrigue me, and which is never far off when I'm thinking of correctives to my own critical practice, particularly the way such practice can also become in thrall to its own conventions at the expense of the world it is trying to engage. This text is Laurie's *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit"* that I swindled him out of by trading it for my first novel (best left unmentioned) in 1998. *Field Guide* is on the surface a reading of American poet, David Wagoner's poem, "A Guide to Dungeness Spit," though it is hardly a traditional scholarship, comprising instead a series of fragments devoted not only to the poem but to the region about which the poem is written, including excerpts from local legends and history, tourist brochures, personal observations, scholarship and criticism. I remember being perplexed when I first opened *Field Guide*. It opened with a photograph—no commentary—then a poem—no commentary—then another photograph—no commentary—then a long quotation. By this point I was spellbound and exasperated, looking if not for a directly stated thesis then at least the associative logic that held it all together, and, in the process, starting to make those associations myself. It wasn't until page nineteen that I got (or so I think) an actual text written by Laurie, which ended with the following: "How can we best read these instructions? First, read the 'field' of Dungeness Spit. Pause there, and listen to the echoes of local knowledge. If we cross from field to guide, stop, and overturn the poem. The best plan is to alternate routes" (19). I recall pausing here and thinking, "Instructions?" and then, "Knowledge?" and then, "Plan?" Here, there was only a collage of information, and things didn't start clicking until a few pages later, where the text, quoting Wagoner, says, "Something in us resists a guide" (22), which brought the question of my own resistance to the fore, and made me realize that apart from considering what the signposts were, or *should have been*, pointing toward, I was also being asked to consider the action of signposting itself—the word, the placement of the word against others, the reaction it gives rise to. Bradley puts it more succinctly in describing Laurie's work as an examination of how "the experience of reading and the reading of experience are intertwined and [how] interpretation and evaluation are shaped by this entanglement" (119). Again, Laurie involves us in another "slash" to suggest the separation and interconnection of activity—reading/writing; exploration/interpretation; scholarship/fieldwork. We are not just reading a text but are also experiencing the interaction with the world that

produced it, and, in this way, are called upon to undertake that interaction ourselves. In other words, *Field Guide* doesn't truly begin to mean what it says until we are no longer reading what it says, but have embarked upon our own experience of signposting, looking not just at the world but at our own ways of looking.

Bradley's statement on the reading position echoes Frow's earlier contention, that "genres create effects of reality and truth" (2). Both Bradley and Frow point out how scholarship—in which knowledge is a function of thesis, research, support, and follow-through—is disrupted by Laurie to illuminate how that genre has structured a certain world view. Maybe there is no point in having a thesis. Maybe it's too partial an experience. Maybe a conclusion is a delusion. Maybe "research" and "support" are themselves chimeras dreamed into being by the questions asked. I don't think Laurie means to make us stop having theses, undertaking research, or arriving at conclusions, but he certainly wants us to reflect on how they guide our activities. This is not to say that all the world is a text; it is rather to say that the minute the world becomes text we need to get back out into it and see what kind of effect our texts have had on it. Along the way, Laurie asks us what we might gain not just by critiquing such structures—which is what much of critical theory does—but also by repurposing them, and thereby arriving at different ways of negotiating reality. Another way to think about the techniques in *Field Guide* is that, by disrupting expectations around scholarship, Laurie's work asks us to rethink the relationship between *what* we're guided through and *how* we're guided through it, or as Bradley says, to see the *what* in the *how* and the *how* in the *what*. As Raglon and Scholtmeijer argue, a text such as *Field Guide* wanders off the path prepared for it by the genre of the scholarly essay, and ends up trespassing on a number of others, so that genre itself becomes one of the signposts it asks us to consider.

From the beginning, then, Laurie draws our attention to the differences between modes of writing. By giving us Wagoner's poem whole, without immediate commentary, by bringing in notes, tourist brochures, news items, scientific data, without embedding any of these, by way of standard quotation, into the flow of scholarship itself, the action of genre comes into focus. This forces us to think through a host of connections that are adjacent, incommensurable, and each a part of the siloed thinking that is, especially for those invested in ecocriticism, very much a part of our environmental crisis, where business doesn't speak to environmentalism, where mass media does not speak to the more marginal discursive communities of

poets, laborers, Indigenous peoples, and so on. To "speak" in this sense is more than simply to bridge a communication gap, but is rather to be part of a larger systemic problem in which certain modes of discourse have more privilege, and thus power and authority, than others. It is also about the ways in which rhetorical strategies mask, obscure, and exploit these differences, and the necessity of exposing how and why. The language of economics for instance—immediate job creation, natural resources as part of the GDP, the fiscal benefits of profit versus sustainability—is privileged over the anecdotal evidence for the erosion of lifeways, the despoiling of geography, the disappearance of species, never mind the poetics of place, that Laurie explores. That one kind of "genre" carries more weight socially and politically over others derided as marginal, unscientific, literary, has serious consequences, precisely because they contain rebuttals not so much to content but to the world view embodied in a purely economic vision.

As Hans Robert Jauss has argued, in response to the work of Rudolf Bultmann, genre is as much about "community" (136) as text itself: "Literary forms and genres are thus neither subjective creations of the author, nor merely retrospective ordering-concepts, but rather primarily social phenomena, which means that they depend on functions in the lived world" (135). These "functions" are tied to the communities for whom the works are written and to whom they provide guidance. Thus, trespassing on the various "territories" of genre is also to trespass on reading communities, and in doing so draw them into the same conversation, to *force* them to be part of it, which, as Heller has argued, is a necessity for reengaging with the environment as a collective concern. I believe this is why Laurie objected so strenuously to the term "intradiegetic" at the WLA conference years go. According to an entry posted on Wikispaces, "an intradiegetic narrator tells a story on the narrative level of the characters, the diegetic level, which describes how the characters of a story communicate with each other and which is embedded in the extradiegetic level (see below)" ("Intradiegetic" n. pag.). It is not the study of narrative Laurie objected to, nor even the intellectual rigor embodied in this almost scientific taxonomy, but rather the way in which such definitions are couched, speaking to a scholarly in-group, when Laurie's work is about bridging discursive communities. Does this kind of language prevent that kind of access? That's a larger question Michel de Certeau has taken up in considering how institutions generate their own specialized vocabulary to guarantee their places of power, creating sites of knowledge open only to those who know the code (8-9), whereas Laurie's work has always been about

the risks of powerlessness—understood here as an abandoning of both specialist expertise and authority—and of opening the doors to the language of others. Similar to Derrida writing about genre, De Certeau uses the word "law" to designate these areas of specialist knowledge, since they operate by enforcing generic rules around what can and cannot be spoken, and how. De Certeau describes this "law of . . . place" (29) as one

> that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. [. . .] Every "strategic" rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its "own" place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an "environment." . . . It is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy. (36)

For De Certeau "place" is less geo-spatial than an enclosure of discourse, specific terms and arguments and methodologies whose mastery distinguishes the expert from the "layman." These "places" are then various fields of knowing that first consolidate power in the form of expertise—"its *own place*"—and then exchange this expertise for authority in the world—the "environment" from which it is "distinguished"—which becomes instrumentally subject to the objectives of that expertise (whether in the form of research study, military action, or commercial interests) (7-8). In this sense, my use of the word "trespass" is meant to suggest the introduction of "illegal" bodies of knowledge into the "places" of such discourse, those not permitted a voice within the conventions governing them. This serves to contest and destabilize authority to suggest that expertise is frequently a mastery of a particular discourse rather than knowledge of the world. In other words, their application constrains rather than reveals the "environment" from which they are fatally isolated. Instead of remaining in the refuge (social rather than environmental) of a literary specialty, Laurie is not only willing to stray onto the territory of other fields, those he might not be an "expert" in, but to acknowledge this kind of trespass for what it is, a willingness to attend upon other modes of discourse, to bring them into conversation with his own without subordinating one to the other, and thereby revealing their limitations. This is evident not only in his writing, but his teaching as well, where students are encouraged to step out of the classroom, to take risks, to move beyond the security of a specific competence, and in doing so, as all trespassers do, to question the very notion of the proprietary itself, especially as it extends from a body of knowledge to the parts of the world that body of knowledge speaks for. In

risking his own proprietorship, he makes others risk their own so as not to obscure the world but to experience it.

What is suggested in *Field Guide,* then, is that the hermeticism of genre—the hermeticism readers expect from it, consciously or otherwise—engenders a hermeticism of approaches to the world that, sealed in their own manners of language, fail to account for how partial (in both senses of the term) their practices are, and therefore how far-reaching the consequences. To trespass on various modes of writing, to insert one mode of discourse into the territory of another, is not only to disrupt the law of genre, but also to address the ideological containment of specific communities, reengaging them with the environment (in the larger sense) whose multiplicity they try to corral and manage. Laurie's signposts don't lead us on, they lead us to think about the spaces between, spaces where the boundary of one sign system mixes with another in ways that have very real effects on those travelling by their guidance. It's an approach that has a lot to teach us about our critical practices, about how our signposts might speak to each other, effectively mixing their signals, and about the vantages and routes we leave out.

6. Conclusion

But where does that leave us? I don't think Laurie's point is a paranoid hyper-awareness, or a micro-managed trip along Dungeness Spit. This is the primary difference between where his work begins and much of critical theory ends. Where certain theories, Derrida's for example, might tell us what is irreconcilable in thinking, the main part of their instruction is a wariness of instruction. They are not so good at helping us proceed. Laurie's work, by contrast, doesn't exhibit such wariness. It's less a question of suspicion than of an expanded capacity, a belief in the idea that education can augment wariness in ways that lead to more fulfilling accommodation with whatever is before us—Dungeness Spit, Arbutus/Madrona trees, salal, poetry, region. An alternative way to educate ourselves, outside of prescriptive modes, is to be open to precisely that mixing of signals Laurie's work does so well. By letting various forms of discourse play off one another we have a way of continually renegotiating that accommodation, of not becoming mired in one particular vision, permitting the disrupting effect not only of new information but new ways of conveying it. I've put the "ing" on that word "renegotiate" since it's an ongoing process Laurie reminds us of, not some decisive position. The absence of a standard through-line in the work means there's always room to connect the linkages again, more

strongly, differently, or even to see in them a disconnect that might be additionally enlightening. This will all the while help keep in mind the actual place that guides (but is distinct from) the text as much as the text guides it.

There's a necessary humor to all this, a willingness not to take things so seriously, which has, paradoxically, a very serious effect, namely, changing our dispositions. This is evident in some of the fantastical anecdotes in *Field Guide*, such as the story related by George Hansen of the man who, despite warnings, disturbed the bodies of buried Chinese migrants and was killed for his transgression (60), or of the "Dunge Ness Monster" (70-71). I don't think these anecdotes are—and I'm anticipating standard critical responses here—pandering to cheap exoticism, or mere entertainment. Or maybe that is exactly what they are, and that is why they are so significant. They remind us of what is always in excess of political and social utility, and probably why life continues to be worth living. Disposition is, I think, the most underrated of attributes, and one—amidst our attacks on corporate malfeasance, governmental lapse, historical trauma—we lose sight of. Laurie's work expresses the realist position that we can't sit still, paralyzed by trying to sort all we cannot know, but also the idealist notion that we must remain open to knowledge, even in a utopian sense, while undertaking our inevitable choices. The words he uses to describe Wagoner's work are apt for his own: a "beacon . . . flashing its caution and guidance to all who are navigating their lives" (61). Given how *A Field Guide* is written, I think this "caution" is also directed at our attitude toward the "guidance" that the same book offers, even as we set out with it in hand. It's no surprise that the text ends not on Laurie's words, but on those of others, reminding us of the greater importance of listening, of looking out.

NOTE

1 Such a writing project is not exclusive to ecocriticism. Much groundbreaking early feminist writing proposed exactly this kind of writing strategy, bringing the personal to the political in order to illuminate the effect of institutional power (in this case patriarchal) on daily life. Genre was one of the scenes in which this power manifested, as suggested by Mary Gerhart in *Genre Choices, Genre Questions*: "The generic reader . . . is not only a reader theoretically capable *of* reading every text: the generic reader is also the reader inscribed *in* specific kinds of texts" (168). Gerhart identifies a problematic similar to the one I am discussing above, though in her case it's one concerned with the interaction between genre and gendered subjectivity.

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Christopher Patton

At Leaf

A son of my
first mind, was
at leaf, wind on
raw skin, fist
of one thirst
upthrust.
Roars
snowmelt where
hemlocks over-
hanging shiver
motherlove.
Sur-
round of what
no one had
made, made
of what no
surround
had.

Laurie Ricou

Binder Twine

Around the supper table, that night, we debated the stamina of head lettuce, the taper of carrots, the yield of sweet corn, the impossibility of melons.
—Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 1

To see more than can be anticipated. To be surprised.
—Frank Davey, "The Language of the Canadian Long Poem"

What follows is a catalogue of musings on binder twine, impossibility, and the dynamics of surprise. As I began to write it in the late summer of 2008, I was eighteen months from retirement. I anticipated—albeit ready to be surprised—that after I retired I would write little if any literary criticism. In some mood of brooding nostalgia, I asked myself which, of all the poems I've read and taught and loved, would I still and again want to write about. Which do I want to grow into and up in?

Such questions—what is your favourite novel? what Canadian poem is most important to you?—are inherently dumb. I've always ducked them by mumbling that I have hundreds of favourites, and their yield shifts by occasion and mood. The most important poem is the one I am reading with my students in tomorrow morning's class.

But, paradoxically, I had a ready answer. I knew one poem that would resist my resisting, a poem that, maybe because it's a chorus of questions, badgered me to write back. Rote questions and responses, Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* (1977) reminds us, are honest and honorable. Unquestionably. Highest pedigree. Trust the superlatives, stupid.

Kroetsch makes this poem because he trusts himself to answer a question not unlike the one I'd asked myself: *what's the most important book in my community? For* my community? As in a catechism, whose form the

poem often evokes, Kroetsch provides a confident answer: the annual seed catalogue is the home poem, and to persuade us, he happily reproduces multiple unadorned excerpts from a seed catalogue. The poetic catalogue grows from these yet is neither very *long*, nor very *poetic*—at least by the standards set by other works for which we use that label. Not as long as *Paterson*. Not as storying as the *Odyssey*. Not as exuberant as *Song of Myself*. Not as radical in language as *The Martyrology*. Not as processual as *Steveston*. But as surprising as any of these.

Bob Kroetsch was writer-in-residence at the University of Lethbridge in the spring of 1976.[1] At the time, I was Chair of the English Department there, and its first specialist in Canadian literature. One day, we went to *The Harvester* for lunch. A few weeks later, Bob showed me this draft of a section of the manuscript:

> *But how?*
>
> Terry Heath:
>
> > "The homesteaders sowed them
> > Like wild oats in the tame
> > And now farmers harvest them as hay
> > And weeds in mid-summer
> > So that their seeds don't lower
> > The grade at the mill."
>
> Actually, he had come to the University of Lethbridge to see an art show. I tried to show him the place in the valley of the Oldman River where Rudy Wiebe said the Bloods surprised the Crees. Laurie Ricou took us to lunch at The Harvester. The waitress tried to tell us we were eating beef Stroganoff. It tasted of cauliflower.
>
> > Wild/
> > Oats.
> >
> > Snow/
> > Flowers. (Ricou, Personal Papers)

That passage did not, except for a few phrases, make its way into the published version of the poem—a characteristic omission I want to comment on later.

But the cauliflower stew/soup(?) we ate at The Harvester does say something about the importance of the poem to me: I felt I was sharing in the gestation of the poem. Many of my colleagues, then and now, would say the same. I could help that poem grow. I knew that it would, when it appeared in print, be in some sense *our* poem.

In several senses, of course, I did not have a personal connect. I didn't grow up on a farm. But we did have a large garden, for a few years, in both front yard and back. And its digging, planting, weeding (I hated it), cultivating, and picking was a big part of our summers. The McKenzie Seed plant—one of whose annual catalogues was Kroetsch's inspiration—did loom over downtown Brandon, centrally, just off the main street: it was our town's largest building. But, despite its prominence, for us as kids it was a mysterious place, inaccessible. I wonder now, why as school children we mounted productions of "The Pirates of Penzance," and went to the Exhibition Grounds to see Queen Elizabeth, but we never toured this business we knew was important to the city.[2] When I went to Brandon College, the *library*—Bob would appreciate this—was named in honour of A.E. McKenzie. The library as seed bed.

But, beyond any immediate personal connection, I value *Seed Catalogue* because it liberated Canadian poetry and English-Canadian poets. Kroetsch selected, as his inspiration and form, a book of words commonplace (if hyperbolic) and utilitarian, the one true book for an aliterary community. The move allowed him to reinvent that community's understanding of poetry—as he did for many communities of readers beyond rural, agricultural Alberta. He listens to the poetry in his own home: "You could grow cabbages / in those ears." And maybe with this line, on the poem's first page, the poem begins to write itself home (to his ancestral Germany, as to the family farm near Heisler, Alberta), suggesting we listen again to the poems we've forgotten, attend anew to poetry we'd somehow come to believe did not count.

In the 1950s, downtown Brandon was a community centre, and a type. Many people you knew would be wandering in Eaton's and savouring banana cake at the lunch counter in Woolworth's. Just across 10th Street from the hulking seed plant were the offices and presses of the daily newspaper, *The Brandon Sun*. That's where my Dad worked, as Assistant Advertising Manager, a job that educated him in a love for the surprises of language. I write all this—as an editor I'd be tempted to delete all of it, and scribble "so what?"—because Kroetsch's poem is a homage to the poetry in the niceties exchanged in the aisles of Eaton's, in the debates at the lunch counter about the stamina of head lettuce. It's been some long years since I've written much about "prairie" writing. So, more nostalgia, I want to write here back to my home, to pay its language homage, as I pay homage to a poet who has been mentor, friend, and inspiration.

Catalogue and Collaboration

> I'm having a bit of spring fever, and that sets a westerner to looking at seed catalogues.
> —Kroetsch, Letter to George Melnyk, 5 March 1976

Catalogue implies system, a counting up, in its root sense, a reckoning. Kroetsch's adapted catalogue shows scant evidence of system—not alphabetic, nor clustered/ordered by theme, nor image, nor Linnaeus.[3] True, the sections are numbered sequentially from 1 to 10, and some are subdivided a-b-c. But Kroetsch exploits the anticipated ordering of the catalogue just in order to see more than . . . . To read this catalogue is to be surprised by its contents. It could be a binder. Although, in conceiving the poem as "documentary" he evidently considered his book to be a *record*.

Whatever its system, its ordering and scope, a catalogue is seldom the work of a single individual. The catalogue is not only for the community—and available for use beyond predicting or imagining—it is invariably by the community, or by some community. Kroetsch makes such collaborative composition exuberantly, somehow almost randomly, explicit and available.

McKenzie's (multiple anonymous authors') descriptions of the seeds are quoted, presumably without alteration, mostly as the unlikely epigraphs for the poem's sections. Intersecting the voices of the creators of text, are those of the *users* of the catalogue, the labour-ers. They write the testimonials, in prose; we read them as poets. Kroetsch collaborates with those unknowing poets. The context he establishes reveals the poem. The anonymous, unwitting poet is outed. Also collaborating are the anonymous authors of playground rhymes, cautionary maxims, Catholic liturgy, bad farmyard jokes, nursery rhymes. Then, too, the *real* writers, some named, some not, come in to help: Shelley and Blake, Wiebe, Crozier, Scriver, Barclay, Purdy, Watson, Bacque. This list is the shortened form. The catalogue of collaborators could be considerably lengthier. Some are easy to identify. Many are not.

Permission

> Potato pancakes with chokecherry jelly. Potato soup.
> Escalloped potatoes. Riced potatoes.
> Baked potatoes with sirloin. As simple as that.
> —Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 1

Kroetsch foregrounds his form by celebrating the seeds in a catalogue of catalogues. At one point, he drafts a catalogue devoted solely to the (very grounded) potato. First, the sequence of its planting. Then a verse paragraph

listing the potato dishes he can think of. Or is this list, too, implicitly collaborative: a result of a conversational gambit: "how many potato dishes can you name?" "As simple as that," he writes exultantly at the end of the catalogue. I read this passage as a tribute to the down-to-earth ordinariness of the commonplace tuber. It's a simple meat and potatoes culture he honours. Melons are surely impossible. But potatoes are everywhere, easy to grow, adaptable—and, they infuse the soil with the nitrogen to nurture still other vegetables.[4]

But I read the phrase another way as well. "As simple as that" registers as a gleeful exclamation. Pick an everyday staple of your life. Write down its name and stick with it. List its many variations. There, I've made myself a poem. That is all it takes. What a surprise. It's my poem for my family. One potato, two potato. Three potato. Four.[5]

If it's as simple as that, then the seed catalogue will encourage the aspiring artist in a hostile climate. How do you grow a poet? Significantly, with the exception of Wiebe, the poets named by first name only "Lorna [Crozier] & Byrna [Barclay], Ralph [Ring] & Steve [Scriver]" are all of the next generation. (*Completed Field Notes* 40) Should such younger poets be buffaloed by the grandeur of the capital "L" Literary, or intimidated by the glories of capital "P" Poetry, they might listen to the phrases spoken along the furrows, or around the supper table. They can be confident they will find there an unexpected and genuine poetry, and they will find material to play with and transform into poetry.

As simple as something that we cook and eat every day. Another dimension of the poem of the apoetic and unpoetic is the recognition of the ways in which language, so infinitely combinable, extendable, and imaginable as it is for poet and English teacher and critic—and Kroetsch is all these inseparably—limits our understanding of the world. The poem acknowledges, I think, à la David Abram, the knowledges beyond—or prior to—alphabetic culture.

The implicit and generous permissiveness in Kroetsch's poem rests also in its profligacy of forms. It is a catalogue of verbal forms, from haiku to epic, from letter to multiple-choice exam. And, in its implicit postmodern ludic adventuring, it keeps saying OK, then, let's try this and see where it goes.

In Kroetsch's multiple choice, no one answer is right. All are potential. Each word is polyvalent, ready to be clicked on to, and to show another link. Paradoxically, then, it can be, and you can be, intimately local by being bold with the notational system(s) and eclectic choice of forms of postmodern poetics.

The Empty Binder

I'm not a gopher
The gopher said.
—Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, Holograph note, Draft Section 4

Seed Catalogue is polyvalent. It makes multiple connections through a multiplicity of catalogues. It's a catalogue of forms. But also a catalogue of writers, those listed, cited, companionably overheard. The number would be considerable. Beyond those named, many appear in the form of intertexts—more intertexts than one reader could confidently enumerate—and in several cases (as with the literal catalogue that is Kroetsch's model) their authors/originators are unknown or anonymous.

Probably most intriguing in this regard is the exuberant litany—and catalogue—of absences that un-composes the second part of Section 4, and then redirects the plot of the poem. Here is Kroetsch turning the shrewd observations of Wallace Stegner into privative hymn. Stegner: "Education tried, inadequately and hopelessly, to make a European of me" (24); "For most of us, the language of literature is to some extent unread, because school has always been separate from life" (26). Kroetsch: "the absence of both Sartre and Heidegger // . . . the absence of Aeneas" (35-36). The absence of Lord Nelson is an absence of a swashbuckling history. The absence of the Cathédrale de Chartres is the absence of memorable spectacular architecture. The absence of clay and wattles is the absence of heightened literary imagery.

But the absence(s) are, of course, each and all ironic. Sartre and Chartres are present, the signs of *real* culture (and sweetly rhyming), even on a farm outside Heisler. It's the local resonance that's absent. The collaboration is, then, the paradoxical collaboration with the *empty*, the unlocated, the world that exists in language only. For a long time, collaboration has had a pejorative edge along with its warm fuzzy side: to cooperate, usually willingly, with an enemy, especially with an enemy occupying one's own country. I would argue that Kroetsch trusts this complicated paradox enthusiastically. It's what makes his poem more than just another maverick adoption of a non-literary prosaic model rejecting the lyre and the lute. What we have, in a curious way, is collaboration in the sense of consorting with the enemy. Maybe Kroetsch is both resisting *and giving in*. I don't know quite how to discriminate the attentive seeding and nurturing, but it does seem to me that Kroetsch does not want to assimilate the poems

he *works with* (*col* with + *labor* work). It's not as if he's rewriting them, or even somehow calling attention to their unacknowledged poetry—except obviously by establishing a context—but somehow, like the hired man and the catalogue and binder twine—they are just there, essential, in their own being, honoured. I mean both playground rhymes and Aeneas.

In one of the handwritten notes in which Kroetsch contemplates answering the questions he poses, he lists, under the heading "How do you grow a poet?" some potential respondents. The names appear in a column, filling most of an eight and a half by eleven inch sheet:

> [Andrew] Suknaski
> [Rudy] Wiebe
> [Lorna] Uher [Crozier]
> [Anne] Szumigalski
> Ken Mitchell.

And to the side of this list, at the right hand margin, he advises himself "get remarks from each." Presumably Kroetsch invited each of these, as well as others, to answer his question . . . via commentary or poem. Box 11, File 2 contains a handwritten, ribald invitation to Lorna. Terrence Heath sends his response, an autograph poem, in a letter dated 26 February 1976 (Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 2).

It seems to me a crucial signal of the (discovered) program of the poem that Kroetsch does not use any of these invited poems, except perhaps obliquely and covertly, in the published poem. No poem, or part, by Terry Heath. No poem by Lorna. No direct response by Wiebe: the quotation from Wiebe is copied from a published article.[6] Kroetsch once memorably asked "How do you make love in a new country? . . . How do you establish any sort of *close* relationship in a landscape—in a physical situation—whose primary characteristic is *distance*?" (1989, 73).

Maybe his omission of the most immediate poets on his horizon—the friends, the personal contacts, the students and mentorees—enacts the growing of distances. Names named but voices suppressed. The absence of Keats. The absence of the pyramids. But also, surprisingly, *the absence of collaborators* in close relationship.[7] And, if such absence is absently unmentioned in *Seed Catalogue*, the answer to the question "how do you grow a poet?" likely resides even more with the *unintentional* poetry: in the child rhymes, jokes, admonitory mottoes, and proverbs. Poet . . . say uncle.

Binder/Twine

to tie together/a *double* or twisted thread

Maybe the slash, so much favoured by Kroetsch, and especially in this poem, is the ultimate notational expression of grammatical collaboration. Or, better, the paradoxical absent collaboration. More than a score of them appear in *Seed Catalogue*. They appear frequently, deliberately—not quite obsessively. It is Kroetsch's double hook.[8] That is, it gives a doubled choice, a choice of balanced equivalents. Either / or. You can choose either "either" or "or." But the form is also a hook. Because the / joins the two into a curious, novel *one*. You can accept both without choosing. Twine is a binary that is not. As Kroetsch writes in Section 4: "Everything / in between: lost" (my slash, showing line ending). The slash allows / enables / creates an expression that incorporates all the in-between within a duality. The poem proposes an unexpected collaboration that joins and embraces the between of "man / falling" and "smack // into" (44).

Kroetsch discovers semantic collaboration and extension . . . and also generates surprise. Just to take one example, the slash that appears in line 1: "We took the storm windows / off" was inserted into the typescript by hand (Kroetsch Fonds, File 4). Here is the first opening verse paragraph as published:

> We took the storm windows/off
> the south side of the house
> and put them on the hotbed.
> Then it was spring. Or, no:
> then winter was ending. (29)

In the first typescript draft, the line ended with "windows" and line 2 began with "off", so Kroetsch has deliberately extended the line to create this slightly bizarre binding. What means the term "windowsoff"? or the possible opposition of "windows" and "south side of the house." I cannot quite posit a plausible answer to these questions. But I do think the essential twisting that makes strong twine is at work here. Twisting the reader's mind into some torment of interpretation. Seeing some connection beyond the anticipated. And surely foregrounding the necessary involvement of the reader in some refined and teasing collaboration invited and required by poet and his grammatical play.

Quite Contrary

> Horseshit, my father always argued—
> horseshit ~~was~~ not good for gardens.
> —Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 1

The first italicized "how" question Kroetsch poses in *Seed Catalogue* is "*How do you grow a gardener*?" (31) Not until the final Section 10 does he ask the foundational seeding question—and then with a multiple choice answer, and in that twisting double hook form we've been noting: "*How / do you grow a garden?*" (45). Then, to open a potential answer, choice (b), he repeats the question (but with no slash), preceded by the inversion "*How do you a garden grow?*"

This question invokes Kroetsch's grandmother, Mary Hauck, of Section 4, as well as the other Mary-muses in Kroetsch's life. Mary, Mary, quite contrary. How does your garden grow. At one level, another (shadowed) nursery rhyme again celebrates the poetry he might have forgotten was part of *home*. At another, it shifts attention to a miracle of culture—in its root sense of *tilling*—that a seed, often almost invisibly small, colourless, nondescript, will grow into an intricate plant, often large, subtly varied and bold in palette, packed with symbolic resonances. And that plant makes seeds again, usually prolifically, ad infinitum.

Seed. I have wandered with Bob in his garden while he delights in the hostas and the sedum, tells me of his regular trips to a nearby nursery. The Greek root of ecology posits the intricate, infinite inter-dependencies that make a *home*. Through the fruits of its many collaborations—the poem ends asking, not answering, maybe post-humanly, *who was left*? (46)—maybe *Seed Catalogue* finds the validity of a collaboration with the not-human. The collaboration of seed with soil and microbe, with sunlight and chlorophyll, with honey bee and badger, with earthworm and rainwater—the catalogue continues. I would argue that such an environmental dimension is crucial to the poem. Hence, the poet pays attention to the composition of fertilizers. Then withdraws from the topic. Tells us about cabbage and brome grass.

The Absence of Books

> Poetry is language used with an awareness
> of the poverty of language.
> —Don McKay, Unpublished working paper. qtd. in Bringhurst 41

In its documentary impulse, in its apparently prosey assertions—"Son, this is a crowbar" (38)—in its lists, *Seed Catalogue*'s most insistent theme, explicitly

and covertly, seems to be that poetry is impossible in this place. "As for the poet himself," Kroetsch intones in Section 6, following lists of folk remedies and fencing materials, "we can find no record" (18). In a culture without books, the bookish man seems to conclude, ruefully, but under his breath, in parentheses: "(shit / we're up against it)" (15).

Yet obviously the dominant theme is not conclusion, but starting point. The impossibility of poetry is the s*eed.* And at many moments in the poem we are surprised, against the lists and documents, by the grace and strength and colour of the lyric voice Heisler has grown:

> *The palimpsest of prairie*
>
> *under the quick erasure*
> *of snow, invites a flight*

Or:

> Your sweet peas
> climbing the staked
> chicken wire,
> climbing the stretched
> binder twine by
> the front porch
> taught me the smell
> of morning. (45)

Such passages, partly because they re-read the commonplace, work-a-day images of the seed catalogue, compel the reader, collaborating, to re-read the unpoetic, the apoetic, the naive poetic as something else.

Cabbage

On the opening page, the poet recalls his mother's jocular yet exasperated chastisement:

> Did you wash your ears?
> you could grow cabbages
> In those ears. (29)

This example, as we must already recognize—given the epigraphic excerpt describing Copenhagen Market Cabbage—this conventional warning, now, here, again, contains within it dimensions of an economy, of heritage and genetics, of global connections—and even a link to the horse ("thoroughbred") so often standing still in this poem.

Such a passage answers the question, "how do you grow a history?" The poet hears a rote admonition from his childhood that has been repeated over

generations: the mother is becoming *her* mother. While the "you" whom a mother's "poem" addresses is validated as a grower, but also as a metaphor-maker: you *could* grow cabbages in those ears. You *could*, by making your ears large, and receptive, by attentive listening, speak and imagine what you cannot see and touch.

Brome grass

The poem begins with cabbage. But as it moves toward Section 10, beyond home, and to airports, Japan, Germany and painting, the quoted catalogue excerpts promote seeds for grass, and morning glory, and then ultimately—with no hyperbolic description; just the price—to sweet pea. Maybe the poem is moving away from its grounding in long-lasting vegetables practical and nourishing toward more imaginary and aesthetic and spiritual nourishment.

At the beginning of Section 7, Kroetsch cites McKenzie's description of Brome Grass (and here, for the first time, he includes the Latin binomial—another (linguistic) broadening of the scope of the poem). The description ends with the energetic if privative endorsement, printed in bold: "Flourishes under absolute neglect" (20). Then in Part B of this section—again he is offering multiple choice responses to the question "*How do you grow / a poet?*"—he repunctuates and reformats the phrase as:

> *Flourishes.*
> *Under absolute neglect. (41)*

Evidently, Kroetsch recognizes in Brome's toughness an aphorism and motto for poetry and the prairie poet. They, too, are flourishing neglected. But, more crucially, he asks us to reconsider, as with cabbages and ears, the poetry we forgot to know was so immediately present in our unpoemed home.

I said earlier that *Seed Catalogue* gives permission. My students often affirm this sense of opportunity. In a course on the long poem in Canada, they will thrill to the mysteries of Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, and they will marvel at the fluency of Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*, but they are also intimidated. But, when they read *Seed Catalogue*, they feel: yes, I too *could* be a poet; yes, I *am* a poet: yes, my world has poetry in it. And such reactions seem to hold not only for the young woman from a farm just outside Weyburn, but for the young man whose parents emigrated six years ago from the Philippines. Even in the breadth of its learning and the genius of its multiplying complexity, *Seed Catalogue* never seems removed, never

seems arrogant. Never is pretentious whatever the hell that means. Yes, you could grow poems in those ears.

So the verb to flourish becomes a noun. And it becomes a sentence unto itself, allowing, potentially, any subject to be attached to it and grow luxuriantly. Binder twine flourishes. Flourishes. The one-word line seems both to validate decoration for its own sake, and caution against fine language used merely for effect. The absence of flourishes. We recall that this subsection is the first to be headed by a flower. Flourishes, of course, shares a root with flower. It's from the Latin *florere*, to bloom.

Similarly, Kroetsch invites us to reconsider the phrase. Surely "under" is not just "beneath," although the groundedness is again relevant. "Under" in this one/line poem will also signal protection and watchfulness and tutelage. The poet is learning from neglect.

Piss-up

To my mind, the poet's most intriguing editing of his draft for *Seed Catalogue*, is his neglect of this flourishing list of slang, profanity, and expletive[9]:

> Huh-uh.
> Ouch.
> Whew.
> No shit.
> Yuk.
> Is that right, eh?
> Cripes.
> Hmmm.
> Balls.
> Bull.
> Come on.
> Goddam.
> Wow.
> Holy mackerel.
> Sheeeyit.
> No bull.
> (Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 1)

In the manuscript, this list was to appear in the final section, just before the unanswered excerpt from the tactile poem: *Adam and Eve got drowned / who was left?* Now, I think Kroetsch was probably wise not to keep this passage in the published poem. For one thing, retaining it would have turned the poem too far from mother, and too far from the how of gardens. But, it does provide instructive demonstration as to how far into the vernacular Kroetsch was willing to go to find flourish within neglect.

The poem recognizes poetry in the language of the farmyard (or in the muttered asides of law courts and academic meetings). As Kroetsch wrote to himself at the head of a handwritten version of this list:

> sounds of working:
> but it could
> be fucking
> (Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 1)

Same sound: two processes of seeding. The catalogue of expletives is a sound poem that might, in retrospect, remind the reader of the poetry that exists where the poverty of language is so foregrounded. Several instances occur in the poem, most explicitly in Section 7C, a down-the-bar dialogue ostensibly about cowboy history, and heroism. The woman's response to drunken male bluster is first "Yuh?" and then "Huh-uh" (42), before she dismisses them peremptorily. But even "huh-uh" is a poem. It's the poetry of the restricted code, the phatic communication that validates feeling and conveys warm connection. It speaks volumes in its semantic absence. Hence, when Kroetsch finishes his account of another drunken rant, the "piss-up" with Purdy, he repeats Wiebe's observation, but for very different purpose: No song can do that.

Cultivating

Wiebe's "that," differently contextualized by Kroetsch, might refer to a discovery of your own poetry. It might refer to what this poem means to the students in my classroom. At the end of Kroetsch's list of poets he wishes to incorporate in the poem (and ultimately does not), he adds "—comments by Laurie Ricou." Whatever these might have been, or are, I don't know. But I do take the unrealized personal collaboration to be part of the poem's strategy. It gives me permission to collaborate in the poem's poetry by offering these delayed comments. It's the best collaboration I know for telling me where I'm from. Be humble, it says. Don't look down on the supposedly "uncultured." Discover your own poetry.

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NOTES

1 With typical generosity, Kroetsch divided his residency, and leave year, between the University of Calgary, during the fall term, and the University of Lethbridge. It was in Calgary, of course, at the Glenbow Museum that he encountered the McKenzie Seeds Catalogue (1914) that inspired the poem.

2 I believe McKenzie Seeds has recently moved its operations to a larger, more efficient site on the outskirts of Brandon. There is some talk of turning the original building into a casino.

3 Some "system" exists, of course, in the traces of narrative that shape the poem. It begins in one home place, near Heisler, and ends, in section 9, with the poet's cousins' return to his German ancestral home place, dying in the skies above Cologne. And hence we have one form of chronology, and of growing up. Also, Kroetsch once mapped the sections of the poem as the sequence of his many muses, mostly female, from mother to Anna Weller to "Libby." In one note he describes the form as a "series of figures moving toward a musing." (Kroetsch Fonds, Box 11, File 1). And one might read the sequence of entries from the McKenzie catalogue as a move from vegetables to grasses and flowers, from literal, physical nourishment to more aesthetic and spiritual food.

4 Although "Seed Catalogue" is in the opening section, the third and last subsection of *Field Notes* is titled "Country and Western"—another pointer to Kroetsch's affection for the down/home sentimental truths of country music's audacious poetry. I recall trading with Bob our bemused interpretations of the complex metaphor "You've got sawdust on the floor of your heart" (Sneezy Waters qtd. in "Waters, Sneezy"). In his poetic sketches toward a self-portrait, the poet imagines himself "dressed as a country & western singer," who might also adopt the name Orpheus: "he worked small bars / on the prairies, looking for what he'd lost. / He sang hurtin' songs that made people cry." (Kroetsch, *Too Bad* 14)

5 Although only a small portion of the typescript draft of the potato section (Box 11 File 1) makes it into the published *Seed Catalogue*, similar comments might be made about the other elemental and foundational plants—cabbage, bean, and brome grass—in the poem. For an essay that might be read as a rich extension of Kroetsch's poem to the potato, see Michael Pollan 181-238.

6 In discussions in 2008, Dennis Cooley reminded me of the story that Kroetsch left behind all or part of the manuscript when he returned to Binghamton. In that case, solicited poems, intended to be included, might simply have been lost.

7 W. H. New suggested to me that the general absence of surnames implies a relinquishing of pedigree, that is an emphasis on closeness of family, rather than lineage and status.

8 See my comments on Kroetsch and apposition in "The Majesty of His Loyal Apposition," more general comments on the virgule in *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* (158).

9 My formatting here attempts to follow Kroetsch's redrawing of his typescript list, but it should be envisioned with several directional arrows, and holograph insertions/deletions. Significantly, Kroetsch was obviously rearranging the list in a *poem* and poetic sequence.

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Nancy Pagh

Cuttings

The nice thing about having fins is how
they cut things, serrate the cellophane
of surface tension. I suppose
wings can do this too. Meanwhile
the spine's a stick that pins you straight to the world.
One year I planted rhododendrons in the shade.
Called each one "you," and "you," and "you."
Reasons for being in a garden:
very different from a beach.
Baked shale. Effluvial ooze. Near water green,
far water silver. Black fins cutting the distance.

Nancy Pagh

Tides

Someone plants eel-grass September mornings.
I do the dead-man's float in memory foam.
Fog congeals, grays. Once I rowed a dinghy
against tide I could not out-muscle. Had to land,
wade, pull the boat by its painter. The line
I live on stops at :18 and :46 weekdays.
Some afternoons a bleached moon rises.
Ten thousand vehicles flow past my house.
Moon, no moon, I chart the hours by their whine.
There's a trick with a spoon and some water.
Do it until the mind goes slack.

Maia Joseph, Travis Mason, Angela Waldie

The Laurie Ricou Files
The Afterlife of Habitat Studies

"**T**ell me of what plant-birthday a man takes notice," writes American nature writer Aldo Leopold, "and I shall tell you a good deal about his vocation, his hobbies, his hay fever, and the general level of his ecological education" (44). In *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949), Leopold reflects upon the July return of cutleaf Silphium to a graveyard near his Wisconsin farm, and on the annual return of Draba, which rewards anyone "who searches for spring with his knees in the mud" (26). In *Wolf Willow* (1962), Wallace Stegner, an American possessed of a Canadian childhood, searches the place he calls Whitemud, Saskatchewan, for the source of a smell "pungent and pervasive" that leads him back to his younger self. "It is wolf willow," he writes, "and not the town or anyone in it, that brings me home" (18, 19). In *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory* (2007), Laurie Ricou devotes an entire volume to a glossy Pacific Northwest understory plant, musing on place through the ecology, industry, and resonance that surrounds a single species. "If we learn the word salal," he writes in *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (2002), "and the story of its growing and harvest, then we will learn from a growing in place" (84). This "growing in place" reflects a unique approach to literary study that Laurie has shared, over many years, with numerous students and academic colleagues.

As three of Laurie's former students, we share, in the critical reflections that follow, the ongoing impact of his teaching on our engagements with literature and place. The three of us met and became friends because of his unorthodox English class, Habitat Studies, which he taught at the University of British Columbia. This course asked (predominantly) literature students to research the science and culture of a single species for a semester, and to document the challenges and joys of thinking about place and region by focusing on a representative inhabitant, whether native or not. Maia (cinnabar

moth; *Tyria jacobaeae*) and Travis (American bullfrog; *Rana catesbieana*) took the course as graduate students; Angela (rufous-sided towhee; *Pipilo maculatus*) took it as an undergraduate. This was around the time Laurie clarified his reputation as Canada's leading ecocritic with the publication of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* and *Salal*. Those two books shaped much of how the three of us (and scores of other students and ecocritics) learned how to attend to the world outside of the classroom, learned to learn, as it were, about ourselves as one species among many. The following sections represent our individual attempts to demonstrate how Laurie's teaching and scholarship have influenced our own thinking, writing, and research. We have each chosen texts or species that we consider to be part of Laurie's natural habitat, works that he has inhabited, as writer or reader, or that share similar geographical and ecological qualities with those he has inhabited in the past.

Each of these sections documents a different afterlife of Laurie's scholarship and pedagogy. In "Into the Thicket: On Guiding and *Salal*," Maia highlights the humble and open forms of guidance that characterize Laurie's teaching and emerge in his writing. She focuses especially on how a little-known understory plant guided Laurie's experimentation with method and form, and his evolving understanding of what might constitute a book. In "Notes from a Field Guide to Rain," Travis plunders several of Laurie's critical strategies—archives, field notes, files, rhizomes—to offer a reading of rain poems written about Port Hardy, BC. And in "The Practice of Homing," Angela provides further evidence of Laurie's influence as teacher, as guide, as seeker, first by exploring salmon's central role in defining home and then by sharing the transformative power of studying a single species from multiple, interconnected, perspectives. Taken together, as they point in myriad directions and occasionally return to strike Ricouian keynotes, these sections, we hope, help to confirm Laurie's contributions not only to the study of a bioregion and its inhabitants—literary and biological—but also to a scholarship that seeks direction from unexpected guides.

Into the Thicket: On Guiding and *Salal*

> I have been always surprised at the connections a little-known shrub initiates.
> —Laurie Ricou, *Salal*

One of the major components of Laurie Ricou's Habitat Studies seminar was the final report, which was to take, according to the course description, "a form . . . appropriate to your subject and to our evolving sense of how its habitat might be imagined" (Ricou, "Out of the Field Guide" 351).[1]

Over the course of the term, as we developed our projects on our selected species, this directive invited us, prodded us, to think carefully and creatively about the relationship between form, method, and subject matter. What our reports ultimately looked like depended largely on how we encountered our species, our responses to those encounters, the cultural materials we discovered, what we decided to do with them, and, of course, the species itself.

Later, my work as a research assistant for *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory* allowed me to observe Laurie engaged in this same process of adapting method and form in relation to subject of study. My expectations of literary scholarship were repeatedly overturned as I watched and helped him assemble his text according to a profoundly ecological logic of association—as he tried to capture on the page the physical and cultural ecosystem that nurtures (and sometimes threatens) an oval-leafed, glinting-green understory plant. In the published version of the book, a chapter about the practice of picking salal leaves—for example—illuminates a range of complicated, often unexpected, relationships as it shifts from musings on terms for picking, to news stories about salal "poaching," to an interview transcript from a picking field trip, to close readings of literary fiction about brush-pickers and tangled thickets of salal. The book as a whole takes its form in relation to Ricou's effort to "pay attention to salal as continuing: a process, a complex of connections going on" (*Salal* 3). Short but often dense chapters about salal ecology, propagation, and cultivation rub up against others about field guide descriptions, early European botanizing, and flower arranging. Ricou is careful to articulate relevant links throughout the chapters, but he is also interested in acknowledging disjunction and leaving the book open to associative possibility: the many quotations scattered in textboxes throughout *Salal* contribute to all three of these functions.

Salal was not, of course, the first book project in which Ricou experimented with method and form. Both *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit"* and *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*—Ricou's two earlier studies of the Pacific Northwest—are also the product of such activity. A study of David Wagoner's poem "A Guide to Dungeness Spit," *Field Guide* contains only short essayistic passages of writing by Ricou, placed alongside a range of contextual materials, including excerpts from archival documents, newspaper articles, guidebook descriptions, photographs, and Wagoner's poetry. While *Arbutus/Madrone* is characterized by a more sustained essayistic form, each chapter is interspersed with textbox quotations in the same manner as *Salal*. And Ricou asks us to imagine his chapters as "files," each file assembling readings of literary texts

that are connected, sometimes closely, sometimes more loosely, with the file's "label"—salmon, raven, rain, Sasquatch, island, intertidal, and more. "Dividing my reading notes into files implies *collecting* rather than systematic linear argument," Ricou explains, "stories and words and discoveries clustered according to some shifting set of associations" (*Arbutus* 2). The book concludes with twelve "afterfiles" (one for each file): originally bibliographic essays, they ultimately became what we might call the afterlife of the main text, a place where Ricou continued to make new associations and connections (2-3).

In a recent study of *Field Guide*, Nicholas Bradley[2] has attended closely to the relationship between form and method in Ricou's work. Bradley describes Ricou as a "curator or . . . bricoleur. He selects and assembles explicatory and contextualizing information, fabricating through the juxtaposition of fragments a polyphonic text that is neither conventionally argumentative nor narrative but instead associative, suggestive, and unresolved" (132-33). Stronger elements of narrative and argumentation return in *Arbutus/Madrone* and *Salal*, but the emphasis on assemblage, interrelationality, and open-endedness remains. Bradley also focuses on the way that, for Ricou, "a sense of surprise" functions as "a strategy for reading" both literature and place (119, 132). This is so in Ricou's engagement with Wagoner's poem—Bradley notes that Ricou is open "to be[ing] led by the poem into unfamiliar territory" (132)—and in his hopes for the contextual materials that he gathers together. As Ricou himself observes in a discussion of *Arbutus/Madrone*'s textbox quotations, his aspiration is that, "when next encountered, [a quotation] will surprise me, and the reader, into some as yet undetected connection" (*Arbutus* 2). The willingness to be surprised is part of an overall stance of humility that is integral to Ricou's ethic as a reader, researcher, writer, and teacher.[3] Wagoner's poem and Ricou's book both present themselves as guides, but they ask us to reconsider what it means to guide and be guided. When Ricou takes on the role of guide himself—a guide for Dungeness Spit, for a poem about Dungeness Spit, for the region and culture of salal and arbutus/madrone—he does so humbly, as Bradley notes, with a degree of irony, "assisting the novice but still learning" (134).

Picking up and briefly expanding this exploration of Ricou's approach, I want to emphasize the role that salal played in its ongoing development and articulation. Because it seems that at a certain point the plant itself became—like literary figures such as Wagoner, Robert Kroetsch, and Kim Stafford—a guide for Ricou. Time and again, in the "Salal" file and afterfile of *Arbutus/Madrone* and, especially, in *Salal*, Ricou displays what might be described as

an empathic understanding of the plant.[4] He attends to salal not simply because he wants to learn *about* it, but because the plant seems to express itself in the landscape in a manner that provides a descriptive language for, and encourages an enhancement of, Ricou's approach to apprehending the world.

"What if I tried to listen to . . . the ways in which salal speaks? What would I hear?" Ricou asks at the beginning of *Salal* (2). Ricou will go on to suggest that salal "does a kind of writing on the landscape. It highlights the edges, marks the shade, insulates the base of Douglas-firs. Then there are . . . the growth patterns, the underground rhizomatics" (205). But before turning to these means of "expression," I want to pause and consider that initial question with its apparently obvious answer—that salal cannot speak, that Ricou will hear nothing (unless one counts—as Ricou certainly does—the birds and pickers' fingers rustling the plant's leaves, or the stories of those who grow, harvest, sell, study, or simply notice the plant). There is, to be sure, an apparent ridiculousness to the question, which demands, if we are to continue to read along with Ricou, that we abandon preconceived expectations and reconsider our mode of engagement.

The verb "to listen" has its roots in the Old English, *hlysnan*: "pay attention to." For Ricou, the act of listening is a mode of attention, and the question that opens his book is a means of articulating the wondering that inflects his attentive approach. With salal, Ricou extends and deepens the stance of humble, open attentiveness that he cultivated in his earlier work, pushing toward "deference and absence" in the presence of an apparently voiceless subject (206). Importantly, too, the laconic guide (Bradley 125) who, in *Field Guide*, steps back and lets contextual materials speak, returns in *Salal*—especially in Ricou's handling of the interviews that he gathered as part of his fieldwork. "I decided," Ricou explains,

> that the salal-tellers should "talk" with a minimum of mediation. I wanted the voices to be heard in their own distinctiveness. They appear in an alternate typeface, and with very little of the question-and-answer primness often found in printed interviews. This format attempts to disperse authority, allowing the integrity and specialness of different actors with concerns, commitments, and interests very different from mine. (3)[5]

We might say that Ricou becomes plant-like in his own reticence, seeming to recognize and nurture a tendency toward silence as he attends to the quiet plant and its little-known stories.

Ricou reports from his reading of forest science papers that salal thrives best in thinned stands of timber—sunlight slanting into shadow—and will

only disappear in extremely low light (52-53). Its presence in the darker corners of the forest, and its knee- or hip-high bushiness, encourage a particular kind of looking in and movement through the physical landscape—off the path, into the shadows, beneath habitual notice. Multiple times in *Salal*, Ricou describes the displacement, discomfort, and fumbling ineptitude that mark the experience of the literature professor turned novice salal picker or forest ecology student, but the term "understory" becomes a bridge, for him, between his work as a literary critic and his learning in the new realms of salal. The understory plant that thrives in low light, the "uncharismatic" species that, despite its ubiquity, tends to go unnoticed (2), the many uncelebrated makers and keepers of salal stories: the "writing" that salal does in the landscape not only provides a metaphor for Ricou's work as a regional critic, for his devotion to the edges of culture—it also expands and complicates that work. Ricou's focus on salal demands that he step off the literary critic's path into a tangled undergrowth, physical and cultural, that he does not know how to read or understand. He gets lost, rediscovers the path, and steps off it again. This becomes the approach, and *Salal*—its form emphasizing process, acknowledging unknowing and learning, and now and then finding the more comfortable (yet still surprising) space of a poem—its articulation.

And it is from salal—not, initially, from a theorist—that Ricou learns to describe the form of his book as rhizomatic. Salal grows and spreads using a system of underground stems (or rhizomes), from which it shoots out aerial stems (*Salal* 49). An important moment for Ricou was his encounter with forestry researcher John Tappeiner, who uses a thick bundle of salal rhizomes as a teaching aid (50). The tangle of salal stems seems to have concretized for Ricou the concept of largely unpatterned but integral interconnection that is foundational to his approach. Salal helps Ricou see and understand how, as Kim Stafford once put it, "coherence is born of random abundance" (31, qtd. in *Salal* 16). Ricou begins with salal, and only then turns to theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and their "proposal that *book* is a rhizome" (*Salal* 49, Ricou's emphasis). "They note," Ricou explains, "that the rhizome 'connects any point with any other point' (77). . . . A book—I'd like to think they're talking about this book—is 'an arrangement, it exists only in connection with other arrangements' (3)" (*Salal* 49-50). Ricou's task as curator-bricoleur, as arranger, is to carefully gather and trace salal connections—"[s]eedman to picker to winemaker"—indicating without reducing their complexity (205). It involves "identifying, even creating, the knots"—the possibilities for future surprise in the system, for "[u]nexpected salal connections" to reveal

themselves (48, 120). And it is, finally, to repeatedly gesture beyond the text to where salal and its network of stories continue to grow and spread and change, to die back, to regenerate. For Ricou, if *book* is a rhizome, it might also be a habitat—"an imagined habitat, a thicket of words, within which you read yourself into place" (*Salal* 118). In *Salal*, Ricou's experiments with method and form create a book-space where readers do not simply learn about salal, but rather wander and wonder along with Ricou as he is guided into relationship with the plant in and across locations and contexts. In the *Salal* thicket, reading becomes an encounter with a guide engaged in—and encouraging—an ecologically mindful mode of inhabiting.

Notes from a Field Guide to Rain

> To write in the Northwest is to write about rain.
> —Laurie Ricou, *Arbutus*

Organizing *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*—a critical appreciation of a beloved, adopted region—as a series of files, Ricou attempts "to signal slightly less than precise organization and editorial discipline" (2). The book's twelve files "suggest variety and overlap," a recognition of the structure's imprecisions, and they also leave room for what remains "unventured" (4). This critical strategy can be traced, I think, to Ricou's interest in and research among archives. Something about the archivist's venturing into the unventured, despite the textual nature of most archives, has helped to shape Ricou's approach to the connections between literature and ecology. A library basement might seem to be a far cry from the ecological fieldwork that has become a hallmark of Ricou's twenty-first-century scholarship, but the archive represents field inhabited by cultural jetsam and flotsam—not just metaphorically but literally, that is, the archive mirrors the entropy and possible interconnections of an ecosystem. The epigraph Ricou chooses for "Patricia Blondal's Long Poem," an essay about his work with the late Winnipeg writer's papers in the University of British Columbia's Special Collections, indicates the position he accepts as researcher. From Timothy Findley's celebrated book *The Wars* (1978), a novel framed by an archivist's ruminations on historical documents, the passage reads: "As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you'll never find. This is what you have" (Findley 4). Having, for the archivist, the critic, the ecologist, always already admits not having enough to pretend completion. Though Blondal's papers fit "in one file box" (Ricou, "Patricia" 291), and thus appear to be few enough to manage, to coax narrative coherence out of hiding, their sparseness poses more

questions than answers. However, "[a]s with any such collection—but perhaps here exaggerated by its confined size—the gaps frustrate and tantalize" (291). To be frustrated and tantalized. To be challenged and invited to explore, comfortable enough that some—many—gaps will remain unfilled. To work with what little you have. With archival as well as ecological fragments, the scholar's choices are limited; but as happens when locating intertextual routes of reference between discrete texts, the scholar can move laterally in directions suggested by pieces and gaps alike.

In the spirit of collecting fragments imperative to Ricou's scholarship, I want to venture into some unexamined territory. Instead of suggesting a new file, though—Banana Slug File? Harbour Seal File? Non-fat De-caf Latté File?—I offer some notes lateral to Ricou's "Rain File," the fourth entry in *Arbutus/Madrone*. Had they been published a decade or more ago, many of Basma Kavanagh's poems from Vancouver Island, including the sequence "Taxonomy," which I discuss here, would, I think, have found space in the Rain File, which occupies a scant amount of space in spite of a full page of epigraphs from four different sources. The Afterfile: Rain, too, is brief (one page). Most of the three-and-a-half pages of the "Rain File" quote and discuss works by American authors—no real surprise given the book's cross-border, bioregional focus. Still, the imbalance might say more about west-coast Canadians' tendency, as locals, to "not so much as glance" at the drenched phenomenon otherwise "worth gawking at" than it does about those writing from the American northwest coast (Ricou, *Arbutus* 61). This resident tendency to overlook the weather, whatever its impetus, opens the coastal wetness to scrutiny from outsiders, for whom such precipitation is perhaps less ubiquitous, less defining as a regional characteristic. Kavanagh's efforts to gather observations about and categorize Vancouver Island rain reflect a long-term visitor's perspective on what it means to experience not just rain but rains.

Rather than offer this reading of "Taxonomy" as an addendum to the Rain File, I want to position it as an offshoot of Ricou's "claim for a texturing and linkage, for a pushing of the climate cliché that writes a complex balance of rain, and temperate rain forest . . . a gas to breathe, a filter through which to see, and an Aboriginal vision time" (*Arbutus* 63). The botanical metaphor deliberately evokes Ricou's complementary work, *Salal: Listenting for the Northwest Understory*, in which he meticulously "listens" to the history, culture, literature, and ecology of the rhizomatic *Gautheria shallon*. Taking Deleuze and Guattari's refusal of the dominant metaphor of the tree—as in, for example, Charles Darwin's evolutionary tree of life—and embracing

their focus on "underground stems and aerial roots, the adventitious and the rhizome," Ricou's book-as-rhizome is "made not of units, but of dimensions, or rather of shifting directions" (Deleuze and Guattari 33, 77); the organism and the metaphor offer "special allure" (*Salal* 50) not only for what they contribute to Ricou's book, but also for how the book, as an "arrangement," gestures toward and links to "other arrangements" (Deleuze and Guattari 3). So, borrowing the rhizome metaphor from *Salal* and the file metaphor from *Arbutus/Madrone*, I offer this file on Kavanagh's rain as one possible destination for the rhizome (one of many) cultivated in the "Rain File."

Although a resident of Kentville, Nova Scotia, at the time of composing, Basma Kavanagh grounds her first poetry collection, *Distillō* (2012), firmly in the Pacific Northwest. As much as the sodden ground will allow, that is. The book's opening sequence, "Taxonomy" (16-21), identifies six different species of rain, which the poet observed while in Port Hardy, British Columbia:

> *Distillo inlumino*
> *Distillo silvestris*
> *Imbris micans*
> *Imbris delapidato*
> *Pluvia pertendo*
> *Pluvia densa*

To name rain in this way is at once to be complicit in the empirical history of naming and to be alert among other namers. Each entry in the sequence functions much the way Ricou's files do, albeit in a different generic register. As poetry, "Taxonomy" perhaps resembles David Wagoner's "A Guide to Dungeness Spit," the subject of Ricou's *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit"* (1997), which Maia Joseph discusses in her contribution here; as Ricou acquiesces "to be led by the poem into unfamiliar territory" (Bradley 132), I accept the speaker of Kavanagh's sequence as a guide whose familiarity with Vancouver Island at once reveals her status as outsider and revels in her careful lyric observations. An epigraph informs us that in 2005 Port Hardy received 2184.7 mm of rain during 242 total days of rainfall.[6] The book title hints at the opening sequence's idiosyncratic structure—two of the rain species are named *Distillo*—while the enigmatic diacritic denoting a long (or heavy) vowel—the macron over the lower-case o, which does not appear in the species' names—presages both the length of time rain dominates Port Hardy and the immense weight so much rain adds to such quotidian activities as running errands, cleaning the toilet, and walking.

Each short lyric in "Taxonomy" names a species of rain using the standard

binomial system of identifying genus and species. The scientific name is followed by brief characteristics to complete the poem's title or header. These names, of course, are invented by Kavanagh, and so in a sense parody scientific naming, simultaneously acknowledging the empirical value of names while engaging in a subtle critique of the practice. The poems themselves enact a descriptive mode vulnerable at once to a range of rainy clichés and the vicissitudes of individual experience. That both cliché and experience reside in the imaginations of outsiders complicates Kavanagh's task by inviting west-coasters' special scrutiny. The descriptive mode I'm reading in "Taxonomy" gestures toward more than purely functional descriptive language. Noting the rain enough to delineate six different types, despite the sense Ricou shares that rain permeates a Pacific Northwest consciousness, marks Kavanagh as coming from elsewhere. In the Pacific Northwest, "you're supposed to learn not to notice the rain" (Ricou 61), perhaps as a survival mechanism—describing and/or complaining only serves to reinforce what the body already knows. The careful observer, despite the risks, can offer fresh insights that even the most saturated local might appreciate.

While "Taxonomy" evokes a Linnaen natural history, and thus a scientific register inspired by fieldwork, its entries avoid unnecessary reduction on the way to celebrating dynamic, sensuous taxa. Members of the genera *Distillo, Imbris,* and *Pluvia* might not be organisms per se, but the language with which Kavanagh writes these rains activates a kinetic process implicating the rains as scriptive element (if not as elemental script). For Ricou, Ivan Doig's "visible rain is a form of writing" that "literally graphs the *óros*, writes the mountains. It has its own voices" (*Arbutus* 62). Mountains in Kavanagh's sequence remain underwritten, presences slowly shifting behind a deliquescent palimpsest. Rains as polyphony. Kavanagh's rains are active, the words she chooses to describe them predominantly verbs. *Distillo inlumino*, for example, "adorns," "shines," "glints," "glosses," "slicks," "lights," "gilds," "polishes," "films," and "bronzes" in quick succession. Kavanagh characterizes *D. inlumino* as "an illuminating drizzle; uncommon" (15). This, perhaps, is the rain David James Duncan writes about, which "soothed and softened everything," "hummed on the river pools and pattered on new paddles" (252). Duncan's "whispering sibilants" (Ricou 61) pre-echo the "wet whisper" Kavanagh insinuates in the midst of describing *D. inlumino*—a description of a description. "Taxonomy" pulses with such sibilance, assonance, and consonance. Alliteration alerts us to rain's—this rain's, all rains'—gratuitous grammar. (I'm not sure whether to thank or to blame Laurie for that last sentence.) Unlike Pacific Northwest

writers who tend, in Ricou's analysis, to answer the question of "how to write rain" with some "notion of the uninsistent" (Ricou 62), Kavanagh makes no qualms about realizing how rain inheres in the poet's fieldwork. The entries in "Taxonomy" write rain the way Ricou observes it, as "repetitive, redundant, and unremarkable" (63). Her verse embraces the repetition, animates the redundancy, and dissolves the unremarkable's negative prefix.

Consider how the sequence's final entry slips into using a single, unremarkable descriptor, as if to note the remarkable insistence of *Pluvia densa*, "a true rain, heavy and penetrating; common in autumn and winter" (20-21). Finally, Kavanagh succumbs to the most common rain verb: "The wall of water / falls / uninterrupted," she writes, providing no break from "thirty relentless days" (20). By this point, after six entries, the poet's thesaurus has run the gamut (and likely become waterlogged beyond use). Having relentlessly fallen, the rain has produced a singular condition best described with a word both succinct and accurate: "slogging, with wet hands, wet / gloves, wet shoes and socks, // I lift wet glasses off, smear wet lenses / with a wet cloth" (21). The resulting verse muddles spondaically, recapitulating the "swampy, saturated" ground, the inefficient acts of walking—"every step a labour"—and wiping away the rain's "rotten, ragged, sodden" effects.

Earlier, the poet's meditation on *Distillo silvestris* locates a specific "Here, deep in the gorge / at Marble River, beneath great trees at Quatse, / among graves near Ronning's garden, / on the silent, sandy trail to San Jo Bay" (16). Names can provide comfort, marks on a map describing a region, so that even the trees can be known simply—reverentially—as "great." The trees, one senses, have had their due, and their names tend not to affect the rain's behaviour. *D. silvestris* democratically "runs / the runnel / of every leaf" in the forest. Its presence—the header indicates that it is "generated within the rainforest"—articulates otherwise invisible rhizomatic links between various organisms (and thus connects in similar fashion to Ricou's books of the Pacific Northwest); working with gravity, *D. silvestris* can be seen

> Fanning from needles
> onto herbs bent double with its weight,
> swelling fungus,
> rousing humus,
> blooming bracken,
> teasing moss and lichen,
> washing
> down
> nutrients . . . (16)

Again, the verbs in this passage tell the rain's status as active link: it not so much describes the various plants it touches—as rain for Doig graphs the mountains, say—as activates them in ways core to their individual being. In *Still Life with Woodpecker*, Tom Robbins suggests that "A seeker can go into the Great Northwest rain and bring back the Name he needs" (71). Kavanagh, a seeker from another coast, has inhabited a particular corner of the Pacific Northwest and come out with many names. Whether she (or we) needs them matters less than how she attends to the rains she encounters and organizes in verse. Let this be a further entry. File under, among, perpendicular to, rain.

The Practice of Homing

> On the banks of the Goldstream, I sensed you could define a place in salmon. The migration of the Pacific salmon marks the limits of an eco-region.
> —Laurie Ricou, *Arbutus*

In the opening lines of his "Salmon File," Laurie Ricou describes witnessing the migration of salmon in the Goldstream River as "a rite of passage, an initiation into a new home" (*Arbutus* 99). Three years after moving from the coulees of southeastern Alberta to the lush coast of southwestern British Columbia, he and his family found themselves immersed in an ecological phenomenon that has defined not only home but homing for many who have witnessed and retold the story of salmon. "The place finds its form in the awesome migrations of the salmonid," he writes, "that ancient story happening many times" (100). Ricou invites readers to explore the myriad stories framed by the epic migration of salmon as he incorporates accounts from First Nations cultures, environmental history, works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and the visual arts. As he considers various tributaries of the salmon story, this file reveals how the observation of a local phenomenon can extend into reflections on the broader ecological, economic, and cultural contexts salmon inhabit.

The "Salmon File" captures the significance of salmon in sustaining the Pacific Northwest, physically, spiritually, and imaginatively. As Ricou conveys, the salmon's influence is reflected in the central place of this species in ceremonies and rituals as well as in visual art and story. The first salmon rite, for example, a ceremony practiced in some form by many Indigenous nations of the Pacific Northwest, reveals the centrality of salmon to the First Nations of the region. This ceremony honours the annual return of salmon through a community feast, and as Ricou explains, "Whatever the variations

in the first salmon feast among greatly varied cultures, all ceremonies, in basic form, recognize the sustaining ecology by returning all or part of the remains of the salmon to the river/sea" (104). By combining a feast, prayers, and the return of salmon bones to the waters that brought them, these ceremonies acknowledge the importance of allowing some salmon to return to their source in order that the migration might continue.

Given the significance of salmon as a food source, their migration has helped to map the settlement of the Pacific Northwest. As Terry Glavin explains in *The Last Great Sea*, when salmon species "arose from their Ice Age refugia and headed into the North Pacific," their annual return to the continents allowed human societies to settle with the assurance of a reliable food source (79). Both Glavin and Ricou note that salmon inspired settlement not only at the mouths of rivers, where they were in the best condition, but also in the Interior where the salmon were leaner, and dry winds allowed for long-term preservation (Glavin 79-80; Ricou, *Arbutus* 109). These settlement patterns illustrate Ricou's assertion that "[r]eading the place bounded by the salmon story recognizes a region that is both salt water and fresh (and has a life both *in* and *out* of water), of rain forest and desert, of metropolitan centre and hinterland *inter*-depending" (104). This interdependence is central to Ricou's depiction of the Pacific Northwest as a region spanning ecozones and political boundaries to encompass a rich diversity of species, stories, and communities. "Salmon do not recognize the international boundary between Canada and the United States," he writes, "in swimming either through the Strait of Juan de Fuca or up the Columbia River system" (113). Salmon are emblematic, therefore, not only of what it means to make one's home in a place, but also to explore and expand its boundaries.

Emerging from a myriad of streams and tributaries, salmon migrate to the ocean, where they remain for one to six years, depending on their species, some travelling as many as sixteen thousand kilometres before returning to the streams of their birth to spawn (Taylor 5-6; Bowling 159). Viewers who catch a glimpse of this circular journey cannot help but reflect on the astounding homing instincts it requires. Ongoing speculation surrounding the means of navigation, however, lends an intriguing element of mystery to the salmon migration. This is both a local story, as each salmon seeks the precise riverbed of its birth, and one that encourages us to question whether a region containing such an impressive journey can be bounded. Defining a place by salmon, as Ricou proposes in the epigraph of this section, suggests a

region bordered by the fluid lines of a riverine story, rather than by political boundaries that ignore the ecological or geographical nuances of place. Such a definition conforms to one of the primary tenets of bioregionalism—the delineation of place according to ecological rather than political criteria.

In the foreward to Joseph E. Taylor's *Making Salmon*, William Cronon identifies salmon as keystone species, that is, "organisms so central to the functioning of an ecosystem, so tied to a multitude of other creatures, that their removal can have far-reaching, even devastating consequences" (ix). Not only do salmon provide sustenance to numerous mammals, birds, and fish species, they also help to fertilize and sustain the lush Pacific Northwest forests surrounding coastal ecosystems.[7] Ricou locates his "Salmon File" near the centre of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* not because of the salmon's role as an ecological keystone, however, but rather as an imaginative one. Salmon inspire questions such as "How do they get back?" and "How do they find home?" (113), which are compelling in a scientific context and equally intriguing when considered in the contexts of narrative and experience. Where do we find home in an age of increasing national and international mobility? What leads us back to our homelands or compels us to explore far-flung places? And if circumstances cause us to dwell in new landscapes or communities, how do these places become "home?" By focusing on the primacy of the salmon story, Ricou offers a Pacific Northwest characterized by relentless rhythms of arrival and departure. As he writes with an ear tuned to tides, rain, and rivers, his readers cannot help but consider the impact of ecological rhythms on their lives and landscapes.

In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), Ursula K. Heise finds the awareness of local places that characterizes bioregionalism insufficient to address the environmental concerns of an increasingly globalized planet. By asking us to listen to the places in which we live, however, Ricou's criticism and pedagogy encourage an affiliation with these local places that is crucial to engaging with global environmental issues. Salmon provide a powerful example of species bound into the complex web of international concerns. As the human population continues to increase, the importance of sustaining a plentiful source of protein is immediately evident. Salmon farming, however, which is often viewed as a means of sustaining salmon populations, negatively impacts the health of wild salmon and the ecosystems they help to support (Morton n. pag.). Given the role of salmon as a keystone species, their survival in the wild is crucial to the health of forests and species bordering salmon streams. As salmon have been extirpated from

vast stretches of their original habitat due to urban development, logging, pollution, and the construction of hydroelectric dams, the impact of their loss resonates throughout aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. In light of such ecological concerns, Ricou's focus on the importance of species to defining place provides a crucial point of entry to an engagement with local and, by extension, global environmental issues. Those who have watched salmon spawn in a nearby stream or understand their role in nourishing carbon-sequestering forests are more likely to advocate for these species at the national and international levels. Those who understand how the loss of the salmon story would impoverish the cultural mythology of a region are also likely to invest time and resources in advocating for their preservation. Ricou's scholarship inspires his readers to explore their local places and, through this exploration, to consider the significance of these places in broader ecological and cultural contexts.

Like his scholarship, Ricou's pedagogy encourages an exploration of the interconnections between species and place. His recent contribution to *The Bioregional Imagination*, entitled "Out of the Field Guide," details his approach to Habitat Studies. He presents the curriculum for this course as though explaining it to a new class on the first day of the semester, outlining the "rather speculative guidelines" for the term project and explaining the importance of field trips, interdisciplinary research, and collaboration to the successful completion of this project (349-51). In this first class, each student will randomly select "a particular species, most of which inhabit, in one way or another, the Pacific slope region of North America" (350). Students will then spend the semester pursuing this species in literature, art, museums, music, language, food, medicine, ecology, anthropology, and popular culture. Just as Ricou places no limits on the sources students may use, he also encourages creativity in determining the form of the final project. "[T]hink of yourself composing a *biography* of gull," he suggests, "a *story* of red huckleberry, an *archaeology* of the purple star, a *poetics* of snow goose" (350). This wide-ranging exploration is also central to his own scholarship, imbuing it with a sense of discovery and wonder.

Following his explanation of the term project, Laurie leads his class to a western red cedar on the UBC campus to "touch its bark, smell its leaves, and listen for what bird might be perching within it" (349). On this first of many field trips, he establishes his role as guide and fellow seeker, encouraging his students to develop an attentiveness to our natural surroundings. Perhaps the greatest gift a teacher can give is to show us how little we know of the

places we live and then offer a map to guide our exploration. Or perhaps the greatest gift he can give is to tell us what *he* doesn't know and then ask for our help exploring. Laurie's texts are a testament to collaboration—with scientists, poets, salal harvesters, and students—and he encourages the same spirit of collaboration in Habitat Studies.

On the first day of Laurie's class, years ago, I picked the rufous-sided towhee from a hat and began the task of reading the Pacific Northwest through its piercing red eye. In David James Duncan's *The River Why*, I heard "the spiral watersongs of towhees" that accompany the protagonist, Gus, on his trek to the source of the Tamawanis River (237). While towhees were not the Chinook salmon navigating the journey to their spawning grounds, they were an integral part of the understory, as "they sifted through the hazel clumps, watching [Gus] with crazed red eyes" (237). My trek led me to field guides and fridge magnets, to my uncle's garden on Saltspring Island, and to the wild rose in my parents' backyard where towhees forage amongst late-season rosehips. In the years since I completed this project, I have recognized its influence on my dissertation topic, my creative and critical writing, and the quality of my listening. Perhaps most noteworthy, however, is that it is still ongoing. More than a decade after completing Laurie's class, I still greet towhees with a blend of wonder and recognition, whether I encounter them in texts or in the underbrush. I still receive notes from Laurie and other Habitat Studies participants when they find towhees, a reminder that these projects, like Laurie's files, remain open. Laurie reveals that literary study is not bounded by text, or discipline, or region, but only by limits of our curiosity. He also demonstrates how engagement with place can radiate from a single class to all the future places in which we find ourselves.

After Region

> Question
> and answer together
> inhabit the ground.
> —Robert Bringhurst, "Gloria, Credo, Sanctus et Oreamnos Deorum"

In "Anasayú File," the concluding chapter prior to his afterfiles, Ricou "cautions that the affiliations [he has] cultivated" between the authors and texts in his book lead to "a sub-species of regionalism that may thrive in some conditions, but will be profoundly vulnerable in others" (*Arbutus* 149). Far from an example of hedging—as if the book might well be dismissed as

so much local colour—this caution recognizes "the often pejorative label" that has accompanied discussions of regionalist criticism in Canadian literary studies (Fiamengo 241). If each section of this essay represents a subspecies—literary critical, ecocritical, bioregional—eking out an existence in different regions of study, taken together they demonstrate that one scholar's idiosyncratic focus on the particulars of place can encourage a rich biodiversity of responses, thereby influencing the study of Canadian literature more broadly. Or, as Ricou puts it in "Afterfile: Anasayú," "local knowledge, even nostalgia, need not be inconsistent with nation-building" (205)—with the impulse, that is, to think through how regional concerns inform national responses to, say, botanical metaphors, extreme climate conditions, and salmon behaviour ecology. Like the seeds of a particularly robust plant species catching on shoes or backpacks during a hike, Ricou's books have moved with each of us, as have the questions he asked and the observations he made in the classroom. Will they remain vulnerable or will they thrive? "Question / and answer together / inhabit the ground" (155). Yes.

NOTES

1 See Ricou's "Out of the Field Guide: Teaching Habitat Studies" for a detailed explanation of the course.
2 Bradley is another of Ricou's former students.
3 In a review of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, Robert Bringhurst remarks: "[t]hese *Files* are the writing of a man who listens carefully to words and loves to read, but also of a man who loves to teach, has done so all his adult life, and has, I think, been humbled by his students' brusque repudiation of all their elders' claims to greater knowledge or authority" (104).
4 In using this phrase, I am thinking of Ricou's assessment of David Douglas, one of the first European botanists to encounter salal. Ricou notes: "Douglas's biographer, Athelstan George Harvey, describes him as . . . excessively modest and shy (39). Maybe the modest Douglas empathizes with the unpretentious salal. The 'shady stillness' of the rainforest, discouraging to many, is congenial to Douglas—according to his biographer, the shade-loving Douglas makes the shade-loving [salal] his favourite" (*Salal* 148).
5 Ricou adds later: "In some sense, the presentation is distorting—it leaves out a measure of dialogue. But the measure is slight: in most of the interviews . . . I had to ask very few questions. My interventions tended to consist of encouraging 'Uh-huhs' and a surprised 'Oh really'" (16-17).
6 Ricou shares a similar statistic: "Mean annual rainfall at the Vancouver International Airport is 1055.4 mm" (*Arbutus* 60).
7 As Alexandra Morton explains in *Saving Salmon*, such contributions are evident even to the naked eye, as years with higher than average salmon returns can be identified by larger than average growth rings in trees.

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TV Mason

Containership

How little beauty catches at the throat,
Simply, I love this mountain and this bay
With love that I can never speak by rote,

And where you love you cannot break away.
"Reason for Not Writing Orthodox Nature Poetry," John Wain

All colour has drained from the scene, though the image of the heron in the shallows rings sharp and clear. Midnight snow obscures three freighters alight in the bay. The salt water slips toward ocean, sighs toward shore, whispers *sepia, sepia, sepia*. How incongruous to see a great blue heron in intertidal moonlight waiting to catch a falling, frozen mote, standing, head cocked, ready for winter's gifts to come, crystalline, from above. How exotic and floral appears this patient stalker turned stalk; how reedy, diaphanous, remote:

how little beauty catches in his throat.

How your window opens to early spring sounds and containerships in the harbour. Song sparrows, yellowjackets, meltwater from the eaves striking wind chimes. As if twenty-three days of rain hadn't just threatened the water supply. The word rising to your lips, despite the view, is turgid. Turgidity. The water you've been boiling all week comes to you today from Capilano or Seymour or Coquitlam Reservoir. Kilometres away from the ships you watch and hear through the windows that are always open and the starlings that hear you say,

simply, I love these mountains and this bay

the way tiny creatures making home at a clearing's edge love
the clearing's aloof refusals of summer's crowded growth. Japanese
knotweed and Himalayan blackberry compete along a bog's
violent boundary while volunteers replenish an urban carbon
sink with spongy native sphagnum moss. Cosmopolitan salal, mean-
while, vies with ubiquitous fern for understory lore, neither apt to gloat.
On the bay, sun shines on five lichened, heroned rocks bordering five
idle freighters. A sixth, yellower than the rest, and emptier, passes by.
A love for this place and its inhabitants lodges in a distant throat,
a love that I can never speak by rote,

except to say that every place inhabits its inhabitants. Pet hairs
and other hitchhikers on autumn trips to islands whose great blue
herons and familiar flora remind of home and other places where
you might have loved. Every place inhabits its inhabitants, becomes verb,
becomes home. Contains freight. Places in relation to other places,
other histories spread like gill nets, the chance of entanglement a way
of mitigating loss. Loss a place where fear of losing hovers like winter
wrens' broken singing. Where the possibility of breaking listens intimate-
ly to what you love. And where you break you cannot *not* have loved, I say.
And where you love you cannot break away.

Lisa Szabo-Jones

Adventures in Habitat
An Urban Tale[1]

> Follow the project far enough to surprise yourself. Then go back to it. Be patient and relentless. Dream. Surprise yourself again.
> —Laurie Ricou, "Out of the Field Guide: Teaching Habitat Studies"

A black shape leaps, plummets twelve storeys, ripples down windows, spirals and wavers, pulls up short, flies back to the top of the building and leaps again. No one notices. No one sees the body-head bop before the dive, no one hears the guttural call among Vancouver's urban corridors—how the sound scrapes through the traffic and construction on Davie Street. No one sees the murder of Northwest crows that appears and chases the bird down Hornby Street, headed toward the answering call of another raven. Their ears plugged into, eyes and thumbs locked onto smartphones, iPods, and mp3 players, pedestrians pass me by, shoulder check me; their bags knock my hips. No one notices.

When people think of cities, they commonly think of concrete, theatres, high-rises, sidewalks, nightclubs, shopping malls, vacant-eyed and fast-paced pedestrians, cars and buses clogging narrow streets. In such built habitats, Neil Evernden's claim resonates: "genuine attachment to place for humans [is] very difficult" ("Beyond" 101). If we continue framing his proposal in relation to cities, his point offers a useful way of thinking about our relationship with the nonhuman world. He claims that humans are "nicheless" species; their way of living excludes them from participating in an ecosystem's natural processes. What he means by nicheless is that, as a species, we have fallen out of our ecological and evolutionary contexts. Instead, with the aid of technologies, we shape these contexts to meet our needs. We are "capable of material existence," but we lack the capacity to commit to "an organic community" (*The Natural* 110) as co-extensive and

coevolving. With this disassociation, we lose our capacity to understand and live within a place's regenerative limits (carrying capacity) (*The Natural* 109).

Cities thus framed maintain an illusion of separation from local sustaining biophysical processes. Evernden proposes that if we attend to how other organisms function in and sensorily engage with a territory, we create potential to understand what it means to be *human* and find more sustainable ways of reinhabitation. As we are creatures who tend to be omnivorous, and to live in excess of our habitat's carrying capacity, he suggests we may realize our embodied limits through comparison with another creature's inhabitation of our shared environment. Yet, in a city under a constant influx of noise and disruption, where our senses diminish and nature seems invisible or nonexistent, such a task seems nearly impossible, some may argue futile. What organisms would we study? Pigeons, starlings, raccoons, jackrabbits, dandelions? And, how would studying rock pigeons in Vancouver, or jackrabbits in Edmonton, for instance, open interconnections between individuals, communities, and urban living? What if those non-human city dwellers, like many of us in Canada, are invasive or introduced species, living and shaping the environment through similar opportunistic strategies? These questions, I realize, have no singular answer, as each encounter with the nonhuman predicates a different response based on its species: some residents endorse empathetic cohabitation, while others incite zeal reminiscent of mobs with pitchforks and torches. Very few turn those questions back on themselves. Though, I have no singular answer, I adapt my critical enquiry to correspond to the cultural and material diversities of cities. In this particular urban tale, my narrative structure becomes an exploration of complementary modes of reception and expression of this diversity; it shifts between the collective, cultural, personal, and scholarly. At times these shifts seem abrupt. But, as with moving through a city, these paths of enquiry force unexpected turns that often lead to unanticipated connections.

A pluralistic approach is fundamental to ecological urban living as it enables an apprehension not just of a city's ecology as a whole, but also of an individual's interaction as part of an urban collective that includes the non-human. Without learning to grasp the ways in which urbanites and the biophysical world interact within these spaces, we will always struggle to see cities as anything but environments shaped by humans. Of course, this claim is a well-rooted and flourishing sentiment in the environmental humanities. But, that is my point: it seems this growth has little reach beyond

environmental criticism. And so, while the notion that we ought to pay closer attention to the human and non-human interactions of place remains a truism among eco-critics, the crux is that it persists as a novelty or does not register at all to a wider population who are marginally or not invested in environmental issues.

Our inability to recognize the biodiversity, may be as David Suzuki suggests, because cities are "human-created habitat[s] that [are] severely diminished in biological diversity. Our surroundings are dominated by one species—us—and the few plants and animals that we decide to share space with or cannot quite eliminate. In such an environment, it becomes easy to think that our creativity has enabled us to escape the constraints of our biological nature" (13). Yet, I wonder if Suzuki, caught up in the movement of the city crowd, lost sight of his surroundings. If he walked by the lots overrun with Himalayan blackberry and Morning Glory. And, if he glimpsed these spaces, he dismissed them as enclaves of weeds and invasive species. If he did not see the varied thrush and finches foraging among the plants. Or perhaps, if he stopped for a moment, when a "vacant" lot popped out, alive with orange California poppies, the midnight work of urban guerrilla gardeners. As with most human built environments, for millennia, cities have created niches for other species (exotic and native). Bridge girders and house attics have become nesting sites for birds and bats; sewers and basements take the place of field warrens; green belts, golf courses, and alleyways become wildlife corridors. In many cases, "we" do not "decide" and often cannot eliminate them, particularly those urban cohabitants that we deem pests or trash animals, such as raccoons or Norway rats.

What we need is a relational representational form of transgressive ecological literacy that collapses boundaries between genres, cultural differences, disciplines, partisan politics, and regions. An important step in creating such a literacy is to apprehend how another creature fits into, shares, and reshapes a world constructed by and for humans. For this endeavour, we need to turn to artistic forms that embody the complex interplay between the biographical (of human, nonhuman, place), the autobiographical (the personal) and material (biogeochemical) processes. Forms that cross the thresholds of common assumptions prompt thinking the unthinkable: that the species that inhabit urban green-spaces (orderly and disorderly) co-constitute urban environments through their own creative agencies and material interactions. Such a focus on (or return to) material and nonhuman processes enables an organic approach to cities. By focusing on the processes

of local cultural and material interactions that decentre human (self) for a shared *bios* (human and nonhuman life) in urban environments, ecological literacy offers that possibility. The insights of aesthetic and cultural narratives can help to shift assumptions and behaviours about what it means to be human and how we interact with the biophysical world. We can "intuit a connection" (Ricou, *Salal* 118) to engage and deepen perceptions of what constitutes the construction of place. We learn through creative endeavours, as Laurie Ricou advocates, by attending to "imagined habitat, a thicket of words, within which you read yourself into place" (*Salal* 118). In these habitats, we see what it means to dwell ecologically, to find our niche. If we follow Ricou's suggestion, then creativity is not a constraint, but a method to work through the paradox of learning to live within our limits and push past our limitations. In order to see ourselves in relation to the nonhuman world, we need to keep ourselves simultaneously in and out of sight.

It is 2010, and I am three years into my PhD program. As Laurie Ricou, my MA supervisor, encouraged me to move to another city to do my final degree, I chose Edmonton. I grapple with this place, so different from Vancouver. The big sky, the muted browns, the short seasonal burst of greens, the dryness. The first thing I noticed driving into Edmonton, in 2007, was how the suburbs sprawl unchecked, about oil refineries and industrial lots. Since then, I have made many returns to the West coast. I tell Christine, another relocated Vancouverite who also frequently escapes west, that it's all the salmon we ate growing up. They've altered our genes, filled our cells with a coastal homing urge.

But, this evening in 2010, I am not in Vancouver; I am in Edmonton. I stand in the Telus Theatre's lobby, a glass atrium that overlooks a corner of University of Alberta's north campus. I retrieve the letter from my satchel. I turn the sealed envelope over in my hand, read the sender's address again. Though I am curious to know what Laurie has sent me, for now, I resist opening the letter. I move closer to and look out the window. It is early March and snow still falls. I look past my reflection, and peer out into the night, watch the students and faculty pass by. Something catches my attention, not a movement, but rather a practised stillness that contrasts with the other snow-covered clumps of bush that line the sidewalk. I lean closer to the glass, push my reflection further away: a white-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*), wearing its winter white hunches between two shrubs. As the seasons change, so does their coat from grey to tan to white. These

hares always take me by surprise. When I notice pedestrians pass within inches without reaction or downward glances, I smile. I nearly trip on their frozen forms in both winter and summer. When I startle them, they do not so much hop away as run like squat, miniature deer weaving through parked cars and dumpsters, galloping down the middle of residential streets. The previous summer, while walking downtown, I stumbled across two huddled on the edge of a parking lot adjacent to City Centre Mall at 102 Street and 103 Avenue. Blocked in by office towers and 104 Avenue's six lanes, I wondered how they managed to end up here. And then, a week later, three blocks east on 106 Street, I disturbed one grazing on a narrow strip of grass. It bolted to a parking lot across the street, stopped against a white-stuccoed building, and pushed its body against the one, chipped spot of exposed concrete.

To understand the complex interplay of human and non-human relations, enquiry "has to start somewhere, it has to start with a specific" (Ricou, *Salal* 108). For Ricou, specificity begins with a local species or cultural artifact. So I began my journey through the local under the mentorship of a singular species that inhabited the Pacific Northwest. Through Ricou's ongoing teachings, I soon realized that local ecological investigation moved naturally into the realm of global concerns. Ecology was not just a study of local biogeochemical interactions; it was a globalized way of thinking. Though born and raised in British Columbia's lower mainland, I was shocked by how little I knew and had been educated about local histories, both cultural and natural. By reading the species' ecologies against wider human cultural and personal events, my perceptions of individual and collective local identities and affiliations have shifted. But, that shift also occurred through negotiating the interdisciplinary approach that Ricou advocated. For as I learned, *his* method was a loosely structured process of enquiry—with only a seeming hint of madness. The more forays I made into other disciplines, the more I felt my own disciplinary constraints loosening their fast hold; I became more open in my search, and eventually a method did emerge, one oddly compatible with my own patterns of thinking. As I listened to my species, my species began to guide me to the interconnections. Admittedly, it often made me feel frustrated, like I was running along the same pathways repeatedly, dropping down black holes, coming at things obliquely or with a disciplinary short sightedness. Despite these frustrations, though, the species led me always to surprising places. I began to hear a diversity and expression of agencies; I began to hear

myself—"ourselves"—in the voices of others, human and non-human. I began to imagine what another species sees in our form, hears in our voices, smells on our bodies, tastes on our breath, feels in our movements through its/our territories. And, then, while thinking these questions, the unexpected: I found a poem.

"Rat Song"

When you hear me singing
you get the rifle down
and the flashlight, aiming for my brain,
but you always miss

and when you set out the poison
I piss on it
to warn the others.

You think: *That one's too clever,*
she's dangerous, because
I don't stick around to be slaughtered
and you think I'm ugly too
despite my fur and pretty teeth
and my six nipples and snake tail.
All I want is love, you stupid
humanist. See if you can.

Right, I'm a parasite, I live off your
leavings, gristle and rancid fat,
I take without asking
and make nests in your cupboards
out of your suits and underwear.
You'd do the same if you could,

if you could afford to share
my crystal hatreds.
It's your throat I want, my mate
trapped in your throat.
Though you try to drown him
with your greasy person voice,
he is hiding / between your syllables
I can hear him singing.

(Atwood 32)[2]

"Rat Song" is one of ten poems in Margaret Atwood's series "Songs of the Transformed." Animals sing their plight, their bitter insights, and their rage. They are fabulist turnings of human and animal that blur distinction between species, emphasizing clearly humanist constraints (and animal complaints). This poem is not a song in the classical sense; there is no

exaltation of the subject, no high praise. Instead, Atwood writes a visceral song of otherness— an irregular ode to human bestiality and bittersweet celebration of rat intelligence. She sings in a vernacular: vulgarity, violence, and insult. She sings in chords of "crystal hatreds": discord.

The repeated patterns in "Rat Song" show how human obsession manifests as habituated ways of thinking and behaviour that sediments identity as "natural." Atwood's poem is not a song about a rat; it is a preoccupation of human self-interest. Sung from a rat's perspective, however, the poem invites us to contemplate this obsession from our own animality. As the rat repeatedly voices "you" and "I," she upsets the formal distance and distinction between subjects. This collapse of distance, coupled with the pronouns as indexical references, create both bound and unbound contexts and meaning. At first, "You" refers specifically to human/reader and "I" to rat/speaker. The title and action of the opening verse paragraph determine the distinction. However, the repetition—the obsessive and dizzyingly iteration—of "you" and "I" throughout the poem, subsumed and spoken by the reader's own voice and joined with the rat's litany of accusations undermines a clear division between the two species.

Then at the centre of the poem, hinges a flip-mirrored vision of human and rat: "humanist. See if you can," sings the rat. This line, bookended by the poem's first line, "When you hear me singing," and the poem's last line, "I can hear him singing," divides the poem into action, accusation, thought, and subjunctives. The first half reveals how the human behaves and thinks; the second half, illustrates how the rat acts and what she sees, and desires. The word "humanist" drops down off an enjambment as both a declaration and pejorative that exclaims, "All I want is love, you stupid." The blank space at the line-end causes pause, yet "stupid" finds not only a skin-crawling phonic echo in the repeated esses, but also an assonant emphasis (and echo of "you") in the internal repetition of the "u" in "humanist." The pause is further emphasized by its abrupt halt at a midline end-stop. The period trips up the rhythm, jumps a beat straight into another sibilant, the rat-hissed imperative and challenge "See if you can." Intensified by the second end-stop in the line and its repetition of "you" and the vowel's phonetic echoes in "stupid / humanist," the rat's contempt astounds. It is familiar in its resemblance to the loathing humans reserve for rats, and seems outrageous because it is directed at us. The effect of such recognition along with the poem's formal constraints temporarily immobilizes the reader. The line's two end-stops punctuate the anthropocentricism and speciesism that inevitably

will prevent the "humanist" from rising to the rat's challenge, for as the term "humanist" maintains, human condition and values are the central concerns.

Though rat and human do not share similar physical attributes, the pronoun references unmoored from their antecedents amplify a merging of rat and human that evokes revulsion for both parties ("and you think I'm ugly too"—the inconceivable made plausible: "you" "too" are ugly to a rat). Human disgust and terror manifest in the various methods employed to exterminate the rat: gunshot, poison, and drowning. These methods intimate a level of barbarism that seems, for the size of the animal, out of proportion, inhumane, and further speaks to an escalating level of frustration. And from the rat's cunning and ability to evade death, this is an almost absurd and futile human pursuit. A frustration the rat mocks in her declaration: "I don't stick around to be slaughtered." If read in the context of the abundance of historical and current rat narratives, through the line's compounding of the present active voice to the infinitive, we hear in her song a promise of continued conflict between us and them.

The dare to you, I, to love her, "a parasite" that survives "off your / leavings, gristle and rancid fat" seems a deliberate sabotage to undermine any human attempt to rise to her challenge. Yet, the possibility of human affection perhaps never really was a possibility to begin with, only an imagining on our and her part: a performance of rat, of human. As readers, we sing aloud the rat's words, and in doing so make them our words, our voices declaring, "I take without asking." So no surprise, then, when the rat recognizes her mate's song "trapped in your throat" drowned by "your greasy person voice," she wants "your throat." The forward slash that separates "he is hiding / between your syllables" offers a visual (and violent) cue and space for improvisation of the multiple (imagined and implied) meanings. We wonder where the rat hides: in human breath that creates the gaps that give form to words, make the rat intelligible, and thus evade capture. Or, in the pauses, the hesitations and limitations of "your" language, where she hears a rat. The slash, thus, becomes a humanist snare, a literal typographical snap-trap that forces "you" and "I" (human and rat) to sing together, hear the song, listen to the words, to be held in judgment by the other, to deem who and what is the beast.

I wonder if the rabbit looks back at me. It is too dark to see its eyes. I step back from the atrium's window; the rabbit disappears into my reflection. The Telus Theatre's foyer has filled near capacity. Eden

Robinson is the Kreisel Lecture speaker tonight. I walk up the stairs, then stop halfway. I flip the envelope over and tear open the flap. There is no accompanying note or letter, only a photocopy of a *Harper's Magazine* essay: Charles Bowden's "The Wisdom of Rats." I frown. Nearly eight years have passed since I wrote my Habitat Studies piece for Laurie's class. This unexpected essay without note of explanation seems abrupt. Randomly sent my way. Of course, I think, this has no ulterior motive. It is one more rat thing sent to me by a friend. I read the first line, "As a child I could not color within the lines" (13). My frown turns into a pinch. I feel a tap on my shoulder, turn: Dianne and Kate stand behind me. I stuff the essay and envelope back into my satchel, and continue to walk up the stairs. My brow relaxes. I smile, tap my bag.

My first encounter with Laurie was in his Canadian Long Poem undergraduate course at the University of British Columbia. After the first class, his gruff demeanour made me retreat from the front to the back row, and then to my advisor, Judy Brown, to ask why she had recommended I take his course. I explained how he walked in carrying a hard-shell briefcase, a grim set to his mouth. His first words to our class: "This is a course on poetry. We will be studying poems. So if you think studying poems is not for you, I suggest you leave." A few students did. After his impatience with my answers, I wondered why I too hadn't left. Judy only laughed and encouraged I drop by his office. So, I did. And, as we discussed radish seeds, gardening, and Robert Kroetsch's long poem *Seed Catalogue* for thirty minutes, he taught me a new way of reading (I discovered, too, when he made me look up the meaning of *radish*, that his briefcase contained only the *Canadian Oxford English Dictionary*). The next term, I enrolled in his English Majors Seminar on invasive species, a new direction in his Habitat Studies course, which normally focused on native Pacific Northwest flora and fauna.

His syllabus mentioned no required books, only a course description, expectations, a rough outline of the term, and a listing of species. Early on in the term, we left the classroom, and walked to a grassy area north of the UBC Anthropology Museum. We stopped under a Western red cedar, next to a tangle of Himalayan blackberry, the Salish Sea below us. Laurie rocked on his heels, scratched the top of his head, and held out a baseball cap filled with crumpled paper scraps. We'd been waiting for this moment: our "four month obsession." *English ivy. English ivy, please. English ivy. Please.* I unfurl

my paper. I turn to the young woman beside me, and I see the scrawl of *ivy*… "No swapping species," Laurie calls out, looking at no one in particular.

Sweet Jesus.

R*attus norvegicus*, also known as the Norway rat, brown rat, wharf rat, house rat, barn rat, common rat, grey rat, water-rat, sewer rat, Hanoverian rat (believed to have accompanied George I from Germany to England in 1714), the Friesen *ierdat* (earth rat), and *Wanderatte* (roving rat), is a commensal animal who essentially dines at the human table without contributing anything to the meal. Like most humans, the opportunistic rodent is omnivorous, which "gives these species a considerable edge when foraging" in major settlements (Garber 184). It thrives in the Northern Hemisphere. Habitats range from sewers, urban lakes, toxic land sites, landfills, alleys and lanes, university campuses, city parks, plazas, cellars, subways, rail yards, grain elevators, barns, haystacks, grain and corn fields, marshes, markets, demolition sites, under single-dwelling houses, apartments, derelict and condemned buildings, wharves, and shorelines. As its various names and its habitats suggest, the Norway rat is cosmopolitan and highly adaptive.

Much literature over the centuries has depicted Norway rats as war-hungry creatures that descend in hordes, scourging and colonizing new territories. For instance, Hans Zinsser in his work *Rats, Lice, and History* compares the Norway rat's introduction to Europe: "just as established civilizations of Northern Europe were swept aside by the mass invasions of barbarians from the East, so the established hegemony of the black rat was eventually wiped out . . . [by] the ferocious, short-nosed, and short-tailed Asiatic" (199-200). A more probable and non-racist explanation, however, is found in the growing density and expansion of urban development. Wood shingles replaced thatch roofs, streets became common garbage tips, and underground sewers, water mains, and cellars opened up new harbourage sites for Norway rats, while black rats (roof and attic dwellers) saw their habitats shrinking.

The urge to read animals in humans and humans in animals, of course, is nothing new. Animals have been our fabulist mirrors for thousands of years: they are the flesh for many of our stories. In Canada, there are stories where the Norway rat and human relationship defies this generic category. In the coalmines of Nova Scotia, the miners regularly fed the Norway rats. The coal-blackened corner of bread where the miner pinched his sandwich was a standard meal for the pit rats. The miners' treated them with deference, and

in some instances introduced them to the mines because their presence—or rather their absence—could save their lives. If the rats were absent from or seen exiting the mine, the miners knew to stay out or to follow; it meant that a bump or collapse was about to occur.[3]

For the most part, however, our stories dismiss rats as abominations. Too often, we focus on their consumption behaviours and overlook our own. As Gavan Watson contends, "we project our own neuroses about urban living onto [trash animals] that share the landscape with us. [They] come to represent the results of our contested urban living arrangements. What we find problematic with these [species], we should find problematic about our own city existence" (36). Watson's observation emphasizes how the way we focus on these species' colonizing tendencies reflects back onto our own colonizing attitudes and behaviours. Is Edmonton's suburban sprawl east-, north-, west-, and southward any less invasive than the Norway rat's spread across Vancouver's cityscape? Whose habitats do we disrupt?

As urban sprawl and density grow, biota leave or die, stay or return and carve out a niche. Cities have their own natural habitats: eutrophic lakes, ponds, landfills, bogs, forests, parks, alleys, lanes, railway corridors, shorelines, abandoned factories and warehouses, empty lots, backyards, front yards, sidewalks, golf courses. Native and introduced species cohabitate in these spaces, some more dominantly than others. The disorderly or unconventional niches we categorize as eyesores. Often, though we do not necessarily welcome them, we come to accept them as inevitable characteristics of city landscapes, and so become inured to their presence. Eventually, as DJ Renegade haiku-raps, we rarely notice

> Beside the dumpster
> a rat drinking rainwater
> from an eggshell

And then when we don't see them, but their presence still encounters us: musk, scat, paw print, bones, feather, song. Despite their tenacity, their determination to share this environment with us, we remain, for the most part, determined to minimize their inhabitation. Sometimes this is for good reason, such as their potential for transmitting diseases and their potential threat to human well-being and property.

Yet, as Ricou persists, "Maybe we need to listen for another tongue, open to the possibility of the creature naming *us*" ("Out" 349). Though we may only ever imagine their songs of us, an ecological literacy that enables

us that imaginative capacity helps us to recognize *our* cultural practices. They have the power to translate the matter(s) hidden from us, to invite us underground, to burrow and emerge in startling places. Surprise us.

White Rock beach, British Columbia, summer, the early or mid-1970s. There is a mixed smell of raw sewage, brine, and sun-baked creosote. A dike keeps the BNR tracks above sea level and stops the tides from flooding Marine Drive. It's covered in basalt ballast, and shored up on the seaward side with granite boulders. Himalayan blackberries wend through the boulders. Culverts protrude from the dikes at random intervals, extending out to the foreshore. My brothers and I spend most of our summer days here, exploring the eight-kilometre stretch of sand and water that connects West and East beaches. Our mother, always well-stocked with cigarettes, magazines, and pulp novels, had her regular tanning spot on West beach. It was understood we were to wander off and play. A Coleman cooler filled with soggy tuna sandwiches, Old Dutch chips, and Pop Shoppe sodas ensured our return.

Most days, I would wander on my own, explore the tidal pools, pick blackberries, walk the underside of the pier, or make my way to East beach to where Little Campbell River emerged from the Semiahmoo First Nations Reserve. At high tide, I scrambled over the boulders. I was small and underdeveloped for my age, but fast and agile. I would leap from rock to rock without pause, a mountain goat, bare feet slapping granite. One particular day, I hesitated: a flicker of a tail. I hurried to where it had disappeared, only to see it re-emerge a few feet away, then, its brown flank a blur, dropped down another hole. I followed. I let my body slip head first down among the boulders, used my hands to pull me forward. The further I descended, the more space opened up. I saw a movement ahead; a face turned toward me, a backward glance. Eye contact. Then it continued onward, but at a slower pace. I followed, pulling and turning sideways through narrow tunnels. The rat's tail, a string in my sight, guided me, and led me eventually to daylight. I emerged a short distance from my entry-point, squirmed out of the opening, blinked, and startled a sunbather.

Subterranean dwellers, brown rats live in a network of tunnels with one or more nesting and feeding chambers, and multiple entryways. In British Columbia's Lower Mainland, they largely inhabit the waterfronts, but also reside in any building that provides accessible harbourage, regardless of the neighbourhood's demographic. The Norway

rat arrived in North America around the time of the War of Independence in 1775. In the early-nineteenth century, the brown rat followed human settlement, spread rapidly across the continent, up into British North America (BNA), and rapidly pushed out the black rat (Twigg 24). The lack of Old World parasites and diseases coupled with ideal living conditions, an omnivorous palate, and fecundity allowed populations to explode and expand from Florida to Newfoundland, from California to Alaska. In its movements across BNA/Canada, the Norway rat acquired a renowned history. As British colonists and migrant workers moved westward, they set up camps and built farming communities and grain silos adjacent to the trans-Canadian railway. These communities presented optimal commensal arrangements for the Norway rat. The Rocky Mountains would have been a natural deterrent for the rats, but in the 1950s, Albertans halted the brown rat's progress. Through an extensive rat control program, which involved public education and a heavy hand with shovels, guns, and Warfarin, they halted the westward migration of the Norway rat. Today, a small but dedicated rat program continues and ensures that rat infestations in Alberta remain few.

Not all Norway rats arrived in Canada by the East coast, though. By the 1850s, Norway rats had found their way into British Columbia by ships. According to an early-twentieth-century local naturalist, Allen Brooks, in 1887, the wharf rat was a common sight in Vancouver, New Westminster, and Victoria: [they] "swarmed at the three large seaports and along the coast" (68). However, though they were sighted as far as Chilliwack in 1894, near the east end of the Fraser Valley, the brown rats were and remain absent or scarce in the province's interior (BC Ministry of Environment n. pag.).

In 1918, Strathcona, one of Vancouver's first residential and industrial areas, abutted the False Creek mudflats that extended from English Bay to present day Clark Drive. At very high tides, its waters flooded into Burrard Inlet. Flowing down into the mudflats were 120 kilometres of salmon and cutthroat trout streams. From the 1880s to the 1950s, Vancouver's False Creek was the terminus for the CPR and the CNR. Sawmills and other industries occupied the land. Over this period, the city gradually filled in the Flats, forced streams underground, and built more industry. After World War I, however, Vancouver's temperate climate and the lure of potential work attracted a large influx of unemployed men. By the 1930s, a "hobo jungle" of tents and flimsily constructed shacks developed on the Flats, which housed approximately one thousand homeless men, many who were Great War veterans (Atkin 62). Vancouver's dump, near China Creek, was adjacent to

this shanty town. Raw sewage outfalls from the residential neighbourhoods and toxic pollutants from sawmills and industry also flowed into False Creek Flats. Despite the mixed semi-diurnal tides and the outflow from freshwater streams, the flats became "unsanitary, rat infested wastes" (Burkinshaw 40-41). This is not surprising, as *Rattus norvegicus* "has a tendency to dominate garbage dumps," and inhibit the "establishment of potential colonizers"; its presence "sometimes become[s] considerable in those dumps where pest control is inadequate" (Darlington 93). Indicative of general sentiment and significant in Burkinshaw's observation is his coupling of rats as a negative modifier of "wastes": an oversight that does not distinguish how waste, in this context, as a product of human consumption creates the physical environment for rats to develop their niche.

John Crossetti, a resident of Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood, recalls how, as kids, he and his friends used to go to this dump, a place "infested with rats . . . and try to kill [them] but . . . never got them" (qtd. in Marlatt and Itter 56). Yun Ho Chang, another resident, similarly relates, "I would stop for a few minutes and watch because these rats were all running around, dragging each other along by the tail. Some of them were as big as cats. Lots of other people watched too, it was a sort of rat theatre" (n. pag.). By the 1970s, the degraded state of the Flats initiated a clean-up of False Creek. Industries were pushed out, squatters removed, and Granville Island Market place was constructed. Nevertheless, because of the city's failure over the decades to manage and control waste on Vancouver's waterfronts, pest control proved inadequate. The Norway rats remained and thrived. In False Creek, Yun Ho Chang's rat theatre continues today.

Taking time out to watch this rat performance, Ricou would propose, is a way-finding through getting lost in the ecological processes of your own backyard. "To listen," he writes, "is to *wait*—patiently—for a sound to be absorbed, maybe to become a message. Perhaps to *heed*. Perhaps to listen *in* on" ("Out" 348-49). The next time you visit Granville Island, never mind the Arts Club Theatre. Purchase a coffee. Find a bench with a view of the boulders that line the shore, let your gaze roam randomly over the rocks, and eventually you will see a skittering flick, a scaly tail, popping heads, and a chase or boxing match. Their bodies "spines pulled in an inflexible / French curve, all haunch to keep their mouths / at the earth, licking dust" (Degen 28).

Anna Jorgensen claims that there is no clear distinction between "regulated and wild urban places: rather there is a continuum ranging from 'wilderness' to apparently ordered spaces, with different levels of wildness existing at

multiple different scales at each locality. In this sense, wildscape can be seen as an idea, a way of thinking about urban space, rather than a closed category that can be spatially located" (2). The rat's capacity to inhabit various urban harbourage sites, regardless of the economic location of the area, disrupts dichotomous assumptions of what constitutes a wild urban space. Is the space wild because an unpredictable, undomesticated species resides there? Is a rat colony in Vancouver's affluent Kerrisdale neighbourhood or UBC's campus less a wilderness site than a hotel in the city's Downtown Eastside? Or rather than thinking in terms of *wild* and *wilderness*, perhaps we should follow Laurie's suggestion and refer to them as habitats. A niche refers to *how* a species lives in relation to its habitat, which is the physical environment that a species inhabits (Callenbach 78). Habitat, thus, as Laurie proposes in a footnote, "has an amplitude that allows for all forms of living-in, including the cultural (that is, human) and imagined" ("Out" 363). As it attends to ecological interdependencies, habitat forces us to think relationally. We define *wild* and *wilderness* divisively, by what they are not: civilized, domesticated. Habitat's focus accentuates the complex interplay of movements that transgress and transform strict demarcations of boundaries.

In 2011, in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, developer Marc Williams had the Pantages Theatre, an old vaudeville heritage site demolished to make space for Sequel 138, a condominium development. After the demolition he did not clear the site, but left it as a holding ground for the debris and garbage; consequently, over the course of a year, it became an optimal habitat for Norway rats. Vancouver's *Global News* quotes one resident, Ben Smith, "If you're sitting at my window, and looking out, the ground moves. There are so many rats, the ground actually looks like it's moving" (McArthur and Meiszner n. pag.). Williams is part of a controversial push by Vancouver developers to gentrify the Downtown Eastside, one of Canada's poorest urban communities. Williams' plans for Sequel 138 include art and commercial space on the main floor, urban agriculture on the second level roof garden, 79 one-bedroom condos priced from $227,000 and 18 social housing units (Werb n. pag.). In a public effort to shame both the city into issuing a clean-up order and Williams into taking responsibility for his waste, Downtown Eastside residents conducted a rat count on his lot, a parody of naturalist's backyard bird counts. Shortly after, the city intervened, and the site was cleaned up. The rats remained. The removal of the debris cleared the surface, but did not address the problem beneath.

The rat count is a form of ecological literacy: recognition of the interconnections between a seeming inescapable poverty, disregard of land use or maintenance, and degraded environmental and human health. Whether intentionally or not, by disregarding requests to clean the site and leaving the lot in such condition, Williams imposed the inescapable ecologies, which Linda Nash claims throughout her book *Inescapable Ecologies,* traps the disenfranchised in not just material locations but also in seemingly "naturalized" social categorizations. As Nash repeatedly illustrates, poor communities become local dumping grounds and locations for toxic industries and classist and racist policies. And, the rats, I add, become implicated too, caught in a circular logic: where there is poverty, there will be rats, where there are rats, there will be poverty. We recognize them as vectors of harmful disease and see this characteristic as inseparable from their habitats: wastelands, which tend to be located in economically supressed areas. We fail to see the corresponding constructed cultural wasteland. We forget that we built these habitats through our neglect. The rat count made evident how out of neglect we produce, to borrow Kathleen Wallace's observation, a "strange" practice of attaching dehumanizing *isms* with urban "environmental degradation [and] that are so pervasive that they seem natural" (72). An affluent developer cleared away his trash and debris (finally, after a year) in a Downtown Eastside neighbourhood; the rats remained.

Ecological literacy is about understanding the interrelations of *communities* as a complex interplay of human and nonhuman interactions. Investigating an animal's niche alongside human ecologies opens up the complex material and cultural relations humans construct with other organisms within urban habitats. The rat tale is one I return to often. Their stories are ubiquitous; we like to write, read, and talk rats, cover the same ground repeatedly. I am no exception. But as Laurie insists, there are moments of surprise in these returns: I hear something new. Like Cape Breton pit rats. Or the rat count. Once the old Pantages Theatre lot became clear of Williams' trash the site temporarily transformed into something unexpected: a raptor's hunting ground (see Smith). Its presence makes me recall the ravens on Hornby Street and the jackrabbits by Edmonton's City Centre Mall: their presence so *unnatural* among office towers because I clung to the wild. Their urban tales, often glimpsed only as shadows on concrete or flickers in glass, disrupt and challenge our

limitations, entice us to take out the ear-buds, power off the cellphones, look away from our mirrored reflections, and seek them out. They make us attend to a rat theatre.

NOTES

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2 "Rat Song" by Margaret Atwood, included by permission of the Author. Available in SELECTED POEMS, 1966-1984, published by Oxford University Press, ©Margaret Atwood 1990.

3 The story of pit rats I encountered on my tours of Spring Hill Mine and Glace Bay Mines in Nova Scotia.

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Susan McCaslin

Dear Banana Slug,

How you mimic the yellow and brown
alder leaves cast on our driveway,
you, hermaphrodite, with eyestalks
poking the moist air.

Your crosswise pace carries
the metaphor of your length
from here to where you want to go,
six or more inches a minute

more surely than my jumping thoughts
that begin in the body
but land in disaster zones,
creating fancies of future loss—

myself shipwrecked in a wheelchair or worse.

While you, faithful to your job,
recycle leaves and detritus,
decomposing, composting
a softer music stretched across time.

Handless, you transit in a slow-swift crawl—
oarless barge.

While I head off for blood work, more tests,
you keep moving, everything working perfectly
in a nervous system simpler, less warlike
than mine, but adequate for all your needs.

Magali Sperling Beck

Poetical Encounters
An Interview with Jan Conn

In *The Fiddlehead* review of Jan Conn's book *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, M. Travis Lane suggests that the potential surrealism of this poetry collection does not necessarily lead us towards "unrealism"; on the contrary, it may point us to "alternative realities" (201). It is exactly from such recognition of possibilities, alternatives, and newness that the following interview with Jan Conn can be fruitfully read. Conn has been writing poetry since the 1970s. With eight books published, her most recent is *Edge Effects* (2012). Many of her poems have been published in a variety of anthologies and literary journals. By reading her pieces, one might become aware of a constant and almost inexhaustible interest in observation and re-creation of meanings that come through the unpredicted connections between what she calls "the borders, or memory chasms" of inner and outer spaces. In this context, her writing is attentive not only to the element of surprise but also to where unexpectedness might take us in the creation of new knowledge or new ways of seeing. The following interview opens a door to the varied ways of reading and enjoying Conn's writing.

Magali Sperling Beck (MSB): In previous interviews (with Sharon Caseburg and rob mclennan, for example) you have commented on your perception of the interrelations between science and poetry, as you are both a renowned scientist and an award-winning poet. What fascinates me in your answers is the sense that both disciplines allow you to go towards what might be called the edge of knowledge. Could you discuss a little more about this aspect in relation to your poetical writing, considering in particular the intricacies between *newness* and *communication*?

Jan Conn (JC): I like to think that I am on a road toward "the edge of knowledge" in poetry. It's a constant evolution of focus and style, rhythm, playfulness. I'm attracted to associative, lyrical, fragmentary and narrative aspects of poetry, and to "disjunctive linking" in *renga*. I want language to purr, jump, swing.

One of my reasons for writing poetry is to emulate the great contemporary Mexican photographer, Graciela Iturbide who says, "I insist on astonishment. . . ." As an example, she has a black and white photograph of a woman in a desert landscape who seems about to become airborne. It's completely revelatory to me, this image. It stays with me, makes me feel suspended. That I, too, could fly.

To me, astonishment and newness are linked, something to strive for in every poem even though this can be challenging, elusive. Hiroaki Sato notes in *One Hundred Frogs* in relation to collaborative *renga* that not every poem needs to be a firecracker, still one wants to try to provide a novel perspective, a moment (or more!) when the potential reader is moved, changed, made to pause and consider something more deeply—from an alternative view—or is stimulated by an unusual image, a terrific metaphor, an arrangement of words that strikes a chord. Usually newness arrives unexpectedly, intuitively, but sometimes the use of a different poetic form or a different kind of language that belongs, say, to a software engineer or one who plans highways (a fascinating example is Sina Queyras' *Expressway*), or a focus on the moods and topography of a single New Brunswick river (like *One* by Serge Patrice Thibodeau), can work wonders.

Is there a trade-off between newness and communication? In *Jaguar Rain* I wanted to provide readers both with a fresh sense of the Amazon, past and present (newness), and Margaret Mee's very substantial botanical discoveries (communication). A lot of the information was packed into the notes in the back, where readers could consult it if interested. I think that some of the poems got a bit stuck in overzealous description of the richness and diversity (too much focus on communication; not enough newness). On the other hand, the plant biographies, the haiku series, and some poems that had their genesis as a kind of game or experiment, like "Amazonian Whites," "Mistaken for Thieves," "Wildlife," and "Fish Pictographs," combined these two elements in novel and mischievous ways.

I think it's crucial to distinguish between communication and accessibility. Striving for accessibility can dampen the spark of the poem. In a recent interview in *The Malahat Review*, Lorna Crozier discusses the issue of poetics and accessibility very clearly. One of the poets I'd say most exemplifies "newness" for me is Anne Carson, who has a genius for innovation in form

and language. Yet, few people would say that her writing is necessarily easy to grasp or follow. Why should it be? Yes, we need to educate a readership to carve out time for poetry, for literature, but the very format of poetry tends to be demanding. Probably, like surrealism, it's an acquired taste. I think that except in unique situations as in Chile when Pablo Neruda drew crowds of hundreds routinely, the audience will remain pretty small, except at some literary festivals and special poetry events. An ecologist acquaintance of mine, a professor at Penn State, who asked for a copy of *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, said that after two intense hours he noticed that his poetry reading muscle was underdeveloped, and it needed more regular exercise.

MSB: On one hand, you have also suggested that you do not necessarily see your writing as an attempt to answer a particular set of questions or to consciously address a specific topic of interest. On the other hand, geographical dislocation and exploration of new spaces and places are very prominent themes in your poetry. Would you see travel as a trope in your poetics? How or why do you choose the places you wish to physically or imaginatively explore?

JC: In some poems, yes, I see travel as a trope, and mostly as metaphor, occasionally irony, or synecdoche. On the other hand, I really do travel quite extensively, so sometimes a poem is a narrative reconstruction that could seem completely fabricated.

I am not consciously writing poetry to better understand the places I travel to or work in, but I do read a great deal on natural history, history, topography, art, architecture, language, and culture before, during and after my physical journeys, and sometimes this information seeps inside poems. I also write to expand my inner vision, to incorporate strange juxtapositions, adventures, random events, new art. I write because I want access to my subconscious, to associations and connections that can provoke me into writing poetry in more innovative ways.

More recently, rather than choosing a geographic locale to explore, I have been focusing on the environment of an artist who piques my interest. For instance, when I was in Madrid I saw a remarkable retrospective show of Modigliani's paintings and drawings. This drew me to delve into the art world in Paris before and during World War I in more detail: the hot, exciting painters and sculptors who were assembled there, how they interacted with Modigliani, how his style grew and changed under many influences. Similarly, I have learned a great deal about Germany and Switzerland historically and culturally because of my fascination with the art and the Bauhaus lectures on theories of painting, colour, and line by Paul Klee.

It's fair to say that my latest book, *Edge Effects*, is centred much more consciously on Europe than on Latin America.

On the other hand, I continue to do research in Latin America. I have collaborative projects in Colombia, Panama and Peru, as well as Brazil. I am sure that poems will be generated by some of my experiences in these countries. It's a natural outcome of exposure to anything from Colombian TV news to Brazilian folk art that can provoke language to depart from earlier ways of creative expression.

MSB: Could we say, then, that some of these geographical spaces, such as Guatemala, Venezuela, Brazil, or Mexico become more than travelled locations in your poetry since they are also spaces of rediscovery for the travelling self?

JC: Probably I "grew up" in some way geopolitically, in Guatemala, getting very fragmentary glimpses of some of the violence that was all around and sometimes, literally, beneath my feet (particularly in Guatemala City where political prisoners were held and tortured in cells underneath the main square). I was not aware of this until a few years ago. I was working in Guatemala on field research for my doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto during the summers of 1983-1985. It was the first time I saw someone shot.

Even though my first trip to Brazil in 1987 was enabled by a Canada Council writing grant, for part of the trip I travelled with Canadian botanists, collecting aquatic plants. It is a country of mythical proportions and contrasts. I realized I could spend the rest of my life exploring its natural and cultural riches, and never be satiated.

I don't think I realized how much I loved and needed winter, on some visceral level, and how strongly it defines part of me, this stupendous season and its crystal-clear sounds, its outdoor activities, until I spent two years in Venezuela (1988-1990). The poem "Icebergs on the Rio Doradas," in *Beauties on Mad River*, hints at this longing, but winter is probably completely tied up with my identity as a Canadian. I also feel strongly, but very ambivalently, about the focus of the Canadian north, as the painters in the Group of Seven, and later composer Glenn Gould, described and envisioned it.

"The Flower Woman and the Dog Star," written in Venezuela, gave me another perspective on depression, which has been an integral, and often very disturbing and debilitating, part of my life. The writing in Brazil of "Saying Good-bye in Belem" provided me with some of the tools to imaginatively cope with the end of a relationship, and helped it survive as

an important friendship. "La Virgen de la Paz," written about an incident in Venezuela, aided me in understanding an aspect of my mother's suicide. The ending of this poem differs: the suicidal teenager survived.

In *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, the section called "Cosmological" provided a re-entry into some aspects of Mexican cultural history and anthropology, which has been a fascination of mine since adolescence. I wanted to explore that rich heritage of mythology and dreaming. At one point in my early twenties, I envisioned becoming an archaeologist.

MSB: Another very intriguing aspect of the connection between your writing practices and travel is that you often write in planes, cars, trains, or in what you have called a "transition time" [in the interview with mclennan]. In this context, movement, or the sense of being "neither here nor there," may generate an intense space for creation and for an acute awareness of possibility. Would you see these physical dislocations, this temporary inhabiting of an in-between space, as also reflecting the process of writing itself?

JC: At times I use travel and the corresponding physical dislocations, even the lack of sleep after long flights, to fuel creativity. One has more access to unexpected links. I wrote the poem "The Event," in *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, on my first flight to Bogotá, Colombia, in 2005. I had not slept the previous night, working against a deadline for submission of a major application for scientific funding. So in my view this poem has wilder language and imagery (such as, "the barked dog/thicker and richer and redder" and "Zebra hidden in a striped zoo . . .") than poems written under more "conventional" circumstances. In strange locations little or nothing is familiar. This is often advantageous for a creative writer.

Possibly such juxtapositions and movement naturally fuel more fragmentary, leaping poems, such as the short, lyrical "Yellow Dog" and "Ahora," the connected series of multiple visions of Mexico, in *Botero's Beautiful Horses*. The corresponding observation would be that I might write more narrative poems when not travelling, but my writing process is never that black-and-white. When I am completely immersed in a painting, studying it, waiting for a transformational moment, this process has a similar effect on my writing as the transitional time inherent in travel. Sometimes I carry reproductions of especially fascinating art with me on trips, to maintain my focus, if I am working on a series of poems inspired by a single artist.

MSB: It is also intriguing to think about the juxtapositions of "selves" that occur in your poems, especially considering, for example, your rereading of Margaret Mee in *Jaguar Rain* and of the Spanish-Mexican artist Remedios Varo in

Botero's Beautiful Horses. I find it is quite relevant (or revealing) that one of the aspects you emphasize on Mee's work is the fact she "was the first botanical artist to begin to put exuberant background details into her formal botanical paintings" (*Jaguar Rain* 107), which shows, among other things, Mee's awareness about the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Would you say that this sense of interconnection (of places, people, and cultures) speaks to your writing as well? How?

JC: Mee was a pioneer in alerting us to the complexities and interdependence of organisms in single ecosystems within the Amazon. It's hard to think of the exuberance of the flora and fauna of the rainforest in isolation, for me, and I experienced the cultures of the Mauhés, the Rikbaktsa, and the Waika, and their connections with their environment, through the eyes of Mee and her explorer predecessors such as Alexander von Humboldt, Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, and Richard Spruce. In the section "Antecedents" (in *Jaguar Rain*), I imaginatively reconstructed the environments of objects, some of which are now only found in museum collections (petroglyphs, spears, a turtle shell, a jaguar mask).

Because earlier Mexican cultures have left so many tangible (often stone or ceramic) cultural, religious and quotidian items, and I have been mesmerized by them since I was a teen-ager, I could imagine deeper aspects of their societies, as I did in *Botero's Beautiful Horses*. I was familiar enough with Maya mythology to be able to say "The Rain Gods hate their job/ but love to fish, all day, all night. / Dazzling in lapis lazuli wetsuits." Or my poetic persona could empathize with the Water Goddess as she helplessly watched the volcano Xictli erupt and destroy the regional cultural centre of Cuicuilco.

Remedios Varo's fantastical and magical paintings exerted a different kind of allure. In "Orinoco," for example, the female explorer's amazing raincoat has been converted into a boat, and there is something unfulfilling about her journey to the source of this impressive South American river. Yet she is profoundly attuned to her environment, full of unusual talking birds and bats that conduct an orchestra of armadillos, and continues on her way, beyond the poem, steering among the trees.

MSB: Discussing travel and poetics in "Mapmaking: The Poet as a Travel Writer," Beatriz Badikian writes: "All poets are travelers. Whether literally or metaphorically, we journey through words to discover new worlds. And we journey through the world to create new words. . . . During these journeys we also become travel writers of sorts" (73). Would you see your writing experience as echoing Badikian's words?

JC: I appreciate Badikian's quote. I think my adolescent reading of art and archaeology of Central and South America, combined with the postcards and exotic presents from my father's international travel, was one of the things that kindled my "journey through words to discover new worlds." And of course, every time I discover a new poet, or visual artist, or a new country or culture, my horizons expand, sometimes exponentially.

I felt that both *Jaguar Rain* and *Botero's Beautiful Horses* were quite dominated by colour, including many shades of black, partly due to the subject matter (a focus on flora and fauna, and history of Mexico and Latin America). In *Edge Effects*, I decided to emphasize textures coupled with a much more sparing use of colour, to focus more on different ways of using poetic language, and not to depend as much on exotic locale to carry a poem. I wanted to reduce descriptiveness in my poems. If the poem insisted on colour, I wanted it to be more tantalizing, for example "borderline blue" and "enigmatic orange" in a poem inspired by Paul Klee called "Not as it is Perceived in the Phenomenal World" that appeared in *The Malahat Review* (2008). The poem "Space is a Temporal Concept," that appeared in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English Anthology* in 2009, avoids the use of colour altogether, and is the richer for it.

The American artist Jenny Holzer fascinates me because of the way she projects language visually. It's an amazing experience to stand in a museum with one of her moving LED word displays rippling through one's mind. This experience really electrified me linguistically. A poem in *Edge Effects* especially affected by her work is called "The Present is Elusive," published in *filling Station*. The first line is "I prefer to live in the cracks of events."

MSB: To what extent are your poems autobiographical? You have already mentioned that some poems were written as a way to negotiate traumatic personal experiences from your past, such as your mother's suicide, or sexual abuse. So, I guess I am wondering about how personal memory is worked through in your poetics.

JC: Some poems reflect my childhood, adolescence, many are exaggerated to various degrees; all are transformed. Memory is storytelling, and each time the story is told the details shift. These poems have been written in part to communicate perilous, tragic circumstances, but also to move memories and events from interior to exterior space, to expose them to more light and air. Exploration of inner space is just as fascinating as outer space, and there are borders, or memory chasms, where one can see both at once.

The era of confessional poetry is over for me, but I feel this way because I have written about, and worked relentlessly on, these hard times in my

own life to enable me to move forward without carrying such a debilitating cargo. Those early scars are part of the fabric of self. Carolyn Smart has spoken eloquently in an interview with Alessandro Porco about confessional poetry versus dramatic monologue in relation to her fine book *Hooked* (2009), which explores the lives of seven women artists. With the writing of *Jaguar Rain*, for the first time I was able to submerge myself in another "I," a transformed self. This envoicement of Mee provided a tremendous sensation of freedom. I felt this way, also, when researching material for the poems about the Spanish-Mexican painter Remedios Varo for the last two sections of *Botero's Beautiful Horses*. I could inhabit her persona, without losing my sense of self, and imagine aspects of her fascinating life and her (mostly) surreal paintings from that invented place.

I have taken this process a step farther in *Edge Effects*, in poems about people on the fringes of society, both men and women. Some of these poems have also appeared in *PRISM international* (2010). I began by meticulously studying images, interviews and poems of the South African painter Marlene Dumas, who lives in Amsterdam. She grew up near Cape Town, South Africa, and I have travelled there several times, in part to explore her terrain. These were arduous poems for me. They required a struggle to leave behind my cultural and class-bound inheritance, and to write from the perspective of a stripper, an accident victim, a person in a straitjacket, and an adolescent male prostitute, among others. One of my younger readers said she could not find a single trace of me in these poems.

MSB: You have often mentioned how influential your father was both for your scientific career and for your poetical discoveries, and such influence is also woven through your writing, particularly through the poems that recover memories of family life and reconstructions of travelled spaces. In my reading of poems such as "Fusion," "While I was Looking at the Background You Walked Out of the Picture," and "One View from the Look-Out Tower," among many others, I perceive a strong connection between the image of the father and the image of the traveller or "explorer"—the one who would be away from home, exploring and discovering new spaces. Conversely, the image of the mother seems to struggle with the enclosure of the domestic space (being sometimes maybe even overwhelmed by it). Would you see your writing, and particularly your interest in travel, as a way to rewrite this story?

JC: Yes, to rewrite the story, an interesting observation, one I've been conscious of since I was a teenager. I noticed how much more I was attracted to my father's views of the world and professional life. He was both a template and

a lodestar, and he offered a way out, of ugly Asbestos and the enormous open pit mine, out of the potential perils of domestic life. After my mother's suicide in 1976 there seemed to be an added threat in domesticity and small-town culture. It was as though there was a DANGER THIN ICE sign in my head.

In 1975 my parents and my youngest sister moved to Denver, Colorado, a significant relocation and promotion for my father. The headquarters of the Johns-Manville Company, owners of the Jeffrey Mine in Asbestos, moved to Colorado from upper New York State. Several other Asbestos-based families moved too, so they formed a loosely-knit Canadian community in Littleton, a suburb of Denver. However, the next year (1976) my mother killed herself, leaving me with an odd subliminal message: beware of moving to the US.

I was especially conscious of the drive and desire to travel during the summer of 2007—I went to South America four times between April and August, and it occurred to me that this might be rather excessive. I recognized that I am chronically conflicted as a Canadian living in the US. I think I began to understand my father at a different level psychologically after my own increased awareness. Perhaps he found Asbestos constraining and limited, and/or emotionally uncomfortable (he did not speak much French), so pursued travel for stimulus and change. I am probably more like him than I have recognized.

My way of managing this interior conflict of residing in the US is to actively seek opportunities either to come home to Canada, or to travel to Latin America or Europe where I feel I will be nourished, charged, and inspired to write. I feel more at home in both Mexico and Brazil than in the US, despite my marvellous American husband, many friends and colleagues, and some outstanding opportunities there. However, my poetry has benefited tremendously by exposure to the writings of many US poets. The sheer volume can be pretty overwhelming. I remember recently comparing notes with Douglas Burnet Smith, who teaches American literature at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. When Canadian friends ask either of us to recommend US poets we have been reading, we sometimes say, the first hunderd or the second?

MSB: If constantly travelling in and out of the US enables you to negotiate this tension of being a Canadian living there, would you say that writing poetry and being published in Canada allow you to better elaborate on your cultural affiliations and sense of identity?

JC: My primary sense of self is clearly Canadian, there is no ambivalence there. Also, my main poetry community is Canadian, writers with whom I meet and communicate regularly. I do readings as often as possible in Canada, in

literary festivals, reading series, and classrooms, for which I am truly grateful to Kitty Lewis at Brick Books, who has gone out of her way to facilitate this. I read a lot of Canadian literature, along with reviews and criticism, I subscribe to several Canadian literary journals, and I also attend The Writers' Union of Canada frequently, which, taken together, help me to feel connected to the concerns of other Canadian writers.

In *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, several poems were written in or about Canada, such as "Dalí D'Hiver" (Montreal), "Just Another Story about Billy the Kid" (Toronto), "Fragrance of the Moon" (Vancouver), and "Monkey Paws, Railway Ties" (Montreal). Parts of *Edge Effects* are more focused on things Canadian, for example several of the poems began from interviews and paintings by Canadian artist Peter Doig ("Years in a Leaky Boat," "Night Deeper than Water"), there is a poem set in Calgary and Muskoka ("Reality Beside Itself"), one written in Banff ("Self as Parchment"), and one from an inspiring visit to Saskatchewan in 2009.

Since 2006 I have been doing collaborative *renga* writing with three Canadian poets: Mary di Michele, Susan Gillis, and Jane Munro. This has been an amazing experience for us. We mostly work online, by email, and meet in person once a year, in the country, to write and rewrite and drink wine and laugh. We have a web page and a book, *Whisk*, published by Pedlar Press in 2013. We call ourselves Yoko's Dogs. This experience of collaborative writing has really fostered and deepened my ties with Canada. It's a very rigorous poetry routine, and it influences the way I think about poetry.

MSB: Although *renga* writing is a very strict form, with rules and patterns to be followed, it is also open to plurality and to the unexpected due to its collaborative element. How does this combination stimulate your poetical imagination?

JC: I like challenges, and I love the porous boundaries of alternating seventeen and fourteen syllables. For those unfamiliar with four-person *renga*, the first person writes an opening *hokku* (seventeen syllables), followed by the second person who links to this via the fourteen syllable *waki*; then the third person tackles the *daisan* of seventeen syllables, the "disjunctive linking," and the fourth person writes the *ageku*, or closing fourteen syllables. We alternate order, naturally, so each of us has learned to write from each of the four positions within *renga*.

I have found when I am working intensely on *renga* that my imagination becomes attuned to the rhythm of these two syllabic counts; this alters my language use, and, since *renga* doesn't work with metaphor or abstract language, it forces me to ask if the poem I have written can be detected with one or more of the senses. If not, out it goes. Also there is the element of

surprise, the unexpected, or the so-called hinge of the poem, which makes each piece a mini-revelation of perception, pun or alliteration. We are very democratic. Each of us has to accept each poem, and we all act as editors. This keeps the language and imagery sharp and fresh.

MSB: Another aspect that intrigues me in your writing is the question of perspective. Many of your poems suggest the intricate negotiations between observer (maybe the lyrical persona, the traveller, the speaker) and observed (spaces travelled, flora, fauna, people, art). Yet, their interactions often destabilize the direction of the observing "gaze" (the observer is not always the only one watching), as poems such as "Belém" and "Mato Grosso," in *South of the Tudo Bem Café*, "Mountain of Mist and Cloud," in *Jaguar Rain*, and more recently "Golden," in *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, seem to suggest. What part does perspective play in the composition of a poem?

JC: I do like to alternate the position of the speaker within poems, particularly because I notice that in the process of observing an incident or a sound pattern that stands out, the observer morphs to a certain extent, both inside and outside the poem.

In "Mountain of Mist and Cloud," the poetic persona begins as a god, though bemusedly, merely a minor mountain god, poking gentle fun at monotheism; then envoicing Mee as she has a dialogue with the mountain, Pico da Neblina, she hopes fervently to climb. Here, she is the explorer, through and through, wanting to be "the first European / up the southern approach." But she has doubts, and may need to use feathers, bound to her upper arm, to enable the expedition to continue. When she encounters the Waika shaman, there is an abrupt dislocation, as though she takes a step outside herself, wondering, "What am I doing here?" The only way she can reconnect with the mountain and the Waika culture is to transform into one of her beloved flowers, and this allows her to continue upward, "Shall I lift my carnelian skirts / and begin the ascent?"

In "Golden" (*Botero's Beautiful Horses*), Remedios Varo's painting is very rich and fantastic so my instinct was to bring some of the poetic imagery back to the level of biological "magic," for example listening in on the dialogues of leaf-cutting ants, watching the luna moth preen before a mirror. So the observer slowly moves around inside the scene being created, dreamily transitioning from land to water as she climbs into a gondola, but near the end steps mysteriously outside this "golden orange spiral city" when her gondola tilts. This kind of layering of movement and charged change reflects the complexity of our psyches and appeals to me.

MSB: What does your more recent work on *ekphrasis* allow you to accomplish in relation to creating newness in language? How does the intertwining between word and visual image collaborate in the construction of meaning in your poetry?

JC: I have moved and evolved in my emphasis on *ekphrasis*, from the most visual, working within the Amazonian flora of Margaret Mee, through the fantastical Mexican dream-time in Remedios Varo, the abstract but very emotionally charged paintings of Paul Klee, the re-envisioning of some Canadian landscape elements and myths through the eyes of Peter Doig, human figures and their phenomenal diversity in Marlene Dumas, and the use of language as visual art in Jenny Holzer.

I think that the combination of the influences of Klee/Doig/Dumas/Holzer have had the most dramatic effects on my efforts to articulate poetry differently. This is because these painters have forced me to think more deeply about ideas and words, not so visually. For example, a poem in *The Fiddlehead* in 2010 called "Years in a Leaky Boat," which was stimulated by a Peter Doig work, hints at this change in the final stanza: "This is a quasi-representational work of art, / no to "red sky at night," / but yes to scorpion red beneath the prow." The poem "The Sources of the Self," published in *PRISM,* very clearly turns away from exteriors: "It feels like infinity / could take up residence in me, some rough place / like my liver, that won't see daylight."

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Derrick Stacey Denholm

Ground-Truthing: POT (point of termination

Checklist for fieldworkers: Trees are reliable witnesses and some poets follow their laterals. Worm-routed by trace heavy metals, some maps "commit sociology" while others interconnect with intangible elusives. While some maps muzzle moss to the goal of a full stop, when allowed to speak, only the greatest diversity of maps will get closest to the truth of trees. As stories ground-truth by transition zone along the misstep of industrial mismappings, the palimpsest of anadromous salmon remap themselves deep within trees to reveal which ones are which.

Locating datum in the field notes where contiguous layers time slow compilations: Considerable, the answers of trees grow young boles into poetic questions, while many young poems bewilder the old root and rhizome phrase. As green resilience, leaves gather many kinds of knowledges and many shelves of books forest transformation into potential nurse logs. Factory-processed, horizontal stacks flip static to the vertical across libraries cut-off from forests. Today, registered professional foresters joke that we log trees in order to do the paperwork required to log trees.

An altern-modern forbearance: mosses are stop-gaps, scabbing over cartesian dualities, slowing commercialization, resisting standardization. Mountain hemlock trees often live for 700 years. Conifer cone crops peak every 7 years. My East Van haircut has been pterygoid for 7 months. This line took 7 seconds to write. On the West Coast, ground-floor bookstores feed the majority of their knowledge to silverfish. Everywhere, dictionaries flip open to gatefold illustrations of trees and even though forests are stands, they will all fall before they will run.

Just as a poem should not be confused between "what it is and what it does," ecological science should not be confused between what it does and does not reveal: Young forests do more than sequester carbon and old forests do more than give what they take. Old redcedar forests produce high levels of methane, medicine and culture and 10 nurse logs anywhere are worth more than 100 CEOs in Terminal City. Respect is not just a gimmick response to the equation of love + respect / solitude + time but is an awaking to what resides: *Dm małdu txa̲'nii goo da k'wan:*

Luk'wil ts'üü yeen a k̲'ala Ksyeen dił 'lii holtga demtii da la̲xdii. Gyet nłüü ada̲ga̲n wilt bała da sgyeda na'aat. 'Naga wuwaaldiya gwa̲'a̲ ligi ndaasn sga'nakt, dza̲ga łaxłaxsa g̲anga̲n ts'alu dił ga'an'onu. Stuul hana̲'a̲m wa̲n nłguułkt a txadoosda g̲alts'ap. Nłoomsga gyeda txa̲'nii yets'isk. Aam dza heelda ma̲k̲'ooxs da suunda gya'wn dił xts'ii sg̲a̲n dza̲was da g̲alksa g̲ayna̲. Lu t'ooxłga gyidza asdihawi dił 'nii g̲an gyisigoo gyisi'aks. Liksgyedm g̲a̲lts'ap wil 'waatgit dił dm k̲'a lisaaẅsga'nm na̲goo̲ga dm ho'ya̲xsm. Lu t'ooxłga gyidza asdihawi dił 'nii g̲an gyisi̲goo gyisi'aks.

(Tsimshian phrases adapted from the *S'malgya̲x* Living Legacy Talking Dictionary, UNBC 2013)

Neil Querengesser

"God in his blank spaces"
Quantum Theology in Tim Lilburn's *Names of God*

The poetry and poetics of Tim Lilburn have evolved in complex and challenging ways over the last three decades. His literary expressions encompass aspects of religious mysticism, Greek philosophy, arcane knowledge, ancient and modern science, medical pathology, and deep ecology, among other subjects. Especially in his philosophical and ecological concerns, Lilburn has affinities with contemporary Canadian poets such as Dennis Lee, Don McKay, Jan Zwicky, and Robert Bringhurst. Mark Dickinson identifies Lilburn as the "catalyst" (65) of this highly credentialed yet still somewhat unfamiliar group that has been engaged over the last twenty years in continuing conversations about poetry as an essential and vital means of coming to understand our present reality. According to Dickinson, these poets are redefining our relationship to nature by asking "foundational questions about how we perceive and think and relate to non-human nature, questions that encourage us to look beyond the language of sustainability and reconsider the basic facts of our very existence" (62). Through his poetry, Lilburn evinces a fundamental desire to probe deeply into new ways of understanding our existence through reimagined encounters with this non-human world and to search for "the erotic life" ("Philosophical" 96) in the deepest philosophical, ecological, and spiritual senses of the term. But while these concerns are manifest in his more recent work and his conversations on poetics and philosophy with the aforementioned poets, it is helpful to see just how early in his poetic career Lilburn was already formulating some of his most important insights by breaking through what Dickinson has identified as "a rigid division in Western thought that has kept thinking and singing separate from each other for hundreds of years" (62).

Critical studies of Lilburn by Darryl Whetter, Gregory Maillet, and Jenny Kerber have focused on themes of desire, ecology, and spirituality. These articles, along with reviews of his poems, have clustered primarily around Lilburn's later publications such as *Moosewood Sandhills*, *Orphic Politics*, and the Governor General's Award-winning *Kill Site*. Such studies most prominently feature the intensely observant and contemplative consciousness for which he has become recognized. His later poems, along with philosophical essays in such collections as *Living in the World as if It Were Home*, permit detailed exploration of his concentrated focus on the relationship between the self and the "othered" worlds of nature and the body made strange. However, such intensive focus also characterizes Lilburn's relatively neglected earlier poetry, particularly the concluding five-poem sequence in his first collection, *Names of God*, published in 1986. Already evident in this sequence, wresting evocative and challenging images from the complexities of twentieth-century physics, are the contemplative dynamics of his later work. Simultaneously, the poems of this erstwhile Jesuit embody some complex theological concerns. More specifically, Lilburn's intricately entwined scientific and theological contemplations in these poems establish fundamental aspects of his poetics, particularly regarding connections between the underlying paradoxes of quantum physics and apophatic or "negative" theology, a search for "God in his blank spaces" (Lilburn, *Names* 94). This sequence implicitly *and* explicitly challenges a worldview embodied in both Newtonian and Einsteinian classical physics, with their assumptions of an ultimately understandable and coherent universe, and an ontotheology based on a God that can be known through and perhaps even contained by language. By challenging this world view, the sequence also reflects a poststructural awareness of and concern for the paradoxical nature and limits of language itself. While aspects of the scientific and the theological complicate much of Lilburn's later poetry, they are seldom involved as fully as in these early poems.

The five poems comprising the sequence explore the nature of God, the cosmos, light, mind, and matter. The sequence begins with two poetic portraits, one of Albert Einstein and one of Niels Bohr, giants of twentieth-century physics whose legendary debates on the nature of quantum physics, particularly at the 1927 Solvay conference in Brussels, Belgium, infuse both these and the three following poems. The entire sequence reflects a contemplative desire that weaves through theology, cosmology, photology, and teleology, a desire that is as intellectually slippery and as imaginatively stimulating as its tantalizing yet often obscure objects.

Indeed, a recurring focus in both Lilburn's early and recent texts is that of desire.[1] In *Living in the World as if It Were Home*, Lilburn comments that he is interested not in theology in the traditional sense but desire; he nevertheless qualifies that distinction by noting the close connections between theology and desire when he says "the sort of erotic experience that draws me has been cast either in Christian theological language or in the dialectical language of Plato." "The eros for the world," he goes on to say, "unfolds in the same way as dialectic and the eros for God have been understood to unfold" (xv). For Lilburn, both theology and philosophy are manifestations of desire. Indeed, the word *desire*, from the Latin *desiderare*, literally "*de-sidera*, from the stars," implies paradoxically both a derivation (in a physical sense) and a separation (in a spiritual sense) of human beings from the stars and, by extension, things heavenly. This concept partially informs both Judaeo-Christian theology and Platonic philosophy, albeit in different ways. This early sequence articulates a desire engendered by an awareness of this derivation and separation as powerfully as in Lilburn's later, more "worldly" poetry. Most importantly, these early manifestations of desire extend not only to the theological and philosophical, but significantly, and perhaps foundationally, to the scientific and the linguistic.

The opening poems of this sequence figure desire in terms of the two preeminent and often opposing physical theories developed in the early twentieth century, relativity and quantum physics, iconically represented by Einstein and Bohr respectively. By far the more famous of the two scientists, Einstein developed the special and general theories of relativity that radically transformed our understanding of classical Newtonian physics and our perception of the universe. Central to Einstein's theory are two important concepts, first that matter (mass) and energy are identical, and second that the speed of light is universally constant; the relationship between mass and energy is expressed as $e=mc^2$—that is to say, energy equals mass times the speed of light squared—a formula intriguingly illustrated in terms of desire in the sequence's opening poem "Albert Einstein, Berne Patent Office, 1905." The counterpart to this poem, "Niels Bohr at the Copenhagen Movies Thinks of the Happenstance of Matter," wryly encapsulates the spirit of the new quantum physics, represented by Bohr, which radically challenged the classical underpinnings of relativity. Relativity, a deterministic science, describes physical phenomena through equations leading to precise and predictable solutions. The equations of quantum mechanics, conversely, are based on probabilities. Although these equations lead in theory and in

practice to very accurate results and observations, precise predictions and outcomes are impossible. While Einstein had early recognized and predicted some important aspects of quantum physics, he resisted its inherent uncertainties throughout his later career, famously declaring more than once that "God does not play with dice," or variants of that phrase. These two poems, at once opposite and complementary, prepare the way for the dance of desire through theology and science in the three poems that follow.

The first poem arises from the famous papers Einstein published in 1905 while employed at the patent office as a "technical expert / third class" (Lilburn, *Names* 91), based in part on an early thought experiment involving "a person run[ning] after a light wave with the same speed as light" (Isaacson 26). In these papers Einstein explains the physics of Brownian motion, demonstrates the existence of "light-quanta" (photons) and the photoelectric effect, and outlines his special theory of relativity. Lilburn translates the mathematics of this last treatise into the poetics of desire by imagining Einstein travelling at light speed into the still source of matter. In a later essay "How to Be Here?" Lilburn writes that the "vector and velocity [of "a nostalgia for Paradise"] is desire leaning into the unknowable individuality of things; poetry is the artifact of this desire" (*Living* 6), an insight complemented directly by the imagery of this much earlier poem. On this high-speed voyage, Lilburn imagines—as Einstein himself possibly may have imagined—a seriocomic image of the rumpled scientist first encumbered by and then shedding the trappings of his body mass as his desire sharpens to the point of maximum velocity: with his "knees" wedged beneath his "chin," "his stomached lunch / of sausage and Gruyere . . . wobbling beneath him," his famous "carnival check suit burns from his skin" as the universe is squished into his "chest" (91). Einstein's desire reaches literally ecstatic proportions as his velocity approaches the speed of light and he becomes "light, spirit-joy-jet" as "[s]peed sharpens mass to spirit and spirit to koinonia" (91).[2] Then, having reached light speed, desire's maximum velocity, Einstein perceives matter frozen in time, he being coeval now with any light-transmitted information:

> Then, abreast original fire's white zing, a high soprano of speed,
> he gazes across the solemn, silent promontory of matter,
> the chrysochloric head of this light wave, the light wave he loves
> and understands by love, staring at its frozen fields
> of shivering spark, desert still. He finds here stoppedness, impossibility,
> and rubs the flames where his two eyes had been. (92)

At this absolutely still and impossible point, the scientist and the poet have achieved the imagined consummation and obliteration of desire in loving communion with the light wave that has transformed his eyes into sympathetic flames. Within the poem, love appears to transcend and replace language as the medium of understanding as light transforms matter into the pure energy of spirit. However, the "stoppedness, impossibility" that Einstein finds here are paradoxically countered by the words themselves; the poem, like Einstein's thought experiment, achieves only a mental transcendence. Thus the poem's final lines point with wry understatement to the transcendent awareness achieved by the violin-playing scientist as "Ecstasied, wholly othered," his "catgut nerve" becomes the "live wire of the wave's note, a trembling c—" which, "for a musical man . . . / is convincing" (92). "C" is at once number and musical note, pointing to the achieved harmony of Einstein's classical physical theories, theories that, while complex, satisfy the desire of the observer in his observations of an independent reality. "C" is also, of course, a mere sign whose ironic connotations in the poem are completely dependent on their linguistic context. The poem holds these "trembling" and unresolvable possibilities in an impossible tension where desire is satisfied only in the imaginative sense, indirectly pointing toward the next poem in the sequence.

If desire is at least poetically achieved within this rendering of Einstein's classical thought experiment, it is overtly frustrated in the quantum universe of Niels Bohr. In his recent book, *Quantum: Einstein, Bohr and the Great Debate about the Nature of Reality*, Manjit Kumar notes that "[f]or Einstein, a belief in the existence of an observer-independent reality was fundamental to the pursuit of science" (263). However, for Bohr the opposite was in fact the case: "For Bohr," writes Kumar, "the transition from the 'possible' to the 'actual' took place during the act of observation. There was no underlying quantum reality that exists independently of the observer" (263). This implies a paradoxical aspect of modern physics, that subatomic particles do not exist until they are observed. This scientific paradox was to prove a psychological barrier to Einstein who pitted his theories against those of Bohr—and of other quantum theorists such as Heisenberg, Schrödinger, and Dirac—a duel that he was to fight and lose. Indeed, the motif of a duel is central to this second poem, "Niels Bohr at the Copenhagen Movies Thinks of the Happenstance of Matter," where he expresses the paradox of desire for a reality having no independent objective existence. The title and opening lines reflect Bohr's enthusiasm for gunfights in the popular westerns (Kumar 141) of the relatively new art form of the cinema. More importantly,

they reflect an insight he derived from these gunfights that, like his insights into the behaviour of subatomic particles, runs counter to common sense, when Bohr observes that the "evil man," drawing first, "has died again, died as always, his chest exploding / with the late-drawing hero's virgin slug" (Lilburn, *Names* 93). Commenting on recent "laboratory gunfights" studied by a research team at the University of Birmingham that confirm that the duellist who draws first normally loses, Tom Feilden notes that Bohr had earlier conducted this same experiment with his colleagues using cap guns. According to Feilden, when "Bohr noticed that the man who drew first [in the westerns] invariably got shot, and speculated that the intentional act of drawing and shooting was slower to execute than the action in response . . . [he] always drew second and always won" (n. pag.). Bohr demonstrated that instinctive responses are fractionally quicker than conscious decisions: "Here is something beyond doubt: the inspired hand / outsprints the tricky draw" (Lilburn, *Names* 93). The counterintuitive conclusion of these lines is similar to many concepts of quantum physics dating back even to Thomas Young's 1801 famous double-slit experiment with light interference, the surprising results of which demonstrated the wave/particle duality of light. A universe governed by the probabilities of quantum physics will draw against the classical theory of relativity in the succeeding poems.

In Lilburn's conception of relativity, the dominant imagery appears to be of light and love; in his conception of Bohr's quantum physics, it is gunplay, both in the dangerous and benign meanings of the term. Indeed, the larger concepts of play and chance combine with the serious pursuits described in the poem, as Bohr muses on another physicist, Ernest Rutherford, "plink[ing] helium ions at a hole in nothing / trigger happy as a rodent-popping farmboy," and even Yahweh "play[ing] with fire, casting blown coals / with the grin of a crooked croupier" (*Names* 93). Desire is either frustrated or sublimated, or its fulfillment perpetually postponed, since its objects can never be precisely determined. In a bizarre, superficial sense, the physicist, like a malevolent but inquisitive deity, is shooting in the dark at a target that reveals itself only after the shot has been fired. Instead of consummation achieved through the imagined intellectual unity with light, as with Einstein, here the efforts of desire to locate the Other are met with "God's dark laughter" as matter whirls in an erotic *danse macabre*: "electrons lark a fervent calypso; they houchie-couchie in a Hungarian fit / round the muscle-bound proton. God is play" (*Names* 93). For Einstein this would be a diabolical craps game with a vengeance, as quantum and classical physics collide chaotically.

What is the object of desire in a universe with no observer-independent reality? The two opening poems just discussed, one dealing with the properties of light on a cosmic scale and the other with the quantum mechanics of subatomic particles, establish the paradoxical concepts informing the following poems. These explore the question of the ultimate object of desire, from intertwining scientific and theological perspectives, as indicated by the title of the next poem in the sequence, "A Theology of Subatomic Particles." While the poems do not necessarily reflect any sustained attempt to achieve a Grand Unified Theory of physics and theology, they nevertheless offer some imaginative connections, dancing around the desire for theological and scientific understanding and expression. Yet they are not mere exercises in natural theology, using science to arrive at a direct understanding or proof of God. Instead, they offer the opportunity to contemplate ontology from both theological and scientific perspectives, from perspectives often considered at odds with each other. And while these poems may not demonstrate, as physicist-theologian John Polkinghorne avers, that the "true Theory of Everything . . . is trinitarian theology" (*Quantum* 110), they complement Polkinghorne's conclusions about connections between theology and physics. The desire for understanding and knowledge informing both these disciplines is complicated and enriched by its exuberant poetic portrayal; the object of this desire is at once both nothing and everything.

The poems in this sequence that weave together scientific and theological concepts, bringing the reader close to both reality and mystery without ever really arriving, are illuminated by the thoughts of physicist Werner Heisenberg on the problems of direct description in his essay "Language and Reality in Modern Physics." Heisenberg notes that "the concept of complementarity introduced by Bohr into the interpretation of quantum theory has encouraged the physicists to use an ambiguous rather than an unambiguous language" (81). From this he argues that the limitations of language necessitate such usage in a scientific field that lacks the expectation of objective certainty: "One might perhaps call [this expectation of certainty] an objective tendency or possibility, a 'potentia' in the sense of Aristotelian philosophy" (82). Further, the language used to describe this *potentia* is "a language that produces pictures in our mind, but together with them the notion that the pictures . . . represent only a tendency toward reality" (82). Certainly such thoughts generally complement the insights of poststructuralist theories that deny textual certainty. Yet, just as it does in the use of language by quantum physicists, a desire—albeit ultimately

unfulfilled—for connection between the word and the world persists in these poems. More specifically, they embody a palpable desire to approach some understanding of "God in his blank spaces," or at least its *potentia*. One route toward such understanding involves an awareness of Paul Ricoeur's "limit-expressions" (122) which, as David E. Klemm has noted, "function to transgress or overturn the normal course of metaphoric process, and to intensify its effect so that the forms of language 'converge upon an extreme point which becomes their point of encounter with the infinite" (Ricoeur 109; qtd. in Klemm 64). Whether Lilburn actually achieves this extreme point of encounter is undeterminable; whether he *approaches* it, achieving *potentia*, is worth considering.

The three poems concluding the sequence are entitled, in order, "A Theology of Subatomic Particles," "Photons," and "Light's Chant." Implicit in the first title but also informing the others is the presence of "limit-expressions" linking physics and theology. In what way, if any, can quantum mechanics contribute an understanding of a divine presence; or is such an understanding closed to scientific inquiry? From the perspective of ordinary language and reason, perhaps the two must remain perpetually separate, science treating the essence of the physical world and theology dealing with non-empirical matters of faith. Yet Lilburn's poetry suggests that the world of subatomic particles may be a point of convergence for the two. Polkinghorne has argued in *Science and Theology* that "just as quantum theory is forced by its actual experience to wrestle with the strange duality of wave and particle, so Christian theology is forced by its actual experience of the risen Christ to wrestle with the strange duality of humanity and divinity" (100). He later acknowledges that the "Christological counterpart of quantum field theory still remains to be discovered" (*Quantum* 90). But he draws a significant potential analogy from this regarding the possibility of a "dual-aspect monism, a mind/matter theory [that] might be possible if it too incorporated within itself a degree of intrinsic indefiniteness," later suggesting that within an "ontologically interpreted chaos theory . . . [a]ctive information might prove to be the scientific equivalent of the immanent working of the Spirit on the 'inside' of creation [wherein] the spiritual character of divine influence would correspond to pure input of information" (*Science* 61; 89). These dualities—wave/particle, mind/matter, and human/divine—stretch across the complex playing field of the three concluding poems.

The first, "A Theology of Subatomic Particles," comprises three sections: "In the Atomic Canyons," "Palpable White Utterance," and "A Dance without

a Dancer." This last subtitle, with its nod towards Yeats' poem on desire "Among School Children," is one of several literary allusions that explore self-transformation through desire. These include *Alice in Wonderland*, T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and the myth of Prometheus. In the opening section, readers are taken on a fantastic voyage deep into subatomic space, "hearing" the "tingngngngngngng," "dadahdahdahdahdahdaaaaaaaaa," and "fzzzzzzzzzzzzz" of infinitesimal particles hurtling through God's "blank spaces" of the "atomic canyons" (*Names* 94). As significant as the sound imagery, however, is the creative imagery of subatomic light. Lilburn refers at one point to "Xvarenah mushroom clouds in the aphasia / Of the spoken world," a direct reference to the "sacred, seminal, luminous, and fiery fluid" of Zoroastrianism (Eliade 104), not so much to equate this with an achieved desire, but to reach toward what Mircea Eliade has called "the 'experiential' character of the majority of the mythologies, theologies, and gnoses based on the equivalence: light-divinity-spirit-life" (95). These lines offer an example of Ricoeur's "limit-expression." The phrase "Xvarenah mushroom clouds" embodies a complex metaphorical image, a divinely hallucinogenic vision of an atomic explosion—the ultimate solution to the equation $e=mc^2$. This image asserts itself even while being threatened with erasure both on the page and in the mind, by the term "aphasia," the failure of language to speak the "world"/word. The figurative complex of these two lines is a transgression, to use Ricoeur's terminology, of the normal metaphoric process. It offers the possibility of a "point of encounter with the infinite" (Ricoeur 109) through what Northrop Frye, adapting Giambattista Vico's idea, calls the "hieroglyphic" type of verbal expression, one that does not directly describe or define but achieves "the feeling that subject and object are linked by a common power or energy" (6). In other passages, references to subatomic light are couched in Christian terms, as the poet chants—with echoes of both Christian liturgy and Maha Mantra— "Lumen, lumen, lumen, / Lumen Christi, Christi, fire" (94), likening the subatomic particles to

> Christic chunks of energy
> With the translucent faces of children, quanta, children,
> Little golden children, subnuclear anawim, with golden,
> Pre-Raphaelite wavicle hairdos (94)

The complex imagery of this passage personifies scientific phenomena through both sobering and whimsical tropes. The imagery of children as "subnuclear anawim" (a Hebrew term for the unprotected or dispossessed) is paradoxically juxtaposed with the idealized artistic rendering of "wavicle"s

(the scientific term for the wave/particle duality of light) as aspects of the children's "hairdos." In the second half of this section, readers return to their full-sized selves, experiencing the connections to this subatomic world in real time, where through their eyes and ears "The living mind hears photons flick slag tails of mathematics / Across the photosensitive palate of the soul" and "a mazurka of particles pizzicatoed / On the taut ganglion of cognitive strain, the expectant nerve / Wanging against its soundbox of bone nahnahnahnahnah" (94). Such lines contain several limit-expressions that oscillate between energetic imaginative absurdities and a profound potential logic that approaches but never arrives at an objective assertion of the text's theological and scientific dimensions.

The poem may be read in the context of apophatic theology, a searching for God in "his blank spaces," spaces that, according to the postulates of quantum physics, do not exist until one begins looking for them. As Jenny Kerber (86-87) and Gregory Maillet (228) have noted, Lilburn's poetics embodies apophaticism, the *via negativa*, involving a contemplation of the divine through the process of negation. Lilburn may be trying to wrench his readers into a counterintuitive perception of a cosmos that has no independent existence beyond our observations. But while the physics of such a perception may be relatively new, the process is not, owing much to the early Christian mystics, particularly Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite who conceives of the ineffability of God as "the Divine Dark" ("Christianity"). According to Pseudo-Dionysius, "[t]hrough a gradual process of ascension from material things to spiritual realities and an eventual stripping away of all created beings in 'unknowing,' the soul arrives at 'union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge'" (*Mystical Theology*, chapter 1; qtd. in "Christianity" n. pag.). He also writes in *On the Divine Names* (echoed in Lilburn's title), "[c]reation is a process of emanation, whereby the divine Being is "transported outside of Himself . . . to dwell within the heart of all things. . ." (iv. 13; qtd. in "Christianity"). What Pseudo-Dionysius was postulating much earlier, without any direct knowledge of quantum physics, is reflected now in Lilburn's poetic sequence with, perhaps, greater immediacy and relevance.

This apophaticism also informs the second section, "Palpable White Utterance," whose opening lines allude both to Einstein's contention that God is subtle but not malicious and the first words of Psalm 145:3, "Great is the Lord": "Subtle / as this / White music blanching nerve / Like tungsten, this song shivering against bone, / Is the Lord . . ." (Lilburn, *Names* 95); this is immediately followed by a possible allusion to Psalm 145:21, "Square

roots upon cubes, cubes upon cubes / Ssssssyllables of his Holy Name" (95). But far from the reverent affirmation expressed in the Jewish *ashrei* of which this Psalm is a part, here the scientific and poetic knowledge moves further into the unknowing that is characteristic of apophaticism, where God's "Holy Name" is simultaneously invoked and made strange through both the abstract and concrete connotations of mathematical (and sinisterly sibilant) syllables. The blank (apophatic) spaces of this section constitute "a time-independent wavefield" where "light and spirit / Spirit and light, meet . . . in Limbo's dark lobe of nonsense . . . nuded of matter, transfixed by the sex smell / Of the animal other" (95). The contradictory aspects of the imagery's eroticism (if light and spirit are "nuded of matter," whence the olfactory signals?) create another limit-expression for deeper contemplation of the absent divinity. As in the first section of this poem, mind, devoid of matter, becomes "the dark, / The proto-air" where nothing exists but "the abnegating principle of swiftness" through which matter is suddenly spoken into being on "a stem of speed blooming / Mass like a flower, a white rose ohohohohohooooooooo. / Palpable white utterance. / World formed on a fire tongue" (95). This imagery alludes directly to the apocalyptic vision at the end of Eliot's "Little Gidding," "When the tongues of flame are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one" (48). However, unlike the certainty of Eliot's lines, Lilburn's imagery resists closure as Einstein continues his light-speed joy-ride on a blossoming rose ("ohohohohohooooooooo") even as divine speech and creation assert themselves in the final line, "World formed on a fire tongue," recalling both the Paraclete of Acts 2:3-4 and the Logos of John 1. These and the concluding lines also both juxtapose and combine the *fiat lux* of Genesis and the Big Bang of science into a startling, disorienting, and darkly comic third image grounding the cosmic in the quotidian: "The bag lady in the park explodes! / Her bonfire hand phoenixes from a photon inferno within her bones / And rolls an orange from her bag, a fireball" (Lilburn, *Names* 95). Is this dazzlingly alliterative display of images merely a figurative description of a homeless woman reaching for her breakfast? More likely it involves the narrator archly asserting that creation is not a singularity; it is constantly unfolding in the most ordinary as well as the most extraordinary acts and natural processes, including poetic creation, a reminder of the ubiquitous power of the equation $e=mc^2$.

But, as the poem's final section, "A Dance Without A Dancer," indicates, these are fictions of a classical, knowable cosmos. Beneath these fictions "Is

God in his blank spaces, / In his boredom, dicing jackpot combinations of c=wf, e=mc^2" (96).[3] Is this apparently sarcastic image reflective of Lilburn's own view of a cosmos constituted by quantum mechanics, or is it possible that even this image of a dice-playing God is part of a larger as yet unknowable design? Whatever the answer, beneath these fictions "Is desire's vibrating dialectic toward combustion / That flares a pandemonia of stunning apparitions / Rilled with shaking light" that eventually "Shimmers, cools, / Hardens firm into the temperate, blue planet of the eye" (96). And perhaps in the coalescent imagery of these final lines is the satisfaction of imaginative desire and the identification of its object, regardless of the quantum "jackpot combinations" that may have been necessary to form the "blue planet of the eye."

The final two poems, "Photons," and "Light's Dance," continue to juxtapose an objective knowable cosmos with one that may not exist apart from our observation. "Photons," while imaginatively stimulating, promises the hopeful fulfillment of desire but in the end appears to resolve nothing. In particular, the poem's metaphors tease out the implications of Gilbert Ryle's earlier attack on philosophy's "official doctrine" promulgated by dualist Rene Descarte (11-18) which Ryle infamously dubbed "the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine" (15-16). Ryle's refutation of Descartes' mind-body duality also reflects emergent thinking in the 1940s from the relatively new science of quantum mechanics. Physicist Erwin Schrödinger argues from his atomic and subatomic research that life exists essentially because genetic material has enough organization to overcome the atomic entropy that would otherwise level it (73-74). From this material basis of life he extrapolates in *Mind and Matter* that consciousness is essentially a process manifesting itself in the "*learning* of the living substance" (99). This monistic view of life was later to acquire much greater impetus in both the physical and social sciences. Indeed, physicist Roger Penrose has even proposed a controversial theory that quantum oscillations in the brain's microtubules are responsible for what we term consciousness (133).

In "Photons," the material reductionism behind such approaches tends to become a source of desperate irony:

> Look at us. Look at us. Cognizant potentia coiled
> in a panic spring, pattern of our fated spin of one,
> helixed by desire, signatured by a Cain-like X, which is us mostly truly, but
> not-us. Our soul's an adolescent rash; gasoline auroras
> of appetite menace flashpoint. Believe us, self hurtling from self—
> vocation—is terrible. Yet it's a joke,
> the casino touch of our lives, the Lord's Gedankenexperiment,

> our skull bones dice rolling
> from His hands, as He flicks a wrist, shoots, and wonders
> what world the world will be. (Lilburn, Names 97)

On the one hand, these lines reflect a nihilistic resignation to the absurdity of existence in a quantum universe where we are merely subject to the forces and laws of its creation, here personified as a reckless crap-shooting "Lord." The double helix of our DNA and its specialized chromosomal forms ("Cain-like X"), ironically echoing the themes of Genesis 3 and 4, both engender our desire and lead us into exile. On the other hand, the lines also reflect a dualistic view of human nature, if not in the sense of Descartes' "official doctrine," then in what is implied through the assertion of such images during our "transcendent microsecond" of existence through "the rocketry of will" (98). In other words, if the universe is no more than the sum of its quantum processes, what then is the value of such poetic—or indeed of any—exploration? The poem's final lines hold out a grammatically ambiguous conclusion: "We do not matter. Lumina Christi. / Broken body of spark confettiing the blank spaces" (98). The pun of the quotation's first sentence embodies aspects of both classical and quantum physics. "Do" and "matter" may be read as expletive followed by (negative) verb, that is to say, our existence is meaningless, which, in a purely mechanistic world, may be so. Alternatively, with a slight shift of focus, the word "do" may be read as an active indicative verb itself, the object of which is "not matter"; that is to say, our doings transcend matter, and there is more that defines our existence than the interplay of subatomic particles. In the first instance, the "Lumina Christi [light of Christ]" is no more than an immeasurable scattering of photons in the blank subatomic spaces of existence. In the second instance, if we "do not matter" in the sense of performing beyond the material aspect of our existence, then the "[b]roken body of spark" with its allusions to the crucifixion can indicate meaning beyond the blank spaces it illuminates. An unresolvable duality akin to the wave/particle duality of light concludes this poem, transitioning from particles to waves in the next.

"Light's Chant," the final poem, cradled by two phonemes of the yogic "om [aum]," rides its self-generated waves in an elegant hymn to an essentially Christic creator and creation that, while not negating the indeterminacy of quantum theory, affirms the beauty of a classically determined cosmos. Light appears in several forms. It is "a dance, a dance, a golden musculature of flame, / flexed in a choreography of desire" (99); it is "a wind, a fire-spermed wind . . . a dance, / a radical pirouette on an absent foot" (99); it is, especially,

"fire's chrysalis, sinuous convections / feathering into flame, the body of Light, / spirit into flesh, flight into flare" (99). The lines suggest light's primacy, particularly through its wavelike manifestations and incarnations into matter, "flesh," and "fire." If matter is essentially energy in a highly specialized state, then such binaries as mind/matter or spirit/flesh lose their traditional signifying power while still retaining the sense of each separate term. Both terms remain signifiers of potential realities, but as quantitatively, not necessarily qualitatively different. The final lines of the poem and of the entire sequence recall Einstein's consummation with light in the opening poem as well as (again) the final lines of Eliot's "Little Gidding" and of Yeats' "Among School Children," with possible allusions to the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

> Ooooooooooo
>
> The birth of Light is a dance, a dance
> muscling the dancer from wind.
> The wind is the world forming
> on a tongue of fire. The wind is in the fire, a breathing. The world is
> a fire
> and ends in fire. Mmmmmmmmmmmmm (100)

These lines suggest no boundary between the material and non-material, the substantial and non-substantial. All is energy, in one form or another. Primal Light acquires being, figured as a "dance," again with emphasis on its wavelike properties. Matter is the manifestation of this dancing Light being muscled from the "wind," a "breathing" spirit that with the "tongue of fire" both forms and is the "world." Allusions to Trinitarian theology bracketed between the sounds of an Eastern meditative chant tend toward the tension of another unresolvable "limit-expression" in this conclusion that already contains within itself the negation (destruction by fire) of the powerful affirmation that it appears to express. "Mmmmmmmmmmmmm" is both the concluding phoneme of "Om" and ironic uncommitted response to the powerful images preceding it.

In "Contemplation and Cosmology," Lilburn says that apophatic knowledge is achieved through contemplation, "the moment when human knowing, lured by the possibility of perfect understanding, is thwarted, shamed, bent back on itself, but continues to know through this shame" (*Living* 27). The impossibility of perfect understanding from a theological perspective is effectively linked in the concluding sequence of *Names of God* to the impossibility, through quantum indeterminacy, of perfect understanding from a scientific perspective. Essential to quantum physics is how the

act of observing and measuring "collapses" a previously indeterminate wave function (Peacock 72-73). Essential to apophaticism is that the act of contemplation may not only create inner change but act as a "vector" that is not only "transcendental" but "bends . . . into the world" by "attend[ing] to things so finely themselves they fall beneath order, law" (Lilburn, *Living* 28). Both Lilburn's early and his later poetry reflect an individual consciousness not yet fully explained or understood, and, thus limited, serving to isolate the self and creating the potential for desire, figured in much poetry, theology, and philosophy as stemming from the need to reconnect with the stars of the heavens or their Creator. Lamenting the paradise remembered by this desire, Lilburn says in his essay "How to Be Here?": "When consciousness crosses the divide into the wilderness of what is there, it expects to find a point of noetic privilege: at last a clear view into the heart of things. But what it does find on the other side is further peculiarity, a new version of distance" (*Living* 4). While most of Lilburn's later poetry and poetics emphasize this "new version of distance," it is already evident in his earliest work, *Names of God*, an understanding of which is essential to comprehending his overall achievements.

Such insights, it may be argued, are best—or perhaps only—achieved through the practice of poetry. Robert Bringhurst has asserted, without being tautological, that "Poetry *is* thinking, real thinking. And real thinking is poetry" (155). Lilburn's early poetry prepares the way for his later work as both a type of singing and a type of thinking even as it already establishes itself as such. What Dennis Lee has said about some aspects of modern verse in general has particular, if unintended, relevance to the poetic sequence studied above: "It resonates with the formal intuitions of relativity and quantum mechanics, where an absolute frame of reference no longer exists" (41). As Dickinson argues, like Lee, Bringhurst, McKay, and Zwicky, Lilburn works with "the multiple resonances of words, the binding properties of metaphor, and other resources available to poets but off limits to prose writers . . ." (63) to arrive at the deep insights into fundamental relationships among poetic, theological, and scientific world views.

NOTES

1 Darryl Whetter observes, for example, that the word "desire" appears in eight of the thirty-three poems of *Moosewood Sandhills* (46).

2 *Koinonia* is a transliteration of the Greek word for fellowship or communion, with specifically Christian overtones in English usage, suggesting in the above quotation the idea of spirit being "sharpen[ed]" to direct communion with God.

3 c=wf: the length of a lightwave (λ (here w)) multiplied by its frequency (f) equals the speed of light (the constant c).

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Christopher Patton

Yarrow

Eerie,
gearuwa,
yerw
Patro-
klos crusht
the bitter
root
from you
to whom all
shone as
viol
arrow,
ray, roar
away

Katherine Ann Roberts

Cascadia Redux
Chronicle of a Return to the (Extra) West

It is never too late to become a student of Laurie Ricou. One does not have to have studied English at the University of British Columbia, nor have his ability to identify a particular plant species nor bird variety, nor share an appreciation of the more challenging British Columbia poets to learn from his profound sense of place: its layers, its sounds, its tensions, its intricacies. In the early pages of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (2002),[1] Ricou feels compelled in a book about place and story to explain his own connection to the region: though a native of Brandon, Manitoba, he had been living on the West Coast for almost two decades at the time of the book's publication and thus claims, albeit rather sheepishly—though I can't see why—"insider"/"local" status. For Ricou, his years spent in Vancouver have to count for something or rather they say something of the "upstart indigenousness that has permeated the urbanization of the Pacific Northwest over the past two centuries" (7). As a Canadian born in Prince George, British Columbia, raised in Vancouver, educated in Ontario and Quebec in both official languages, and who has lived and taught in both Canada and the United States, I, personally, see no need for qualifiers, no need to count years spent, nor dues paid. Ricou has made the Pacific Northwest his later life work. He has now a second West Coast self to add to his earlier prairie self; the two live together in shared residency: "I soon realized that I was not confined to one home" he continues (an observation that resonates with my own expanded, complicated notion of Canadianness), "that, although I would carry my prairie home with me . . . I also felt almost immediately at home with

evergreen mountains and even mist. I set out to read my way into that place and climate. This book [*The Files*] is a record of that continuing encounter" (8).

As it turns out, *The Files* would become my guide, my *livre de bord* as it were, for my own re-encounter with the Pacific Northwest, part of which I would like to recount in these pages as a way to pay tribute to Ricou—his teaching, his philosophy—and as a means to engage in a discussion, ten years after the book's publication, on matters of Cascadia, Canadian-American literary comparisons and border stories. After many years spent far from the Pacific coast (my first home region) pursuing research on Quebec nationalism, my interests have widened to include literary and cinematic representations of the West on both sides of the Canada-US border. I knew from the outset that Ricou's work would be essential to my current endeavours on many levels: first, as a veritable treasure chest of what and whom to read of Northwest writers both Canadian and American; second, as a style of place-based textual criticism; and finally, on a more philosophical level, as an example of how to be a reader, to be a critic, to be oneself in *that place* of "saltwater tides, high-gloss foliage, arbutus trees, unhorizontal landforms" (16) and "storied mist" (17). Reading *The Files* thus constituted the first step in a reconciliation of sorts with my (old) home place, my lost place. For example, there is no more eloquent tribute to the (non)kaleidoscopic shades of grey, shifting in the dim light, where the land meets the sea, than Ricou's blending of quotes by Bertrand Sinclair, Brenda Peterson, and Carol Windley (two Canadians and an American no less), and his own observations looking southwest from Tofino's Wickaninnish Inn on a mid-February afternoon: "We study the colour that is no colour. Sea, waves, beach, trees, sky, islands, all—in light rain and lighter fog—shades of monochrome. An entire landscape seems to be printed in greyscale" (17). This greyscale is echoed in his mind by the black and white photographs on display in the halls of the Inn, bringing to mind the Burkian notion of the sublime as greyscape: indistinctness, unknowability. This section of *The Files* is rounded out by an observation in late April upon contemplation of William H. New's remarks on Daryl Hine's poem "Point Grey." That place name for the western extremity of Vancouver, "where the University of British Columbia, and my office, sit, is itself an expression of the *somehow* and *not exactly* of mist." "This version of my home," he concludes, "the westcoast edge, is a paradox of point (absolute, definite) and grey (obscure, indeterminate)" (18). The "point," here, is an attempt to embrace the wet and the edge, to entertain the possibility of delusion, of seeing something,

as Windley suggests, "just outside the range of ordinary light" (qtd. in Ricou 17). We are light years and shades from Margaret Atwood's infamous quip: "Vancouver is the suicide capital of the country. You just keep going west until you run out. You come to the edge. Then you fall off" (44). With Ricou you do not fall off. You stand and contemplate. You attempt to listen for the poetics of the wet edge/forest/point. Books, Ricou claims, have taught him the restfulness of grey, "just to stand and stare at the missed and misted" (17). One needs only to choose wisely.

So I set out. Back. West. I wandered the alleys of Victoria, drank coffee in a caboose in Blaine, sat quietly in damp, cold, car ferry lineups, waiting to go "islanding." I observed the students on the campus of Western Washington University (WWU) in Bellingham, where I had the good fortune to spend a couple of months, looking for signs of cross-border "West-coastness." But as an untrained anthropologist, I learning nothing other than that they appeared slender and healthy and displayed a penchant for tattoos. I donned an anorak and wandered creeks (both Roberts and False) and seawalls and sometimes quietly grieved for the irrecoverable side of my lost city. Yet I also rebelled, as unruly students do, because living on the edge is not easy: too much rain and forest and grey and damp and trees coming right down to water's edge. "It was the rough edge of the world, where the trees came smack down to the stones," claims Annie Dillard's Ada Fishburn in her historical novel *The Living* (1992), as she gets her first glimpse of Bellingham Bay in 1855 after an epic westward journey overland. "The shore looked to Ada as if the corner of the continent had got torn off right there, sometime near yesterday, and the dark trees kept growing like nothing happened. The ocean just filled in the tear and settled down" (4). No doubt passages like these did nothing to endear Dillard to her local reading public nor did the rumour in the Bellingham area that she moved away after having openly declared that it simply "rained too much" or that the region was not conducive to real "intellectual life." I am not sure which. Surely I did not need Annie Dillard to help me see my own (home) place; but such is the evocative power of writing. Her dense, mesmerizing account of late-nineteenth-century pioneer life in the Pacific Northwest accompanied me on my re-encounter, the "rough edge" haunting my winding drives through old growth forests.

Eventually, I began to long for another West, for plateaus and valleys, for the dry slopes and blue skies of the British Columbia Interior (towns like Ashcroft, Cache Creek, Spences Bridge, Merritt come to mind) with its

sagebrush perfume and sparse pine trees—thinned out now, tragically, by the pine beetle, which has dotted them brown here and there like the aftermath of a thousand selective lightning strikes. I longed also for the Okanagan, its shimmering lakes and hot brown rock/mountain. I am no poet so I will not attempt here to conjure up in a few words what these landscapes mean to me. But many of British Columbia's best, though now living on the coast, hail from these parts, that is to say from a much different topography than Ricou's celebrated wet and mild and muted misted light (George Bowering and Patrick Lane are but the first two voices that come to mind). British Columbia is in essence a place of interconnected and opposing Wests. The same is true for Washington state where recent discussions of the border, to my surprise, did not focus on the 49th parallel but on the "Cascade Curtain" dividing the West from the East side of the state which differs dramatically in topography, climate, population density and, it appears, political culture.[2] But on the question of coastal-interior interdependence, Ricou, in *The Files*, having anticipated charges of Lower Mainland imperialism, was already slowly and decidedly moving—upriver. In "Island File" he reads in counterpoint two decidedly different texts, American novelist John Keeble's suspense thriller *Yellowfish* (1980) and Canadian poet Daphne Marlatt's long poem *Steveston* (1974). I want to linger on this section of the chapter as I see it illustrating, by way of putting texts "in conversation" with one another, a possible method of doing comparative Canadian-American literary analysis which remains rare in our discipline. "Island File" also offers a way of connecting coast to interior, a model for reading interior towns as "islands." Ricou reads Marlatt's imagined Steveston as both built on an island and an "island of men" while Keeble's description first of lumber and then mining communities of the Idaho Panhandle "built in pockets, ravines, hollows and up against cliffs, the people insular, and the routes of travel serpentine" (qtd. in Ricou 34), evokes another kind of island. Keeble's one-industry towns (his are in Idaho, but one could substitute towns in Montana or British Columbia for similar effect) "are based on extraction of a single resource confined in an inaccessible valley" (34). This description, Ricou argues, shows "the power of the island-idea in the wider Northwest"(34) as it allows Keeble's inland company town to be linked imaginatively to the coastal archipelago. Taking his cue from Keeble, Ricou argues for an interdependence of topographies: "the Northwest always consists of dramatic contrasts of wet and dry. The Fraser River carries down to its mouth from the Interior the soil on which Steveston is built" (35).

Theorizing the rapport between "the dramatic contrasts of wet and dry," the unforgiving wind-swept, sun-parched plateaus and the lush, dense rain, (over)growth, is key, in my view, to reading many western writers whose work encompasses both ecologies, each one reflecting back on the other, be it within a single work in the span of an entire oeuvre. Take for instance, Montana writer, now Seattle resident, Ivan Doig. His *Winter Brothers: A Season at the Edge of America* (1980) Ricou cites as a tempting yet imperfect guide (4) for the continuing encounter that is *The Files*. Doig's text is both personal essay and natural history, a retracing of the ethnographer and historian James Gilchrist Swan and his time among the Makah Indians of the northern Olympic peninsula in the late-nineteenth century. I understood *Winter Brothers*, in true student spirit, to be a required text for unlocking the mysteries of place in the Pacific Northwest. But it merely confused and befuddled me. The book does thoughtfully probe the multiple meanings of the very last land on the continent. Reading the ethnographer Swan, Doig ponders how Swan has become "a being of our continental edge, rimwalking its landscape and native cultures" (qtd. in Ricou 22). But, for me, Doig remains both present and absent from *Winter Brothers*, ghosting that jagged edge he so painstakingly retraces through Swan, yearning perhaps for "contact" with Indigenous cultures that does not materialize. Then this:

> What Swan and his forty-year wordstream will have told me by the end of this winter, back where I have never been, I can't yet know. But I already have the sense from his sentences and mine that there are and always have been many Wests, personal as well as geographical. . . . Yet Swan's Wests come recognizable to me, are places which still have clear overtones of my own places, stand alike with mine in being distinctly unlike other of the national geography. Perhaps that is what the many Wests are, common in their stubborn separateness: each West a kind of cabin, insistent that it is no other sort of dwelling whatsoever. (*Winter Brothers* 109-10)

Indeed, *Winter Brothers* is only one dimension of Doig's West(s), of the "dramatic contrasts of wet and dry" especially as the latter, the dry, is so well known to readers of western literature, at least in the United States, through both his fiction set in Montana and his celebrated memoirs, *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind* (1978) and the memoirs based on his mother's letters to her brother Wally, *Heart Earth* (1993).

I confess to not finding many clues to unlocking the mysteries of the Pacific Northwest in *Winter Brothers*, no doubt through no fault but my own. But I found something else. Taking my cue from Doig, reading Swan—suggesting by Ricou—I retraced the life-path of writer Ivan Doig and went

back up over the mountains to "Sixteen country" of south central Montana, the Montana of his childhood, a place, described in *Heart Earth*, of "bone and gristle marriages" (15), of "women who carry the sky" (17), that "do-it-yourself expanse the West was supposed to be and never was" (28). It was a place with "people who had a wire down in their lives" yet who emigrated "into an America they never managed to savvy nor let go of" (32). Doig's description of his parents performing a chore that best exemplifies their "handling of *the country*" (32, emphasis mine) is one of the finest evocations of place and feeling I have ever read. He details how they wiped away mud and dust from their 1940 Ford coupe's fenders and flanks so as to ready it for the funeral procession of a Big Belt Mountains hired hand, belonging, like themselves, to a kind of "people who drew no cortege while they were alive" (32). It recalls my own rural West, captured in a black and white photo of my paternal grandparents, dressed in their Sunday best, my grandfather crouching with four young boys in front of the family car somewhere in the Comox Valley where they had come to farm after a lonely existence in a remote cabin at Reid Lake, outside of Prince George. For Doig, and no doubt for my father, born one year before Doig, coming to the coastal cities to attend university (University of Washington for Doig, UBC for my father) was a voyage to a much more affluent West than what they had previously known. It was almost a luxury West with its new-found wealth and temperate climate, the one functioning almost as the flip side of the other. There is a sense in Doig's work of the need for a personal archeology, alluded to in *Winter Brothers*, an urge to "place" his Montana pioneer past within his contemporary Seattle life. The juxtaposition of these two worlds is most eloquently evoked in preface of the 15th anniversary edition of his celebrated *This House of Sky*, where he describes himself as a "relic," "out of step," a man having worked at a whole host of occupations during his Montana upbringing ("I had worked in a lambing shed, picked rock from grainfields, driven a power buckrake in haying time . . ." [vii]) that differentiate him from his UW doctoral student peers. Now, having brought his elderly parents to Seattle to live out their remaining years, he is reminded once again of the memoir's genesis:

> The sight of these two people of the past who had raised me— Bessie Ringer, ranch cook, diehard Montanan since her early twenties . . . ; and Charlie Doig, ranch hand and rancher, born on a sagebrush homestead in the Big Belt Mountains south of Helena—the daily sight of these two in our Seattle living room, with a shopping center out the window below, made me very much aware of the relichood of the three of us. (vii)

Thanks to *The Files*, I was prompted to enter the world of Ivan Doig and through his layered exploration of place, family, and history, came to embrace my own multiple Wests, the rural and the remote as well as the wet windy coast.

The interplay between the hot/dry and the temperate/wet are also at work in Sunshine Coast writer Theresa Kishkan's historical novel *The Age of Water Lilies* (2010). In this text, English gentlewoman Flora Oakden has come to join her brother on a ranch in the British Columbia Interior settlement of Wallachin near Ashcroft in the years just before World War I. Over the course of one summer she falls as much in love with the landscape—its open skies, "wide expanses of earth undulating in the heat, hills shimmering in the distance like mirages" (6)—as with an educated English labourer in whose company she learns to recognize rattlesnake tracks and discovers a box canyon, its entrance hidden by Saskatoon bushes: "Once inside, it was like being in a room with a ceiling decorated with tumbling cloud. The creek for water, dry grass for a bed" (72). At summer's end, her lover, Gus, enlists and is subsequently killed in the battlefields of Europe. Flora, pregnant and unmarried, seeks shelter in Victoria with a free-spirited widow in a house overlooking the Ross Bay Cemetery. The novel alternates between this narrative and one set in 1962, the story of a curious young girl who explores her own personal domain among the headstones of Ross Bay and befriends Flora, now 70. This relationship allows Kishkan to alternate between two time periods but also to juxtapose two settings, each working in tandem. While the writing in *The Age of Water Lilies* certainly does justice to the splashy moist greenery of Victoria, the waterfront, the wind in Beacon Hill Park, the "beautiful Garry oaks [standing] in groupings on mossy rises" and "water lily plants holding the chalices of their yellow flowers above the water" (123), it is that other environment, that other quintessentially British Columbia place that comes to Flora in her new Victoria home:

> She recalled hills, covered with grasses that smelled so sweet after rain—wild rye, bunchgrass, needlegrass, ricegrass. . . . And she recalled the raps of grasshoppers as they jumped from stem to stem, the vault of blue sky; she remembered the texture of the dust, caught in wind and dry with seeds, particles of sands. . . . Flora had not expected to love the miles of grassland, the flinty smell of the river, and yet she could bring these to mind, across the miles and years, with no effort at all . . . (263)

Kishkan's novel thus becomes an evocative illustration of Ricou's insistence on the interconnected and opposing "Wests" at work in Pacific Northwest writing.

Ricou's "Island File" not only argues for an interdependence of the Northwest's wet/dry topographies, a doubling of locales, but masterfully

twins texts in a way that consciously avoids promoting the "dichotomies that are the frequent pitfall of Canadian-US comparisons" (38) which in this case would lead to facile conclusions: Marlatt's *Steveston* equals peaceful, garrison; Keeble's *Yellowfish* equals violent, narrative of adventure. Instead, Ricou argues, "I would rather walk the border, to ask what lies in the middle, to ask one work to illuminate the shadow in another, to reveal its changing process and its fluidity—refusing to *fix* one or the other" (39). This approach allows him to conclude that *Yellowfish*, read in contexts established by Marlatt's *Steveston,* could be the "poem of place" that Keeble's protagonist Erks longs to write: "As a historian, he wants to stop and go down into the sensory, layered history of a place, but he is caught up in the narrative of the smuggler and outlaw" (38). Conversely, the narrator in Marlatt's long poem is "trapped" in the role of ethnographer, lacking distance from her subject: "Somewhere hidden in Marlatt's *Steveston* is another hungry, souvenir-gathering, bewildered, traveller like Erks" (39). Ricou is rather audacious to bring together a poem and a novel from opposite sides of the border, giving each its due, letting each have his and/or her say, but then "pushing them together" (38) and in so doing creating something completely new and different. This is the art of the critic. And this is the art of "Island File."

At the core of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, as the name suggests, is the question of a shared Pacific Northwest region (that begins and ends in different places depending on your point of view) but that also contains within it a division figured by the slash in the title of the book and the two different words commonly used in Canada and the US to describe the same tree. At various points in the text, Ricou seems to lean towards the idea of the arbitrariness of this division, figured by the international boundary. From the standpoint of the edge, Vancouver, the boundary is "an unwaveringly line and visible boundary [that] dissolves into a meandering hypothesis traced in water" (23). A regional literature and culture, he continues, might be discovered where the boundary becomes indeterminate . . . in a shared ecology far too international to claim" (23). To think the Pacific Northwest with Ricou, is to think "ocean currents and species distribution" (6), drainage basins (crucial for defining territorial boundaries), and watersheds. One of the recurring themes in his work is the study of regional writing, defined in *The Files* as the "politics of appreciating difference" (29). Wendell Berry provides inspiration for Ricou in defining regionalism as "local life aware of itself," as "politics more personal, more concerned with some imaginative power, rather than physical or regulatory or jurisdictional power," and as an "awareness that local

life is intricately dependent, for its quality but also for its countenance, upon local knowledge" (qtd. in Ricou 29). Ricou's choice of chapter titles—"Salmon File," "Raven File," "Kuroshio File," "Salal File," and "Sasquatch File"—all underscore a conscious effort to find and read writing that by its very subject matter, theme, sensitivity and language, responds in some way or another to this idea of local knowledge and even, as do Marlatt and Keeble, to "ecological and autochthonous patterns that omit national boundaries" (39).

I often pondered the phrase "omitting national boundaries" during my return to the Pacific Northwest in the fall of 2011, as I sat in traffic gazing at the Peace Arch at the Douglas-Blaine international border crossing, waiting, on numerous occasions, to cross into the United States, watching the predominantly-male armed US Border Patrol Guards move comfortably, confidently—and not un-aggressively—amongst the cars (remember Canadian Border Services Agents stay in the booth and sometimes you get a woman and/or a Francophone). Much has transpired between Canada and the US in the decade since *The Files* was published. I am hard pressed to remember a moment before 9/11 when the otherwise quiet, trust-oriented tradition of border relations between our two countries allowed us to contemplate "boundariness" quite like Ricou does in 2002; the rules of the game seem to have been so irrevocably changed. Yet, the Pacific Northwest is special, as proponents for Cascadia have been arguing for a long time. A convergence of shared ecological values, respect for the environment and increasing trade and economic linkages have made it one of the premier cross-border regions (or CBR) in North America. Ricou admits to having been, himself, "influenced, largely unawares, by cultural and economic forces . . ." known as the "Cascadia initiative" (6)—which prompted the shift in the original project of *The Files* from one on British Columbia writing to one that would also include writing from south of the border. Teaching, as I do, in a North American Studies program, I have also been influenced by post-NAFTA debates on increasing economic and political integration between Canada and the US. While recent findings suggest that integration is not inevitable, hindered by sovereignty concerns in both countries and fragmentation in policy-making, sub-national or regional areas of cross-border activity still seem to be the most likely places to chart economic and political convergence. For political scientist Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, the Pacific North West/Cascadia best illustrates this new, rising border region, where a "complex ideational construct" spanning economic, social, cultural and political elements forms a regional and transnational "symbolic" regime

in which various state and non-state actors (trade groups, sub-national bureaucrats and environmental groups) can promote their specific agendas (117). In *The Files,* Ricou recognizes Cascadia from the outset as primarily a trade and marketing alliance (26). Indeed, the concept has been critiqued for some time now, most succinctly, in my view, by social geographer Matthew Sparke who has convincingly argued that trans-border "re-mappings" like Cascadia are not *geopolitics* but *geoeconomics* and "represent a neo-liberal, market-oriented, anti-state transmutation of what is generally understood as a democratic political sovereignty," a "decentred political-economic project to entrench neo-liberalism locally" (7; 21). Despite their appeals to the positive impact of borderless free trade, Cascadia's promoters, he counters, are unable to point to any widespread *regionalizing* impact. The increase in north-south trade/traffic flows do not necessarily indicate the rise of *regionalizing* tendencies in supply networks that cross the border and integrate Cascadia economically; instead, the trucks cross the border and then frequently drive on to other distant places (25). Sparke's critical view of north-south trade flows weighed on my conscience as I drove side by side with these trucks on the I-5 in Washington state or watched them line up at the border. Recent research by a unique pair of cross-border collaborators, geographers Patrick Buckley of WWU and John Belec of the University of the Fraser Valley, provides a useful example of the need to rethink the possibilities of local cross-border cooperation, or rather how difficult it is, outside of the realm of the literary, to omit national boundaries. Their detailed case study on the failure to successfully develop a power plant in the borderzone between Sumas, Washington and Abbotsford, British Columbia highlights how the absence of a coordinated cross-border "Green party" or business party hindered negotiations between the various levels of government. Given that none of the stakeholders on either side of the border had come to terms with what it wanted, nor what was desirable or possible in this context, they were more comfortable with letting more "distant actors make the real decisions rather than wrestling with some very troubling issues" (73). In the end, the Canadian National Energy Board favoured Canadian environmental interests over US economic ones in what the authors see as an "apparent move to re-affirm the border as a shield" (57). Their conclusions go against the strong normative inflection in most research on cross-border regions that assumes a desire on the part of local actors to emancipate themselves from the nation-state, an inflection that is simply not borne out by the Abbotsford/Sumas case.

I do not want to dismiss with a slight of hand the spirit in which conservationist Gary Snyder claims, quoted in Ricou, that "the border between Canada and the United States is illusory" (26). Perhaps there isn't anything to stop you from going over "there" and feeling as at home as you feel "here." "It comes down to the nitty-gritty, Snyder continues, when you get into water quality control, air pollution control questions, or salmon runs. The salmon don't give a f— which border it is" (26, omission mine). Indeed they don't. Neither do the swarm of swallows that congregate and then fly off in the final scene of Olympia writer Jim Lynch's quirky, yet enjoyable novel *Border Songs* (2009). Former Border Patrol officer and avid birder Brandon Vanderkool blends in with the flock, letting them circle him before they set off, their voices rising in crescendo, "lost in a mad, simultaneous flutter of wings, as if gunfire had launched them airborne in a swarm that extended, then collapsed as it veered southeast across the valley toward the treed hillsides below Mount Baker's flanks" (291). Brandon clearly dreams to be a part of them, free, one can assume, to cross borders, so much so, "that it half-startled him to look down and find himself still there, left behind, alone" (291). This may be what Ricou means by a regional writing defined by species distribution. I am somewhat irked by *Border Songs*' Canadian stereotypes and its disavowal of any American responsibility in Lower Mainland drug violence, but I read the novel again—for the birds, so to speak—with a *Files* ecology in mind.

I did try to listen for the sounds of these species while in Bellingham; but in my rented condo sandwiched somewhere between the I-5 and the railway lines, the sound of the birds and frogs was drowned out by the sounds of other flows, of cars, trucks, and trains, and the endless humming of the circulation of commodities, of cross-border trade. With all that endless transport activity (and the desire on the part of PNW transportation stakeholders for it to run faster and smoother), I wondered, regretfully, who in Whatcom County outside of environmental circles, and especially given the recent economic crisis, has had time to think about bioregions, watersheds, and salmon runs? And how exactly was this cross-border trade going to spark a dynamic chain of connectors wherein supposed "intense communication" (Brunet-Jailly 117) would lead to shared cultural values or to a shared regional consciousness that could possibly rethink national boundaries? I can't help but reflect on the number of times during my short stay in Bellingham (21 miles south of the 49th parallel) that local residents (off WWU campus) told me they rarely went to Canada any more as they

found the border "intimidating" or had simply let their passport expire or just hadn't gotten around to applying for a document they thought "costly" and/or "cumbersome," not to mention the number of people that just assumed, when I told them where I was from—I said "Vancouver" to simplify things—that I meant Vancouver, Washington. My observations here are not meant be to scientific as I did not conduct planned interviews; but my findings are no less relevant, in my view, to an ongoing debate on a supposed shared, emerging transnational regional consciousness/culture promised to us by the proponents of cross-border economic regions like Cascadia. Nor are my comments meant in any way to betray a sense of superior cosmopolitanism or Canadian smugness, a "we-travel-and-they-don't-so-what-do-you-expect" response that is neither new nor productive. These are not at all my intentions. I return to Waterloo, Ontario with a sincere appreciation, respect, and fondness for northwest Washington State. It is similar to the appreciation and respect I have for northwest Ohio/Michigan, having lived and taught there and having come to understand the local culture as best I could. These are both border regions of the United States; yet they are no less American for all that. They are contiguous (with Canada) yet separate spatial zones with often very different political priorities and styles of cultural imagining.

One of the best-known and most prolific American novelists of the Pacific Northwest is undoubtedly Seattle's David Guterson.[3] Unable to resolve in the long term the thorny question of an emerging cross-border consciousness, though I certainly have my misgivings on the subject, I decided, in the short term, to take a closer look at Guterson's style of imagining the region. In the end, his work shores up the limits of the idea of a regional consciousness, if that consciousness is to take into account those living north of the 49th parallel. Thanks to its long stay on the bestseller list in both the US and Canada, Guterson's 1995 *Snow Falling on Cedars* is perhaps the most widely read Pacific Northwest novel of all time. It was also made into a critically acclaimed major motion picture in 1999, directed by Scott Hicks and shot on location—in Canada. The novel tells the story of the 1954 trial of a Japanese fisherman for the murder of a fellow fisherman on the small fictional San Juan island of San Piedro. Ricou pauses briefly on *Snow Falling on Cedars* in the "Mistory File" and notes its "traveling rain" (15), a metaphor for how the novel "emphasizes a pattern of connections appreciated by most of the region's writers" (15). He also underlines how the novel evokes "a place whose living connects rain to sea to salmon to Japan to cedar to racist exclusion"

and whose narrative "embraces key stories that have been told and retold to make the Northwest: the Gold Rush (and all the connected tales of extraction), the dream of utopia and ecotopia, a tale of travelling the Pacific, which is also the salmon narrative, and the story of the Raven stealing the light" (16). Interestingly, while Ricou's reading emphasizes connections and linkages, arguing for the novel as a representative Northwest/regional text, William H. New sees in *Snow Falling on Cedars* something quite different. For him, Guterson's novel positions itself as a "national cultural saga" as references to Ishmael [*Moby Dick*] and other canonical American literary figures suggest. It is a text about the role of the state and the right to independence, mired in the conflict of authority and the individual (84), emphasizing isolation and separateness (86) alongside the fundamental mistrust at the heart of the island community. In the end, New's reading points away from a regional pattern of connections, suggested by Ricou, towards an understanding of this best-selling novel as embedded within a resolutely American national imaginary.

Given Guterson's importance for the Pacific Northwest imaginary, I wondered whether he would perhaps henceforth exhibit in subsequent writings an awareness of coastal/interior linkages or even a sensibility for the extra-national. His *East of the Mountains* (1999) features a seventy-three-year-old widowed Seattle heart surgeon diagnosed with terminal colon cancer. Unwilling to face the pain of a low slow demise, he decides to commit suicide, planning to make it look like a hunting accident to spare the feelings of his daughter and grandchildren. He sets off on the long drive east from Seattle to the Columbia Basin, across the Cascades to the apple-growing region where he grew up. His carefully laid plans soon go awry, however, when his car skids off the road in a rainstorm in the Snoqualmie Pass and crashes into a tree. He has various adventures over the course of the novel including an encounter on a greyhound bus with a Mexican migrant worker in need of medical attention. Finally, he spends a night in an apple over the course of the novel pickers' camp near Wenatchee,—where he helps deliver a baby and is reacquainted with a woman from his childhood—before deciding to abandon his suicide plan and accept to be driven home to Seattle to face death (the reader assumes) amongst his family. *East of the Mountains* is a novel structured by crossings both personal and physical, from rainy urban Seattle to the harsh rural, remoteness of the Columbia plateau. The imagined West in this text is organized along a horizontal West-East trajectory echoing in reverse a whole host of epic Frontier voyages

(for instance, those of Lewis and Clark, and those along the Oregon Trail) that are a significant part of the American mythology. The only "border" here is the Cascade Mountain Range where the car accident occurs changing the course of the narrative. Aside from a fleeting reference to a truck driver who is heading to Calgary with a load of lettuce, the northern border with Canada is absent from this text. Yet, one of the surgeon's more meaningful encounters (in terms of his own generosity) is with a group of illegal Mexican fruit pickers, one of whom he feeds and helps find work by giving him the use of his own social security number. Not insignificantly, in fact, the only meaningful cross-border human encounter in this novel is with Mexican nationals. If places and regions, as Western Studies scholar Steve Tatum argues, need to be regarded as not only geopolitical/geological territories and physical landscapes, but also as "sites produced by the *circulation of peoples*, of technologies and commodities" (emphasis mine, 460-61), as well as cultural artifacts, images, stories and myths, then Guterson's Pacific Northwest in *East of the Mountains* includes not Canada nor any real sense of the 49th parallel but rather "Greater Mexico."

In *The Other* (2009), Guterson returns to a wet and windy rainforest locale: the novel takes place in Seattle and on a remote part of the Olympic Peninsula. Two Seattle teenagers meet running track and field in the 1970s. One is enormously wealthy, while the other is of blue-collar origin, and yet both share a passion for literature, marijuana consumption and wilderness adventure. While Neil Countryman, the narrator, marries and becomes a high school English teacher, his wealthy doppelgänger, John William Barry, taken by Gnosticism and frustrated by fakery, drops out of college and moves into a limestone cave near Forks in the North Cascades. Countryman witnesses his friend's slow starvation and eventual death, still refusing to break his promise to John William not to disclose his whereabouts to his family who had by this time hired a private investigator to find him. The novel is rife with a host of references to masculine American letters, exhibiting a sort of outdoorsy handiness and hardiness that evokes Twain and Hemingway and touches on a number of quintessentially American themes from Puritan beginnings, westward expansion, ecological collapse, social decline and the interplay of wealth and bohemia. Yet again, despite a proximity to the Canadian border, there is but one evocation of Canadian space in this text: an ill-planned and ill-fated hiking expedition during which the two protagonists get lost in the woods for ten days and "end up" in Hope, British Columbia, from where they simply hitch a ride home. No mention

is made of how they got back across the border. This is, after all, the 1970s. This incident nevertheless evokes Canada as both an undifferentiated "non-space" and an extension of America itself, to paraphrase William H. New (73); a benevolent hiker's playground awaiting their arrival. Incidentally, distant Mexico is not absent from this wet, rainy Pacific Northwest text: Neil Countryman and his girlfriend in fact drive John William's car down to San Diego and abandon it there at his behest in order to make it seem as if he has disappeared into Mexico. Thus we have in *The Other* a strangely configured North American West Coast framed by two border regions: one, Mexico, a place of intrigue and danger (the idea being that if John William has crossed over this border he becomes officially *disappeared* and will not be found); the other, Canada, a border which is not much of a border at all, but an empty wilderness that signifies by its lack of difference from the US.

My brief remarks here do not by any means do justice to either of Guterson's later novels, both of which warrant more academic attention than either has garnered. I read each of them with a specific purpose in mind and found an absence: Canada. In many ways one could argue I am asking too much of Guterson as an emissary of the Pacific Northwest. I would counter that critics, including even Ricou, are asking too little. A shared regional consciousness, a regionalism of place, a "local life aware of itself," as defined by Ricou and others earlier in this text, would, for me, in the context of the Pacific Northwest, necessitate acknowledging and/or taking into account the "other," the socio-political reality that is Canada, lying on the other side of the US' northern border. Given the setting of Guterson's work, this desire for some sort of recognition of Canadian space does not seem an unreasonable expectation. His nonchalance in this regard is simply part and parcel of the larger omission of Canada that characterizes our north-south relationship.

Such are the complications of "creative cross-bordering," of the "dramatic contrasts of wet and dry" and of "responding to ecological and autochthonous patterns" that do not necessarily *omit* national boundaries, but trouble the easy dichotomies between what is Canadian and American, while simultaneously shoring up each text's shadows and respective lacunae. I have argued elsewhere for a North American approach to Canadian literature that moves beyond sameness and difference to stress linkages and connections; in short, a way of thinking about the Canadian imaginary not in deference or reaction to but *in relation* to the American (Roberts 29). American literature of the Pacific Northwest, however, for reasons of national myth and styles of imagining, seems less likely to make connections, more akin to Ivan Doig's aforementioned

"cabin" or "dwelling," off on its own within a resolutely "national geography" (*Winter Brothers* 110). Even then, I hesitate to affirm these national differences, spelled out and affirmed, only to be challenged—just as Ricou scribbles down national differences that provoke unease as soon as they are noted (19). Perhaps the ultimate lesson to learn is to work in the manner of the *The Files*: "just outside the range of ordinary light" (mist; 17), in "tropes of suspension" (rain; 63), and in tune with the "mystery just below the surface" (salmon; 100). I interpret this to mean the following: in harmony with the text at hand and the place from which it originates. It is this most personal, ethical, and humble approach that buoys and sustains me during my continued forays into our many *extra Wests*.[4]

NOTES

1 For reasons of brevity, this text will heretofore be referred to as *The Files*.
2 See National Public Radio's KUOW series "Behind the Cascade Curtain" written and produced by Dominic Black. <http://www2.kuow.org/specials/cascade-curtain.php>.
3 Chuck Robinson, owner of Village Books in Fairhaven, Washington, communicated to me in casual conversation that since so many writers in the Pacific Northwest have been born elsewhere, the fact that Guterson is a third-generation Seattleite qualified him, in Robinson's view, as the region's "local boy makes good."
4 I borrow the phrase from Ricou's "Extra West." Western Literature Association. Lincoln, Nebraska. Fall 1996. Past-presidential address.

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Nature and Its Discontents

A. A. Den Otter
Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land. U of Alberta P $49.95

Neil S. Forkey
Canadians and the Natural Environment to the Twenty-First Century. U of Toronto P $24.95

Reviewed by Wayne Grady

If you want to see a replay in microcosm of the nineteenth-century Canadian conflict between wilderness and civilization, watch how suburban subdivisions are made.

First the developer sends in bulldozers to remove all the topsoil from the ten or twenty acres on which the subdivision is to be built. Then a grid of roads is laid out, and the lots upon which the houses are to be placed are surveyed and staked, and the trenches dug for the sewer lines and water mains; hydro and telephone cables are buried. Then the houses are built, all of them at once, all variations on a single, efficient, cost-effective design. Then the topsoil is trucked back in, distributed where needed (smaller bulldozers), covered with grass not meant to grow this far north, and planted with trees, shrubs and perennials, usually non-native, imported species that require special, exorbitant care if they are to survive in this new environment. And finally, when the original site has been completely altered, the sugar maples and white pines replaced by Norway maples and blue spruce, stuck in pre-ordained patches of red-dyed cedar chips amid paths of asphalt or interlocking pavers, when nature has been completely subdued, tamed and civilized, the people move in.

And so the patterns established in the early centuries of Canadian settlement are re-enacted every day on the outskirts of Canadian cities, something to think about when we ask ourselves whether we learn from history.

In *Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land*, A. A. Den Otter, Professor Emeritus of History at Memorial University, amply demonstrates that turning Canada's vast, natural, untrammeled wildernesses, especially in the Northwest and on the Prairies, into farms, mines, lumber camps, towns, and railroads, was a deliberate goal that drove western settlement for most of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Taming the wilderness was more than a matter of manifest destiny, as it was in the United States, more even than a commercial venture. It was "a civilizing mission," he writes, "an imperial obligation to transform the wild northern territories into productive, civilized lands."

"Civilizing" meant subduing, uprooting what was already there and replacing it with something more familiar, more comforting, something from "home," which was usually England or Scotland. It meant removing rather than domesticating the huge herds of bison that had been grazing the prairie regions for millennia, and replacing them with cattle shipped from Europe; ploughing

the hard, prairie soil, and removing the natural grasses that had sustained the buffalo but could not be digested by European cattle, and replacing it with imported grass that could. It meant shooting wild geese and ducks and raising domestic geese and chickens in their stead. And it meant Christianizing and "educating" First Nations peoples who had lived in harmony with the natural environment as hunter-gatherers for millennia, and thereby turning them into farmers, carters, boatmen, and traders.

Events don't tell stories; patterns tell stories. In the first two volumes of *The Peopling of British North America*, Bernard Bailyn set out to trace "the recruitment, settlement patterns, and developing character of the American population in the preindustrial era." He focused on colonial immigration from Europe and Africa, and discerned four major stages, or "propositions," of development: migration, settlement, land speculation, and culture. That was in the United States, where people migrated west, settled on the land, developed its resources, and then established a culture that was a combination of their original cultural inheritance and the modifications imposed upon it by the land itself.

In Canada, according to Den Otter, we seem to have skipped the first two propositions and jumped directly to the third—land speculation and resource development—without having gone through migration and settlement (and, some might claim, without having progressed much into the cultural phase). This isn't a particularly new observation: Northrop Frye suggested that the geographical features of the East Coast of North America determined the different characteristics of American and Canadian attitudes towards nature and the environment: the eastern seaboard of New England welcomed voyagers with warm, sandy beaches and safe anchorages, while the east coast of Canada warded colonists off with rock cliffs, treacherous inlets and winter storms. American immigrants were gently beached; Canadians were swallowed whole by the St. Lawrence.

In other words, nature in the southern portions of British North America seemed benign, already tame; in the north, particularly in the northwest, which Den Otter describes as "a barren, cold, and isolated territory," nature was seen almost immediately as a powerful force in need of taming.

Basque fishermen were exploiting the waters off Newfoundland and Labrador for whales and fish, establishing only crude, temporary rendering and processing stations at the edges of the continent, for a century before Champlain attempted a permanent settlement at Port Royal; similarly, the Hudson's Bay Company sent trappers into the Great Lakes and beyond, all the way to the Prairies, and, although mandated by its own Charter to encourage settlement in the vast territory it controlled, in fact actively discouraged settlement in those areas because settlers didn't tend to trap beaver for profit.

The civilizing impulse, however, proved stronger than the Hudson Bay Company. As long as the HBC could keep Métis trappers in debt to itself, it could keep them on the trap lines—it was the old truck system, the same trick that, right into the 1930s, kept Cape Breton miners in the collieries and Newfoundland sealers on the ice, working off their perpetual debt to the company store. But in a deeper sense, as Den Otter suggests, being "in debt" was already an aspect of civilization, far removed from the gift economy characteristic of the bush. Thus the HBC sowed the seeds of its own decline by the very act of keeping its trappers in its thrall.

The situation of the Métis and the way they broke the HBC's grip on Assiniboia in the 1840s was an important development in the civilizing process, and Den Otter devotes an entire chapter to the Sayer Trial, which spelled the end of wilderness

and the triumph of civilization in western Canada. Marcel Giraud, in his two-volume history, *Le Métis Canadien*, published in 1945 (and translated by George Woodcock in 1986 as *The Métis in the Canadian West*) devotes several pages to the trial, explaining its build-up and aftermath, and recognizing that the trial was a turning point in the HBC's hegemony. Giraud viewed the incident as an example of Métis self-assertion against an overlord, a victory for the underdog. The prime motivation, he thought, was "the hatred felt against Recorder Thom, who was responsible for the action taken against the defendant or at least for the way it was handled."

It was true that one of the demands made by the Métis before the trial was the removal of Judge Adam Thom as first magistrate of Assiniboia and judicial counselor for the HBC. Thom was a tyrant, to be sure, and was eventually demoted to court clerk. But Den Otter rightly looks at the wider significance of the Sayer Trial, placing it in the context of mid-nineteenth-century world politics. What was happening in the Selkirk Settlement, he contends, was a kind of microcosm of the political turmoil that changed the power structure in Europe in 1848. Far from being an isolated corner of the British Empire, western Canada, at the time of the Sayer Trial, was a seething hotbed of the same kind of revolt against imperialism that had already manifested in Europe.

And for similar reasons. "In the case of Europe in 1848," writes Den Otter, "a succession of continent-wide crop failures and hunger in urban and rural communities had been prominent factors in the violent rebellions." Similarly, the Red River Settlement had endured a series of crop failures in the 1840s, as well as a diminished buffalo hunt and an epidemic of measles and influenza, probably resulting from trading missions to St. Peter's, Minnesota. The Métis were the hardest hit by these calamities. As Den Otter suggests, their cumulative effect was to force survivors to find livelihoods that did not depend on the whims of nature. "The perceived fickleness of nature, evidenced in declining hunts and failed crops, did much to raise discontent within the [Red River] community, and disenchantment with traditional ways."

Pierre Sayer was one of many Métis fur traders who'd been trading illegally with American companies in the south rather than with the Hudson Bay Company, but for some reason he and his two cohorts were the offenders Adam Thom had arrested. Trading with any company other than the HBC was against the law, and Sayer *et al*. were to be made examples of. Their arrest, however, placed the HBC in a legal cleft stick, and may have had as much to do with Thom's eventual demotion as the demands of the outraged Métis community. If Sayer were found guilty and punished, the company would have an armed insurrection on its hands; if Sayer were found not guilty, it would signal that the HBC hegemony was unenforceable, and the Métis and First Nations trappers could trade with anyone they liked.

The company's compromise solution produced the worst possible outcome. Sayer was found guilty (because he was), but he was not punished; in fact, he was released and the furs that had been seized from him and his companions were returned. The guilty finding enraged the Métis, and the leniency nonetheless signaled to them the HBC's inability to enforce its own trade embargos. The Métis were free to trade with whomever they liked, and they'd be damned if they'd trade with the HBC. "The Sayer Trial," concludes Den Otter, "was more than resistance against outside authority or a fearful reaction against unpredictable natural disasters. It also represented the adoption of Western civilization's view of the wilderness as a place laden with valuable resources that had to be developed."

The decline of the authority, and therefore of the profits, of the Hudson's Bay Company

following the Sayer Trial prompted the British parliament, in 1857, to appoint a select committee to review the activities of the HBC. The committee was to recognize that the inhabitants of Rupert's Land no longer wanted to live as nomadic trappers and hunters, but wanted to settle, to become traders and farmers, and to no longer be under the thumb of the HBC. In Den Otter's terms, they wanted to become civilized.

Britain, by mid-nineteenth century, was deeply enmeshed in the throes of the Industrial Revolution that had begun towards the end of the eighteenth. After fifty years of "progress," its government's chief concerns were to ensure a constant supply of raw materials to its factories, food for its workers, and markets for its goods. And it was perspicacious enough to realize that of the two traditional methods of attaining those ends—conquest and civilization—the former was expensive and unpopular, and the latter was not. Who could object to educating and domesticating the Aboriginal peoples who dwelled as uncivilized savages on the lands the British wanted to exploit?

This was the attitude that the select committee took going into its investigation and, not surprisingly, the attitude that emerged from it after forty days of hearing witnesses, none of whom were First Nations or Métis. The testimonies presented to the committee, Den Otter notes, "indicated that over the past two centuries, the powerful combination of science, technology, and capitalism, flourishing under increasingly free political and economic institutions, had created the great and wealthy British Empire." The mission of the Western Europeans was, according to Den Otter, "to tame the world's remaining wilderness regions and manage them for the desires of humanity. . . . Peoples everywhere must be raised to the level of enlightened, Christian, industrial, and urbanizing Victorian Britain."

The only contention within the committee meetings was over who was best suited to carry out these goals, the Hudson's Bay Company, under a renewed mandate, or some form of free enterprise system that would allow First Nations and Métis to compete on the open market with white settlers and producers. The HBC argued, perhaps unwisely and somewhat half-heartedly, that it was already caring for First Nations peoples living within its territories, who anyway were incapable of adapting to modern society, and fundamentally unsuited to living on arable land. This view was countered by, among others, the Aboriginal Protection Society, a British organization founded in 1837 "to fight the perceived dispossession, massacre, and enslavement of Native people by invading colonists." The Society advocated integrating Native people into the new world order through education and religion. Taming the wilderness and civilizing Native peoples were seen as the same process of enlightenment, highly beneficial to everyone, especially since doing so would increase the flow of resources to Britain and turn Aboriginal people into happy consumers of British products.

Den Otter tells the story of the civilization of the Canadian wilderness in chapters providing case studies of some of the key figures in the process, including George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company during the time of the Parliamentary select committee; two Native converts to Christianity, Henry Steinhauer and Henry Budd, who came to view their natal wilderness as, in Steinhauer's phrase, a "waste howling desert"; and Bishop David Anderson, the first bishop of Rupert's Land, who considered the education of Native peoples to be not simply an act of civilization, but as actually the best way of protecting them from the inevitable onslaught of European colonization, a relatively enlightened point of view. Anderson campaigned that the British government set aside a large territorial reserve in which Native hunter-gatherers

could continue to survive until they were trained to an agrarian way of life; since this idea fitted closely with that of George Simpson and the HBC. However, it was not part of the recommendations of the Parliamentary committee in 1857.

Reading Den Otter's compelling and convincing narrative, one receives little sense that there was much philosophical opposition to the bulldozing of the landscape and the destruction of the natural wilderness. He mentions naturalists like Philip Henry Gosse and John William Dawson, both of whom "wanted to demonstrate how wondrously God had made the earth," but who essentially were interested in how all this wonder could be turned to profit. Missionaries such as William Mason and Robert Rundle, and the writer Catherine Parr Traill, admired the wilderness but failed to embrace it, or to understand it, according to Den Otter. They "struggled to survive in an environment they considered to be harsh and isolated." Traill, he says, "fled the forest as soon as she could."

Neil S. Forkey, in *Canadians and the Natural Environment to the Twenty-First Century*, is kinder to Traill, who loved the backwoods and left them only out of necessity. She wrote novels in which her characters, often children, were comfortable, not terrified, in the forest, and she displayed a sympathetic understanding of Native peoples and the natural environment, which she also celebrated in richly illustrated books about native wildflowers. As Forkey points out, she wished to be known as "the Canadian Gilbert White," and although, like most nineteenth-century newcomers to Canada, "she was optimistic about the march of progress into the forests of the backcountry, she at times lamented the pace of destruction at hand." When Northrop Frye proposed that nineteenth-century Canadian literature was inspired by a fear of nature and exhibited a "garrison mentality" towards it, he was thinking more about Susanna Moodie than he was of her sister, Catherine Parr Traill. Forkey also recognizes that Gosse's *The Canadian Naturalist* (1840), an early contribution to the study of natural history, evoked his "appreciation of the natural world, or what was left of it in the face of intrusion by new settlers in Canada."

It is fair to say, however, that the main thrust of the conservation movement in Canada until very recently has been to conserve only those aspects of the natural environment that were useful to humans. Forkey quotes the American historian Richard W. Judd (*The Untilled Garden*, 2009) to the effect that scientific enquiry in the United States, as practiced from 1740 to the 1840s, was "a practical concern for protecting those species of birds, animals, and trees deemed useful to human society; a romantic appreciation for the beauty of natural form and primitive landscape; and a close understanding of the complex biological interdependence that sustains all natural systems." In Canada, the first two of those aims is apparent, but the third—an appreciation of those parts of the natural environment that have nothing to do with human progress—failed to turn up until relatively recently, arguably when it was too late to do much to stop its degradation.

Still, Forkey makes a convincing case that opposition to the bulldozer approach to Canadian wilderness described by Den Otter has existed in Canada since the seventeenth century. As early as 1620, Recollet missionaries such as Gabrielle Sagard were lamenting the disappearance of beaver from eastern Canada; a hundred and fifty years later, sea otters were vanishing from the Pacific coast. During the 1800s, even foresters were alarmed at the wholesale destruction of Canadian forests, hunters were decrying the scarcity of game, and fishermen were finding fish stocks harder to locate. Note that all of these lamentations were for the loss of animals and plants that

were useful to humans; few voiced concerns over the growing number of extinctions and extirpations of non-commercial species.

Such concern waited until the second half of the twentieth century, which is where Forkey's analysis breaks down. He seems curiously uninterested in or aware of the modern environmental movement, given the subject of his study. Contemporary environmentalists seek to preserve all of nature, not just the useful bits. He acknowledges the work of the Canadian Wildlife Fund and Pollution Probe, devoting almost an entire sentence to each, doesn't mention Greenpeace, and quotes but a single article by David Suzuki, on water pollution, published in 1990. He rightly applauds the work of writers such as Fred Bodsworth, Farley Mowat, Roderick Haig-Brown, and Margaret Atwood—although he confines his discussion of Atwood's environmental awareness and activism to her novel *Surfacing* (1972), rather than examining her more recent novels, *Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*, all of which contain stronger environmental themes than other books he does include, such as Hugh MacLennan's *Seven Rivers of Canada* and Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*, which is primarily about agriculture. Neither is there any mention at all of such twenty-first-century nature writers as Don McKay, Trevor Herriot, or Candice Savage, to name but an obvious few.

Forkey seems more concerned with praising federal and provincial government initiatives in environmental matters than with individual or non-governmental involvement, which have often been in opposition to political goals. He notes that various levels of government established the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) in 1984, in response to calls from Pierre Trudeau, "an avid canoeist," and imagines that that agency "facilitates conservation programs that help to ensure the sustainability of the riverine environment for economic and recreational use." He further notes that similar goals remain "at the root of the 2003 Species at Risk Act, which protects species in danger of extinction and provides a starting point for their recovery." However true that may have been in 2003, the passing into law in 2012 of Bill C-38, the famous omnibus bill that gutted both the Navigable Waters Act and the Species at Risk Act, among many others, makes Forkey's use of the present tense in those sentences somewhat anachronistic.

Forkey ends his study on an ominous note. Despite the fact that our "competing desires to exploit and protect natural resources" has been "integral to the formation of Canada," our current dependence of fossil fuels is contributing to global warming, and as an oil-producing nation we are "contributing to what some forecast will be a global ecological catastrophe." His conclusion is that such a future is inevitable "unless Canadians renounce involvement in the capitalist economic system," which we are unlikely to do.

In the five hundred years that this country's history encompasses, the environmental pendulum has swung from exploiting nature to conserving and protecting it. We have enjoyed a brief swing towards conservation, but now it seems to be swinging back to exploitation. What is good for us, we seem to be saying again, will have to be good for nature. As both Den Otter's and Forkey's books attest, however, pendulums are perpetually swinging, and eventually we must come to realize that what is good for nature is also good for us. Den Otter ends his analysis with the views of Andrew Isenberg, who, in studying the causes of the demise of the great bison herds on the Prairies, warns that historians and conservationists, and presumably policy makers, "must challenge the traditional concept of the dichotomy between humans and nature." In other words, it isn't us against them, it's just us.

Pipelines, Decomposition, and Poetic Activism

Stephen Collis and Jordan Scott
Decomp. Coach House $24.95

The Enpipe Line Collective
The Enpipe Line: 70,000 kilometres of poetry written in resistance to the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines proposal. Creekstone $18.00

Reviewed by Laura Moss

In "A Rejected Preface" to *New Provinces* (composed in 1936 but not published until 1965), AJM Smith targeted the Confederation poets who wrote about "nature humanized, endowed with feeling, and made sentimental" as he eviscerated their poems: "[t]he most popular experience is to be pained, hurt, stabbed or seared by beauty—preferably by the yellow flame of a crocus in the spring or the red flame of a maple leaf in autumn." Smith criticized what he saw as the overuse of plant-life as a vehicle for personal self-reflection. Most of all, however, he criticized the romanticization of nature. Although Smith was not entirely fair to his unsentimental predecessors (think of Isabella Valancy Crawford's "The City Tree" or Archibald Lampman's "The City of the End of Things," for instance), he did make a good point about the prevalence of the affective relationship between nature and the poetic persona.

In the past few decades, with the "ecological renaissance" and the "social turn" in literature, nature poets are less apt to passively address the land and more apt to imagine an altered state of environmental change, even degradation. Contemporary nature poets often look at the effects of human interaction, resource extraction, and economic exploitation on Canadian land and waters. One strand of nature poetry employs a poetics of warning as writers speculate on the effects of the tar sands on climate change, the relationships between Indigenous land claims and strip mining, the impacts of oil transportation on British Columbian riverbeds, or the consequences of genetic modification on prairie ecosystems. Rita Wong, for instance, asserts a need for social justice and environmental acumen in poems like "night gift (790 km)" where she asks, "how will the night take you back? will you be the vessel for earth shatter, hydro poison, ancestral revenge? perhaps steady weeds, growing irrepressibly into the cracks, urban repurposing straddling both the drugs that kill and the ones that heal?"

Wong's hopeful image of weeds growing through the cracks in a sidewalk to assert their domain and repurpose the incongruous city space brings me to *Decomp*, the collaboration of poets Stephen Collis and Jordan Scott (alongside Charles Darwin, time, the weather, insects, fauna, flora, a camera, ink, and paper). According to their artistic statement on "the culture mill" blog, in this collection the poets "revers[e] the normal flow of bringing nature into the poem" by "bringing the text into nature" so nature can assert its own kind of repurposing. As the book's back cover puts it, "[i]f *On the Origin of Species* is Darwin's reading of nature, *Decomp* is nature's reading of Darwin." The process of decomposition becomes, according to the statement, a "poetics and writing strategy—a mode of making new texts/works out of the decomposing bodies of other texts/works. We decompose, in order to compose our return to the material."

Collis and Scott go a step beyond other ecological poets as they speak *with*, rather than *about*, nature, and as they draw poetry out of the "variations of climate and ecosystem." In 2009, the poets left copies of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* open to the elements in five distinct British Columbian biogeoclimatic zones: Nicola Lake (Bunchgrass Zone), Prince George (Sub-boreal/Engelmann Spruce Zone), Kootenay Lake (Engelmann Spruce/ Subalpine Fir Zone), Gabriola Island

(Coastal Douglas Fir Zone), and Tofino (Coastal Western Hemlock Zone). A year later they returned to find the decomposing books, decipher them, and translate the remnants into a series of found poems. In a CBC radio interview, Collis explains that they began by asking, "what would [nature's] response be to all the poets' annoying talk and discussion and troping and philosophizing about what nature means?" To answer the question, Scott and Collis gave the elements the opportunity to overwrite Darwin, in ecological variations, and the printed word. While Collis and Scott may "comport as scientists, investigators, researchers," as they say, they don't simply study nature. Instead, they collaborate with it, albeit in a controlled manner.

Decomp forensically traces the linguistic remains of the decomposed pages and renders them as found poems, prose meditations, and photographs. The collection is not only a conceptual poem sequence, although it succeeds at being that. While the poets did stipulate rules (one book, five locations, one year) before composition, the emphasis on decomposing and the somewhat organic re-composing leads to something more diffuse than a constraint-based project might suggest. The poems found in the remains of Darwin's text are presented in boxes labeled "The Readable" throughout the sections. The natural fragments of *Origin* are accompanied by wraparound poetic exegeses repeatedly entitled "Gloss." Knowing the parameters of the project when I began reading, I had expected the fragments of *Origin* to be the core of the book. However, while the book encompasses the decomposing remnants, the collection foregrounds the process of mutability rather than the end-product. The poets, and readers, are left to decipher what remains.

Each of the five sections of *Decomp*, named after the dominant tree type and the location of the *Origins*' placement, begins with a series of photographs of the worn and decomposing pages, shriveled words, and moss and dirt covered typeface. Some are close-ups on the text itself, while others pull back to contextualize the books as objects embedded in the grasses, logs, and leaves. The photos invite the reader to find her own response to the elements and mutated text. The most striking set of photographs are of Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island. No words remain visible on the pages with "moss growing recto and verso." Darwin's book has been subsumed by nature and we are left with an absence of language in this Pacific setting. Without language, without history, without text, the poets write, "even the monstrous wordlessness we abode by here, no feedback, gaping maw. Just zone, its permeable and moving boundary. The book is buried and we cannot read a thing." Such passages illustrate how the process of collecting the pages, "trying not to lose scraps," is perhaps more accessibly poetic than the found words themselves.

In several sections of *Decomp*, there are cameo appearances by poet/field guides to local ecosystems. Fred Wah and Pauline Butling lead Scott and Collis up a Kootenay mountain while Rob Budde and Ken Belford walk through the forests behind UNBC in Prince George with the poets. Their voices echo alongside the fragments from *Origin* and the remnants of poetic discovery and point to the communal nature of the project. Somewhat incongruously, however, passages from popular literary theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Maurice Blanchot, and Giorgio Agamben, among others, are juxtaposed with the BC voices and the work of nature. While the words of Collis and Scott meld with the fragments left of Darwin, the theorists are set apart to comment on the process and remind us, perhaps, of the very constructed and mediated version of natural response we are reading. However, the persistence of references to Blanchot and others is

somewhat jarring for me and detracts from the originality of the rest of the collection.

There is an important contradiction in *Decomp*. On one hand, Collis and Scott have relinquished artistic control to nature as they collaborate with it. On the other hand, this relinquishment is limited by their pronominal presence within the text. Further, glimpses of men I take to be Collis and Scott appear in two of the photos. These briefly populated images echo the manner in which the poets inscribe themselves glancingly throughout the book. We never quite lose sight of the fact that this collection is poetically mediated however much the found "readable" poems suggest the scriptive power of plant-life. Perhaps in asserting their own presence and process, the poets remind us that nature can't actually write and stop us from sentimentalizing or even humanizing the environment, even in its most collaborative form.

Still, as the environment writes back, each of the five ecosystems reacts distinctly to the cardstock cover, the paper, and the phonemes on it. Biodiversity modifies decomposition. Collis and Scott note that they chose to place the books in locations around the province based on the biogeoclimatic zones categorized under the provincial government's ministry of forestry classification system. The zones were created, they argue, "under a logic of resource extraction. It is a division according to dominant and thus harvestable tree species. This is a map made by capital." In a way, then, the books were left to occupy the capitalist logic of classified nature. The resulting collaboration is akin to that of the Enpipe Collective's curation of *The Enpipe Line: 70,000 kilometres of poetry written in resistance to the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines Proposal* (to which Collis contributed). As Fred Wah sees it, "kilometre after kilometre, *The Enpipe Line* occupies its space by writing in it." So too do the fragments of *Decomp* that highlight environmental precarity.

The Enpipe Line project, launched online in November 2010 and published as a poetry collection in Smithers BC after a year, was conceived when Vancouver poet Christine Leclerc was chained to the door of the head office of Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines. "While being removed from the premises," she writes in her introduction to the collection, "the image of a poetry-jammed pipeline struck me." To protest the development of the 1,173 km pipeline from Bruderheim Alberta to Kitimat BC, she decided to try to match the pipeline cm for km with words and invited poets worldwide to join her. She and Jen Currin, Ray Hsu, Nikki Reimer, Melissa Sawatsky, Jordan Hall, and Daniel Zomperelli formed an editorial collective, curated a website (which received online poetic submissions in resistance to the pipeline), and edited the print collection. Together they measured 70,000 km of poetry (where a Times New Roman 12 point font cm = a km). The resulting poems are "at the intersection of poetic expression and civic participation" as one contributor notes. In an act of solidarity, every contribution to the website was included in the book (rather than chosen on the basis of artistic merit or poignancy of political content). Leclerc confirmed for me in an email that the editorial collective decided "that any and all contributions would be valued equally, so the only poems that aren't in the book are poems by people we couldn't get in touch with." *The Enpipe Line* showcases a generation of collective artistic activism, facilitated by internet technology that has made collaboration easier, more accessible, and more powerful as a way to foster dissent.

Most of the contributions are about the environment and the impact of development on the land and water but they address these topics variously using tools of abrogation, satire, direct address, and found poetry. Several found poems (there are kms of them in the collection) like Leclerc's opening salvo, "en- (1,135.72 km),"

document the language of the government, the oil companies, and the negotiators, and in doing so raise it up to ridicule. Some poets play at the level of phoneme and morpheme, as Meredith Quartermain does in "Pipe Liar (428.88 km)" "pipe lure pipe layer pipe liar / cheap cheap cheap cheap . . ." Some metapoetically call attention to the ability of poets to interpret language. Melissa Sawatsky's "Say (246 km)" is especially poignant in this regard: "this line is full of words / that burst without warning, collateral/ damage of constructed intention, / which is to say // there are things you can claim. All the way / from Bruderheim to Kitamat, you can megaphone/ phrases—safe passage, / 62,700 years of person-employment, / maximum environmental protection, / open and extensive public reviews—intangible words in corporeal space." Other poets play with direct address targeting individual politicians. Sonnet L'Abbe's "Pipeline to Harper (1187.3 km)" stands out in this genre as a rambling and powerful invocation to the Prime Minister. Conversely, but no less effectively, in his poem "A Few Questions for a Rubber Stamp (463.57 km)," Ray Hsu asks blunt and pointed questions about Indigenous title, local engagement, and government actions. As one might expect of an open collection, a few of the poems are more significant for their intention than delivery.

The Enpipe Line collaboration beautifully illustrates the branch of Canadian poetry that has swung away from the individual act of writing about nature to a kind of collaborative activism possible through poetry crowdsourcing. It sits beside the rise of groups such as 100,000 Poets for Change that rely on the connections between "social activism and creative promise" and the Centre for Artistic Activism whose stated goal is "to make more creative and effective citizen activists." The effectiveness of using poetry as a forum for participatory environmental activism is explained by poet Derek Beaulieu when he writes that "[w]ith *The Enpipe Line*, poets draw a line in the sand and enact their politics. No longer is the landscape something wistfully elegized; it is the line where poets say no more, not again." Beaulieu picks up where Smith left off in his critique of the wistful nature elegy. The increasingly politicized line of environmental poetry has moved from feeling the sear of the crocuses of the early twentieth century to recognizing the bursting pipelines of the early twenty-first.

Thoughtful Generosity

George Amabile
Dancing, with Mirrors. Porcupine's Quill $19.95

Oana Avasilichioaei
We, Beasts. Wolsak & Wynn $19.00

W. H. New
YVR. Oolichan $17.95

Reviewed by Duffy Roberts

I can't help but review these three collections in the larger contexts of poetry's readers, poetry's value, and the generosity of each to each. And then, there are poetry reviews and their potential for generosity. To be effective, poetry reviews should situate criticism within a consideration of audience. Poetry's value might get taken for granted (by those of us reading and writing reviews such as this), but poetry's audience should not be taken for granted. *We, Beasts* and *Dancing, with Mirrors* need to remember audience a little more, inspire a larger audience even, and not lose sight of the written word as commodity. I struggled with *We, Beasts* because its intertextuality, untranslated text, and structural choices are obscure. *Dancing, with Mirrors* is 185 pages long and the cosmic, I-will-return-to-the-universe-upon-death everlasting-universe-of-things is less effective than when George Amabile writes about specific things. *YVR* will lose anyone without command of the Vancouver it

references, or anyone who is uninspired to look them up. These criticisms, though, do not detract from each book's generosity.

Oana Avasilichioaei's *We, Beasts* aches for a beastly language, one that "pounds and pounds" out. Translation is the collection's focus, or maybe not translating, with its untranslated lines, epigraphs, taxonomy diagrams, and pages more blank than populated with text. It's as if the poet is pulling reclaimed and honest mythology out of the blinding white pages of misunderstood, mistransformed, mistranslated, and misappropriated fairytales and stories. The collection reminds us why "here, a city lies to a child": storytellers tell the child that the wolf is not wolf but nightmare; black bats and cats absorb the truth; a witch is not a woman healer but an evil spell-caster; a crow "shadow[s] the shadows"; a king is not "cruel" but "just"; and speaking "in tongues" and not listening solely to your "elder['s] tongue" will lead to darkness. When tales are told, the teller transforms the tale in the service of power, in the service of particular and controlled versions of home. Beasts are beasts because we are not beasts but civilized, or so the lie to the child goes.

We, Beasts reminds that what is interesting about us is that we are beasts. When "humanity's vault at ease / in her stained apron // rooster // into its // barbarity," we are only at ease because the barbarity is in the service of humanity, whereas other barbarity is in the service of barbarity. When "a home knocks on the door of itself / enters inside and forgets itself," it is as if assumed and static versions of home dismiss our power to live in the world as if it were home. The unknown requires not only translation, *We, Beasts* argues, but also care that those translations do not become memes in the service of power "for tyrants fond of taming / tasks that can be named." Perhaps inspired by a recognition that much of the world is transformed into language that keeps us dumb (without language) to the complexities of places, the child says, "oh mama, unchild me from this child voice." Avasilichioaei exposes the lies in language, in stories, yes. Perhaps it is advice for adults too.

George Amabile's own adult face (or well-travelled life) is in the "mirror" in *Dancing, with Mirrors*, but the "dancing" is more complicated to describe. The book-jacket blurb calls this long poem, fairy accurately, a "lyrical retrospective." Amabile revisits his past experiences and memories and their meanings. "Sometimes history changes key and soars," he writes, and "sometimes it sits there like a damaged animal." History (memory even) as a damaged animal is difficult to associate with dancing, but maybe the success of the collection is in turning damage (loss, guilt, regret, absence) into insight and metaphor: Amabile calls this task "entertain[ing] possibility." The damage has specific sources in childhood: namely, in Amabile's relationship with his father—"how love can change / to a not-so-simple politics / of need" when his father "believe[s] children belonged / to the distant and irrational world / of women, believed it so well"—and in the still-open scar of "helplessness, / the guilt of my brother's death," a death that "tear[s] / his name loose / from my throat."

Paris, New York, Iceland, Oaxaca, Swift Current, Rome, Chiang Mai: Amabile treats these places as "tissue[s] of useful fictions," as if needing to blow our noses to examine the place-specific content and their "web[s] of associations / . . . never thought about before." What inspires Amabile's interrogations of his experiences is age (only older people carry around a hankie and immodestly examine its contents in public), and perhaps a desire, however doomed to failure, to control others' perceptions of his life and memories. In "Power Failure," he writes:

> Think of it: you may never be
> fully possessed of your life

as it exists in the eyes of others,
or as it may appear
to emerge from the cold trails
and fragments that will survive you.

This knowledge is physical

Physical knowledge is an interesting idea, as if what we do were not only inspired by what we know, but what we know *is* what we do. In the end, the collection might be about love as a type of physical knowledge—"*love is a mirror / in which we learn to dance*"—the love of places and his experiences in them, his love for revisiting memories in verse, his love for his children, and the love of a "drink [of] tea on the deck / then [a] change into old clothes and top-dress the lawn."

While Amabile's well-travelled life spans the globe, W. H. New's *YVR* (the IATA code designating Vancouver International Airport) spans Vancouver geographically, historically, linguistically, socially, and personally. But Amabile's "physical knowledge" evokes, too, what *YVR* enacts as a lived version of Vancouver: physical, visceral, tactile, textural. New has said that he wanted to write *YVR* for a long time, but every early attempt to seek his city's language turned into postcards, not poetry. New has also said that it's by going away that you find memories. (Maybe New's well-travelled life—well-travelled in other collections of poetry and in a robust career as teacher, scholar, and reader—helped with *YVR*'s non-postcard version of Vancouver.) New is mesmerized by dividing lines (borders, edges) and calls on Dave Godfrey's pronouncement that "when you say place, I think movement" when talking about *YVR*, a resistance of static versions that rings/dings/mews pleasantly throughout the collection.

YVR begins by writing (maybe "assembling" is a better verb) Vancouver's park names into rhyming couplets: "China Creek, Still Creek, Oppenheimer, Lam, / Choklit, Trafalgar, Ebisu, Elm— // Nelson, Kensington, Charleson, Grays, / Robson, Templeton, Thornton, Falaise—." The poetry of place comprises, in part, the assembling of language that's already there. I think *YVR*'s beginning to position the collection for younger Vancouverites, help them not to be just "*Kids these days. Just hang[ing] out at the mall. / Check[ing] out the labels. Got no damn sense.*" But what I find most intriguing about this collection is its generosity to the larger space of Vancouver as place and home, as when, for example, the "Main Street" long poem, broken into twelve individual poems appearing throughout the book, ends the collection with "*yes*—I live *here*": "I live *here*" can imply that the speaker lives on Main Street or in Vancouver more generally. Insofar as "Main Street" is a "praise poem," *YVR* too offers praise to a city. Read in light of recent outcry by Vancouver community centres and their members in response to a municipal plan to pool community centre funds for redistribution, *YVR* gives voice to *all* of Vancouver *as* a community. All areas of the city constitute home for New's speaker. I don't think this mode of engagement with place to be common (and perhaps the community centre funds-and-funding outcry argues the exact opposite to be more common), but I appreciate, as a Vancouverite, how it narrates a healthy and sustainable Vancouver.

Many of *YVR*'s poems recreate an old Vancouver, a disappearing Vancouver accelerated by gentrification and a mixed-use-condominium-densification model of sustainability. Vancouver is a rich city, and so much of Vancouver's literature critiques this fact, but New is more interested in other textured richnesses. *YVR* recalls V-E day, Luck-Lucky, False Creek Road, Skid Road, Major Matthews, "duffer[s]," $1.49 day, Guinness holding Lions Gate Bridge up, and too many more city places and events to list or count. When slow-journalist Paul Salopek's claims that "we crave a

past in our landscapes," I know *YVR* makes the same claim, but I can't help but feel that that's not true for many of Vancouver's contemporary citizens, whether isolated by wealth or poverty, by a return to nature, or by the blinding lights of technology.

New has suggested that *YVR* is an invitation for its readers' versions of Vancouver; *YVR* is mine, he says, what's yours? I like the generosity in texts that ask for dialogue, stories (poems) of place that have an ear to other stories (poems) about place.

Reading Race in Space

Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, Audrey Kobayashi, eds.
Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada. U of British Columbia Press $34.95

Reviewed by Alana Fletcher

Rethinking the Great White North aims to "press theoretical advances in debates about race and racism into dialogue with a concurrent rethinking of nature now under way across the social sciences." The editors' ascription to the idea of race as a social construct that is, despite its construction, necessary to the understanding of social relations, dovetails with their hold on the ecocritical redefinition of "nature" as a social construct. Neither of these ideas is new—indeed, the editors refer to W.B. DuBois' 1935 polemic, *Black Reconstruction*, to illustrate how whiteness is historically constructed as privileged, while the "recent rethinking of nature" as socially constructed has been foregrounded by ecocritical approaches since the 1990s in the work of critics such as William Cronon in "The Trouble with Wilderness" and *Uncommon Ground* (both 1996). The investigation of the constructedness of both nature and race is applied in the service of deflating what the editors ostensibly present as a still-reigning belief in Canadian racial "tolerance" and multiculturalism. In light of the proliferation of important destabilizations of Canadian multiculturalism since the 1990s (in the work of Sunera Thobani, Wendy Brown, Neil Bissoondath, Himani Bannerji, Smaro Kamboureli, Eva Mackey, and Daniel Coleman, among others) the editors' prevarication that to claim, as they do, that Canada is "thoroughly racialized and marked by racist ideology . . . may come as a bold, even shocking, statement" seems to be overzealous advertising.

The originality of this edited collection, then, lies in its contributors' collective demonstration of the ways in which social constructions of the North, or of nature and wilderness more generally, have been enlisted to buttress a hegemonic white national identity in Canada. This being the case, the editors' omission in their contextualization of *Rethinking* of both Sherrill Grace's *Canada and the Idea of North* (2001) and Terry Goldie's much earlier *Fear and Temptation* (1989) is glaring. Grace's text overlaps in many ways with the current volume, especially in its critique of the representation of the North by southerners and its overarching concept that the idea of the North is central to Canadian identity. Goldie's seminal work contains analysis of the semiotic roles played by images of the wilderness and the North in Canadian indigenization narratives, and close readings of numerous Canadian texts that employ the strategy of aligning Indigenous persons with nature to confine them to the past (a strategy noted by a number of contributors to *Rethinking*).

Contributions which focus most closely on the construction of nature as white are Catriona Sandilands' investigation of the expulsion of Acadians from the area which became Cape Breton Highlands Park; Jocelyn Thorpe's exploration of turn-of-the-century travel writing about Temagami, Ontario, as a wilderness getaway; and Luis Aguiar and Tina Marten's overview of racist

labour recruitment policies in Kelowna. These articles investigate the production of tourist and upper-class city spaces in Canada as "white," but their discussions do not, in themselves, make a cogent statement about Canadian identity. It is in relation to other contributions that focus on the economic influences, narrative interpretations, and colonial legacies which have informed Canadian identity that the whitening of particular spaces that these essays deconstruct becomes legible as a pattern in which the production of "natural" space supports a white Canadian identity.

Economic analyses of race and space are articulated most noticeably within the essays dealing with urban space. In Aguiar and Marten's above-mentioned critique, the racism they uncover in Kelowna is entwined with classism. Phillip Mackintosh's contribution, which investigates the building of parks and playgrounds in working-class, immigrant neighbourhoods of Toronto in the 1910s, similarly draws attention to the economic structures influencing the impulse to naturally "beautify" overcrowded areas. Often, however, this class critique is not conscious enough. Mackintosh, for instance, tends to substitute "immigrant" for "poor," "crowded," or "working class" indiscriminately and without sufficient support. The economic disparity between racial minorities in Canada is examined most closely by Claire Major and Roger Keil, in a testimony-based examination of how and why visible minorities in Toronto in 2003 became not only the perceived carriers of SARS, but also those most at most risk of contracting the illness, due to the disproportionate numbers of minorities employed in service-work positions.

While nearly all of the contributions include some discussion of narrative representation, the most explicit discursive destabilization comes in the work of Richard Milligan and Tyler McCreary as they explore the contribution of Samuel Hearne's exploration narrative to the discourse of white innocence. Interestingly, this is preceded by Emilie Cameron's actor-network theory-influenced "following" of copper through both Kugluktukmiut and white stories in Kugluktuk (Coppermine), which, she argues, produces a more specific understanding of the region, its people, and its resources than do discursive analyses. This divergence of methodologies is significant, as it reveals a disciplinary divide. While constructions of race, nature, and identity are primarily understood as discursive in disciplines such as literary studies (where scholars place particular readings within larger networks of meaning), other disciplines such as geography caution against scaling up from the specific to the general, lauding approaches like Cameron's which examine the particular materials in which stories are carried, so as to reorder these stories without losing particularity by relegating the particular to a facet of discourse.

A thread picked up in many of the articles in this collection is that of the reversals or denials of whiteness: Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks' notion of whiteness as a "master signifier" of race that does not participate in the signifying system of racial difference is consistently invoked, as is Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the anti-conquest, the imperial narrative which oppresses even as it asserts innocence. The collection's two articles on land claim settlements (both focusing on claims in British Columbia) triangulate land and national identity with these reversals. Brian Egan argues that the official reconciliation project undertaken in BC fails to dismantle the assumptions of "racial rule" upon which first relations between European colonials and Indigenous persons in BC were established. The contribution by Jessica Dempsey, Kevin Gould, and Juanita Sandberg follows on Egan's outline of the colonial rational for dispossessing Indigenous peoples of lands

not used effectively or owned privately to argue that a recent series of papers by Tom Flanagan and Christopher Alcantara calling for the expansion of private property on reserves is a neo-liberal argument rendered acceptable through its negation of the history of colonial dispossession. Overall, this collection is a useful resource for scholars investigating the intersections of space and whiteness in Canada.

Battle in the Woods

Tzeporah Berman and Mark Leiren-Young
This Crazy Time: Living Our Environmental Challenge. Knopf Canada $32.00

Charlotte Gill
Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Big Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe. Greystone $19.95

Reviewed by Lisa Szabo-Jones

Escalated by affect and conflict, both environmental and corporate rhetoric build fictions and factions around claims on the truth. For Tzeporah Berman in *This Crazy Time: Living Our Environmental Challenge*, learning to negotiate in the space where those battle lines converge becomes a journey of humility, disappointment, surprise, victory, censure, but most of all, an ongoing acknowledgement that no battle is ever definitively won alone. Mark Leiren-Young writes with and about Berman in what I can only describe as a mixed genre that is part coming-of-age and vocational autobiography embedded with a practical guide to becoming a environmentalist for the twenty-first century. *This Crazy Time* chronicles a heady past twenty-odd years of Berman's involvement in the Canadian and later global environmental movements—British Columbia's early 1990s Clayoquot Sound blockade, Greenpeace, ForestEthics, and PowerUp.

Divided into four parts—"Blockades," "Boycotts," "Boardrooms," and "Climate Reckoning"—the eighteen chapters move out and back from different environmentalist and personal perspectives: confrontation, campaigning, negotiation, intervention. Leiren-Young and Berman document her rise and "battle stories," where Berman enacts civil disobedience, risks and succeeds in arrest, and initiates successful marketing campaigns. But, many of these "battle stories" are also internal battles, nuanced reflections motivated by "finding a way to advocate for the radical change necessary, while addressing the complexity of the problems and the economic and social impact, without compromising ecological values. Not an easy dance." Indeed. Her experiences on the "front lines" of many campaigns open her eyes to how ecological concern extends beyond class, gender, and cultural lines, and inspires people to stand in solidarity.

Her growing awareness and the ways she navigates (and sometimes stumbles through) the ever-present personal, social, cultural, and political challenges, for me, are the heart of the book, and allows me to forgive her occasional celebrity touting and keeps me reading. She finds she is not immune to typecasting others, and notes, "Once you have the environmental lens, you start to see everything through it whether you want to or not." As the book—and Berman's various encounters with different stakeholders—progresses, this early awareness becomes a formative lesson in her later negotiating strategies. As her confrontations, campaigns, and negotiations demonstrate, every player who battles for control of resources (material or human) wears a particular lens that colours the language deployed. Her challenge comes in learning how to switch lenses, see from the other side. In other words, learning how to make compromises.

Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt,* part memoir and natural, cultural, and tree-planting/logging history of the Pacific Northwest, from the get-go rides the reader relentlessly,

"verbing" hard. This tempo becomes clear when Gill writes, "I love my job . . . because it is so full of *things* . . . it has a way of filling up a life with verbs that push into one another, with no idle space in between." Her language also leaves no idle space, breathes life into those verbs that kept me reading. There is also familiarity in her prose, a hard-edged romance and road-trip rhythm and vernacular that reminded me of the Beat poets. And, indeed, she eventually mentions reading "Al Purdy. Gwendolyn MacEwan. Tom Robbins. The Beats." These writers make their presence felt in Gill's prose and imaginings: rhythmic resonance, and a mix of dense, stacked metaphors, poetic economy, and rambling descriptions of human and natural landscapes cut in with tree-planter slang and humour. *Eating Dirt* is a dirty romance of tree-planting culture, though there's nothing romantic about the work. As Gill pares the ecosystem down to the microcosms of soil, so she strips down the tree-planter to bones and muscle, no modesty, just function. She observes, "Mostly, we're invisible." They are the people that we don't see during the battles described by Berman. Their presence appears as after effects: seedlings, new growth.

But that new growth Gill does not proselytize as antidote to unsustainable logging practices or tree-planters as environmentalist saviours. As often as she evokes the beauty of the land, she takes care to conjure the conjugal mess of that "strange industrial marriage" between planters and loggers. Dropped off in clear cuts of "slash and stumps," the tree-planters must renew "the sudden flattening of monstrous biomass," often within hearing of chainsaws that "sound like mad mosquitoes." And, this is a financial marriage: "We're pieceworkers, here to make money, a lot of it, in a hurry." For the ones, like Gill, that return yearly, she claims, "We're professional tree-planters," "monotasking professionals." Perpetually wet and sweat-soaked and caught up in "the ambient complexities" of clearcuts and Pacific Northwest rainforests, the "jet-fuel" speed, the "grunt work," and "dirt lust" (an itch for land to plant) condition them into "industrial athletes."

Though very different on so many environmental levels, *This Crazy Time* and *Eating Dirt* are perfect companion reads. They create a fuller picture of the Pacific Northwest's complex logging and environmentalist cultures. Berman's book, a heroic tale of a remarkable and renowned individual taking on big issues, provides pragmatic guidelines on how to make collective change. Gill's book, on the other hand, makes visible that which remains, ironically, largely invisible in Berman's book: the forests and the "smaller" players whose lives are interwoven with (and integral to) these forest ecosystems. However, in their endeavours, both make us see the humans—for better or for worse—through the trees. Whereas Berman ends on imagining a changed world, Gill, through the power of imagery, brings us back to the connections between people and trees. Gill admits, "Forests for the Future. Forests Forever, as the slogans and the t-shirts say. Not a salve or a fix for the planet, not exactly. We gave the trees some small purchase in the world, and they gave us the same in return." Small battles are as important as big battles; the real challenge lies in not losing that purchase once won.

Plays for Acadian Youth

Herménégilde Chiasson
Pierre, Hélène et Michael suivi de Cap enragé.
Prise de parole 17,95 $

Reviewed by Jane Moss

Two decades after these two plays were first performed for youth audiences by the Théâtre de l'Escaouette of Moncton in co-production with the Théâtre français of the National Arts Centre, Prise de parole of Sudbury, Ontario has made the texts available in print. The playwright is Herménégilde Chiasson, one of Acadie's leading artistic and intellectual figures. Chiasson has devoted his career to creating a vibrant culture that represents modern Acadian identity and seeks to transcend without ignoring the traumas of the past and the social problems of the present. While his many plays for adults explore the lasting impact of the Acadian deportations on minority francophones in the Maritimes, in these two works he dramatizes the emotional conflicts of young people on the verge of adulthood, struggles that often end badly. His young characters seek romantic attachments to compensate for unhappy family situations and poor career prospects.

In *Pierre, Hélène et Michael*, a restless young francophone woman breaks up with her hometown boyfriend and takes off for Toronto with a bilingual anglophone who had recently moved to New Brunswick with his father after his Québécoise mother left the family. Michael is unhappy because he misses his mother, his old girlfriend, and the excitement of city life. Hélène sees in Michael the possibility of escaping from her community, which she describes as full of unemployed losers who spend their time whining. Unfortunately, Hélène does not find the exciting new life she dreamed of in Toronto and she spends all day in a small apartment because her English is not good enough to find a job. Michael is bored by his menial job and he starts seeing his old girlfriend. Hélène is forced to recognize that she has made a bad choice, but she cannot go back to her old life and boyfriend, Pierre. The last scenes take place five years later back in New Brunswick where Hélène encounters Pierre, who has married, become a father, and found a career in computer technology. The message of the play seems to be that leaving one's community for romance and excitement can be a risk not worth taking.

Cap enragé begins with the discovery of the corpse of a young man who died after a fall from a rocky seaside cliff. The ensuing police investigation explores the tangled relationships and troubled personal lives of four young people. Initially, the police suspect that Patrice, who was abused by his alcoholic father and has a history of petty crimes, pushed Martin out of jealousy. Then suspicion falls on Patrice's girlfriend, Véronique, who in turn points the finger at the victim's girlfriend, Sophie. In the end, Martin's diary proves that his death was a suicide, but the betrayals and suspicions revealed during the investigation have undermined the young couple's relationship as well as their respect for authority.

These plays are important to the cultural mission of theatre in minority francophone communities because they speak to adolescent problems in the language of contemporary high school spectators. It would be hard to argue that they are great works, but they do create opportunities for young Acadians to see drama represents their own community and personal concerns.

A Quintessence of Poetry

Méira Cook
A Walker in the City. Brick $19.00

Sky Gilbert
The Mommiad. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Phil Hall
Killdeer. BookThug $18.00

George Murray
Whiteout. ECW $18.95

Michelle Smith
dear Hermes... U of Alberta P $19.95

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

In *A Walker in the City*, Méira Cook takes on the old boys' club of poetry in playful and patricidal fashion. Cook's eponymous walker, variously named Mia and Ms. Em Cook (and, by extrapolation, Méira Cook) measures life in feet, "[t]he foot a precise / approximation of length." Walking and writing share tongues and feet; both acts allow Cook's "Girl with a name like a shrug," a "termagant" who has turned being written to her advantage by writing her way out of others' narratives, to establish herself as one of the most enigmatic and powerful characters in Canadian literature. Escaping the confines of literary girlhood imposed by "the old poet" F. Kulperstein, himself the invention of Felix Kaye (for whom Ms. Em Cook was amanuensis), Mia et al. participate in a layered mystery of authorship of Nabokovian proportions. (Taken together, Felix Kaye and F. Kulperstein suggest *felix culpa*, the fortunate fall associated with original sin and, in more literary terms, the happy resolution following unfortunate events.) But the allusions don't stop with *Pale Fire*; Mallarmé, Nietzsche, Dante, and Lewis Carroll, for example, inform Cook's long poem in more or less direct ways. The opening section thrums with *Alice in Wonderland* verve—"*Callooh! Callay!* arias she out (but soft / away)," providing both allusion and inverted syntax that privileges action words—and introduces characters as subjects and agents. While the style of energy changes from section to section, the play between and among its conflicting figures maintains a momentum that matches, at least, the cadences of walking in a city, into a life beyond the page. As Dante walks into a forest primeval at the start of his *Commedia*, so Cook's walker steps out of a literary tradition darkened by a domineering patriarchy.

George Murray writes personal poems attuned to environments indoors and out. *Whiteout* opens with a poem revisiting the first fifteen lines of Canto 24 of Dante's *Inferno*. "Dante's Shepherd," who in the original balks at having to lead his flock in the early morning cold, in Murray's poem embodies the quotidian act of "walk[ing] to the bank in the rain." The dual nature of the landscape that causes Dante's shepherd to "fret" persists in Murray's "shepherd's" hands, one of which remains protected in its sleeve only to emerge once inside the bank. Such revisioning of classical material doesn't so much jar as it does serve as a reminder that the lyric remains a malleable and viable poetic form in twenty-first-century Canada. If Murray successfully translates fourteenth-century Italian poetry into present-day Newfoundland, he likewise telegraphs local vernacular as vital element of lyric tradition, whether in the sing-song rhymes of "Song for a Memory" ("The old men are proud of their jukebox picks, / Humming in time where the words come unfixed") or the philosophical familiarity of "St. John's" ("Your future could lean in that door and you / might not recognize it as anything / but the next in another series of nows"). The collection's two "Ligature" poems—"Ligature ( )" and "Ligature (&)"—succinctly articulate Murray's poetic in *Whiteout* (a condition during which sea, sky, and land have no discernible lines of demarcation). Signalling the poet's fealty to linguistic marks and sounds, these poems employ ligature as metaphorical

conjunction of two bodies come together as "something resembling an *us*" that just might "make a shape of life." That some ligatures last longer than others—the ampersand's "almost infinity, or infinity's / shape, almost" is a typographical reminder of its longevity—reminds how ephemeral links between people can often be and how enduring some links between ideas, words, and books. Inwardly and outwardly, ligatures dissolve and hold as arbitrarily as the weather (which is to say for reasons beyond our control, if not entirely beyond our ken).

In her debut collection, Michelle Smith looks even further back than Cook and Murray to shape her attention to travel and reading as vocations. The Greek myths that inform *dear Hermes . . .* function both as a device for crafting lyric apostrophes and as a mode of travel that embraces the newness of otherwhere alongside the promise of imagination. Three pages of explanatory notes attest to the breadth of cultural forms Smith engages in this slim volume. Greek gods receive letters from "The Traveller" who identifies herself in the opening poem, "The Traveller Writes by the Light of the Liar's Star," as Hermes' "mercurial daughter." Despite the possibility that the traveller might be "Angela," the spirit of messages, Smith writes in the notes that "she is pure invention." She also appears in a few poems as "the poet," whose missives address more earthly folks. All of the speakers, though, share a similar voice, whether in the numerous ekphrastic poems or in poems of romantic love or in apostrophes to the gods. All evoke the various places to which the speaker has travelled, literally and otherwise. An uneasiness resides in these poems between playfully anachronistic lyric and earnestly recollected themes from ancient myth, with the balance tipping more toward the latter. For every "dear Persephone— / it wasn't the pomegranate, was it? / c'mon, confess, 'cause the jig is up," an "O! Thoughtless Child who unleashed / the wrath of winter upon us all, who ensures / April is ever the cruellest month" offers a counterpoint in universalism; for each "Dear Nike— / Oh, to write you an ode, a sonnet, a rock song," a "his voice travels in waves / of heat that gather in the ear, thick as sticky hot honey" appears to undo with what feels to be a forced fealty to assonance at the expense of cadence. Still, for a journey into the heart and mind of a world-loving, word-leaving new voice, *dear Hermes. . .* proves aptly attuned to the inner and outer workings of story.

The Mommiad seems to be a book that Gilbert felt he had to write in order to come to terms with his mother's death. His conflicting feelings stemming from a conflicted relationship—he fears, he loves, he desires, he becomes (when in drag) his mother—dominate the memoirish entries, which occasionally give up trying to be poems and resort to prose accounts of incidents and psychological insights. Written in a voice that sounds stagey—that is, a voice not overly concerned with syntactical or grammatical precision, a voice desperate to speak without benefit of editorial hindsight for fear of either losing the memories or of deciding not to share the memories at all—the book often seems glib in the face of such serious material (alcoholism, infidelity, physical abuse, sexual identity). Still, for readers it's hard to tell whether the glibness is intentional or a result of careless editing. I can put aside my preference for pronoun agreement, which is ignored in such sentences (lines?) as "She moved my sister and I up to Toronto" and "When I was about fourteen years old my mother gave my sister and I a sex manual," or for proper conjugation, which is missing in a reference to David Carradine who, according to Gilbert, "hung himself while trying to get an erection"—such inaccuracies and their concomitant unsophistication might be intentional. But the phrase "[f]or she leaved in a dream" strikes me as unfortunate, as

does the narrative cliché contained in the lines "[b]ut she was a good mother / Or was she?" Given Gilbert's prowess as a playwright (and the fact that *The Mommiad* is published by Playwrights Canada Press), "these poems (or whatever they are)" succeed as monologues more than as poems. I suspect, too, that they would benefit from a professional reading/performance, which would imbue the memories with a humour and poignancy the words themselves struggle to convey.

If Gilbert's monologue-poems falter on the page, Phil Hall's self-described essay-poems in *Killdeer*, the fourth release from BookThug's increasingly necessary Department of Critical Thought, accomplish something at once prosaic and poetic while eschewing prose-poem and lyric conventions. Using lines within lines—a seeming marriage of Emily Dickinson's dash and Sue Goyette's long lines—Hall crafts narrative essays out of epigraphs and epigrams, aphorisms and memories. Take these lines from "Disclosure," one of the book's shorter entries: "The poem about me as a boy shooting the dog when my dad told / me to // Didn't ring clear in its flaw-rhythms —until I scraped down to the / rage-line // *Nothing but nothing would be beneath me* (MCHUGH)." He revisits his childhood in rural southern Ontario—a topic he covers in *Trouble Sleeping* (2000)—and details his writing life, including encounters with some of the most influential Canadian writers of the mid-twentieth century. The anecdotal account of Hall's pilgrimage to Margaret Laurence's house in 1973 alone makes *Killdeer* compulsory reading for lovers of CanLit and aspiring writers. Its humour puts the lie to the notion that Canadian writing is patently humourless, which is not to say "Becoming a Poet" and "Twenty Lost Years" (a loving paean to the underappreciated poet Bronwen Wallace) are not without moments of seriousness. But the moments feel honestly rendered—thoughtful reminiscences acknowledging one artist's debt to others and evoking the best of high-minded conversations past:

> I have built a way forward with poems using doubt
>
> But I have Bron's absolute confidence in all of us with me each day as I tinker
>
> She believed in a unified front against despair – because she did – I do – mostly
>
> Sometimes – even now – 20 years later – when I've finished a poem – or think I have – I think – *Bron would like this*
>
> Or – *I'd have a fun old time arguing with Bron about this one*

And so, despite the often dark subject matter—poverty, fear of failure, loss, death—Hall's Governor General's Award winner offers "a fun old time" with poets and thinkers past and, thankfully, present.

Carnet de voyage

Gilles Cyr
Huit sorties. L'Hexagone 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Charles Dionne

Huit sorties suit, de proche, le chemin de son narrateur aux prises avec un désir d'authenticité. Il tente de dépasser le « mur », celui qui donne son nom au premier chapitre du recueil. Un sentiment l'habite, qu'il doit éliminer. « Dans l'intervalle je vois que rien / n'est vraiment à sa place. » Le regard est porté avec inquiétude vers un bouleversement sans nom, vers la fin de la quiétude : « suivez mon regard / on doit s'inquiéter / quand ils partent en forêt / avec leurs quatre-roues ». Comme si le silence des lieux était sur le point de disparaître, détruit par l'Homme. « Enfin réunis dans une communauté d'indignés », il faut partir à la recherche de la vraie essence humaine. Foncièrement mobile, la voix narrative témoigne de son passage d'un lieu à l'autre : Hull, la Sicile, Licata, Syracuse, l'île de

Crète, la Macédoine. Véritable « carnet de voyage », les différents espaces s'enchaînent comme chacune des huit avenues ou « sorties » que tentent d'emprunter le narrateur. L'arbre, le jardin, l'Arménie, le papillon, la pomme, la recherche, incarnent les outils qui servent à désamorcer le mur. L'errance rythme le recueil, jusque dans la nature, parfois précédée par un guide. Cependant, le voyageur sera « encore perdu », inévitablement. En voyage, les plaisirs de la cuisine, les festins et les marchés populaires permettent d'explorer un vocabulaire pointu qui reflète le climat de recherche sérieuse où tout est noté. C'est aussi l'occasion de faire une série de rencontres. Les histoires étrangères, d'« un autre mythe cherokee / lié à la colère / [qui] raconte l'invention des fraises »; les peintres Cézanne, Huygens et Papin, réels personnages. Le trajet est ponctué d'objets, eux aussi soumis à l'étude : la pomme, l'hirondelle et le café, par exemple. Le tout pour passer un « mur », jamais tout à fait décrit, et ne privant pas du désir de vouloir toujours aller plus loin; « pour renouer / nous irons le plus loin possible / au-delà des scories dérangeantes / des ratages ponctuels ». Ce genre d'occupation, conclut le narrateur, « serait absolument moderne ». C'est peut-être, un peu ironiquement, par le geste moderne de l'errance, que le recueil propose certaines réponses.

Olson Happens

Frank Davey
When TISH Happens: The Unlikely Story of Canada's "Most Influential Literary Magazine."
ECW $19.95

Charles Olson; Ralph Maud, ed.
Muthologos: Lectures and Interviews.
Talonbooks $39.95

Reviewed by Clint Burnham

The story of Charles Olson, his poetry, and his influence on Canadian writing has been told many times in the past fifty years: from his early years (in the 1930s and 40s) when he wrote the still-important study of Melville (*Call Me Ishmael*); to his key role in the Black Mountain College in the 1950s (where, with Robert Creeley, John Cage, and a host of painters, poets, and teachers, he was part of a great experiment in arts education); to such manifestos as the essay "Projective Verse," where he established the *page* as a site for poetry, breaking out of the left margin of what Charles Bernstein would call "official verse culture"; and of course culminating in his magnificent epic, spatial, local but also globalized poem, *The Maximus Poems*, begun in 1950 and not completely published until after his death in 1970, the great bridging text from the modernism of Pound and Williams to the postmodernism (a term he is credited with inventing, at least in English) of *TISH*, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers, and beyond. So much is official and historical, so much is true, and yet so much is disappointing when you read beyond Olson's poetry and essays. Not when you read his letters (whether in the selected edition from University of California Press or the multiple volumes from Black Sparrow), but certainly when you read, as we do here, this very uneven collection of lectures (at colleges but also around the dinner table, as during the so-called Vancouver Poetry Conference of 1963) and interviews (for the

BBC and *The Paris Review*). *Muthologos* (a second edition assembled by Vancouver Olson scholar Ralph Maud) collects not simply such texts, but versions of such texts that do a weird disservice to the work, perhaps falling into what is too often the cult of Olson, the cult of the great man that arguably reveals too much, as in these ramblings from Olson's Berkeley lecture in 1965, where, like a scene from a twenty-first-century reality television show (from Gloucester to *Jersey Shore*?), he ends up commenting on his own self-revealing:

> But at this point of time, I find myself — and I'm nervous, 'cos I'm reading this poem, and I'm finding it all right, right up to this point I've stopped. How about it, Allen? Right. You're with me, I think. And I will read, after the third poem, a fourth poem, which says why and how a woman at Black Mountain asked me, and explained to me, or . . . I don't know. I mean, we were talking about Paul X entering here, whose cigarette I'm smoking and I said, "He's simply invidious." And I don't say that again to get into an argument, like they say; but, I mean, I don't still know why that woman asked me the question which the poem contains. Fair enough? This would be, from my point of view, what really is argument: is the fact that we live out, until there isn't any, the argument of our own being. That's why I believe, as I've kept saying this week, and I'm enough up to say now why I think the private is public, and the public is where you behave. And that's its advantage. [DRINKS]

Also to be filed under TMI is Frank Davey's hilarious (at least for me, since I'm not in the book) memoir *When* TISH *Happens*. "TMI," as in the pop locution "too much information," is no doubt how some of Davey's poetry comrades from the 1960s might view this narrative of sex, drugs, and mimeograph machines. *TISH*, of course, was the poetry magazine that Davey co-founded with George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah, Lionel Kearns, Gladys Hindmarch, and Jamie Reid. Taking inspiration from the new American poetics so famously embodied by Olson (with no little help from UBC's Warren Tallman). Davey really does bare all here—complete with details of affairs, poetry battles, and debates over how high Robert Duncan's voice was. But in that last regard—Davey on the American poet's visit to UBC in the summer of 1961—we see the everyday ground of how Black Mountain interacted with *TISH* and, indeed, how Olson's work, as opposed to his persona, was so influential: "Magic's greatest enemy . . . is fantasy." Duncan is now explaining Olson's *The Maximus Poems* and how Olson has rigorously grounded them on actual events—"[T]here must be an actual occurrence . . . You've got to know what is there."

Looking for Happiness

Joe Denham
The Year of Broken Glass. Nightwood $24.95

Myrna Dey
Extensions. Newest $22.95

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

If a reader wants to find one or two novels to provide her with cultural and historical background to British Columbia, especially the coastal region, she can find it in either Joe Denham's *The Year of Broken Glass* or Myrna Dey's *Extensions*. Denham locates his work mainly on the Sunshine Coast, while Dey's novel is set in Vancouver and in a small mining town on Vancouver Island. Both works are also similar in their central trope of a main character in search of a happier life in *The Year of Broken Glass* and the truth of the past in *Extensions*. Because Denham and Dey eschew using a linear narrative and a single point of view, the novels are more challenging to read than the run-of-the-mill fiction available to the general public. The writers' attempts to

employ narrative complexity and character development to produce a quality work are laudable, but not without problems.

Denham's Francis Wichbaun is a university graduate-turned-fisherman. In a fairytale-like scene, he captures a glass float that has mythical power. Having been told that the glass float would garner him a small fortune, Francis decides to take the object to Hawaii where the buyer lives, because Francis has a second family and wants to leave his eco-warrior Anna and son for loving Jin Su and daughter Emily. Francis is not a happy character. The reader's introduction to him is: "I'm tired of the end of the world." This is a sentiment repeated in the novel. Why is Francis so weary of life? Is it because of his principled but nagging Anna, whom he met at university? Is it because the fishing business is not flourishing? Is it because, like all adulterous men, it is hard to keep two households going and to keep the lies straight? Is it because he realizes that he is a failure? Probably all of the above and more. That means Francis is not much different from the average person living and breathing in reality.

At this point the reader might question the charisma that should be radiating from Francis, since he is the focus of three women, including Miriam who sails with him; unfortunately, he comes across as a whiner. Then one wonders at the genre-mixing that happens throughout the novel. *The Year of Broken Glass* begins as a soft-spoken existential meditation. At some point, it becomes a kind of literary *Waterworld* with a bit of Melville and Conrad: adventures on the high seas, self-discovery, romantic interest, individual endurance, and so on. The third generic turn occurs when guns are fired and assassins are rappelling from a helicopter. Many writers have tried to mix elements of genres to produce a more original narrative. But this is a fine balance not easily maintained. However, Denham's novel is written with integrity and, often, elegance. The exception is when Denham introduces multiple first-person narrations. Anna's voice is vigorous and believable. Jin Su's is a mere whisper, an accessory. Others are not convincing.

Extensions is narrated in first-person. Bella Dryvynsydes is a policewoman looking to solve the mystery of her great-grandmother's early life in a mining town in British Columbia. The novel moves from Bella's reflections on her life—her mother has died, her lover has dumped her, and she is finding repeated visits to domestic violence unrewarding—to letters written by her great-grandmother Jane, a child of Welsh immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. These letters are retrieved from various sources. The process of retrieval becomes a series of discoveries of lost relatives and stories of the past. Fitting the pieces of puzzles together, Dey implies, is Bella's way to fit the pieces of her life together: to overcome her low self-esteem, to change to a more fulfilling area of police work, and finally, to accept romantic attention from someone she once arrested. The novel's rhythm moves from the narrator's "don't-mess-with-me" evaluations (of people, of life) which, given her profession, predictably sound caustic and cynical, to the epistolary style of Jane, who comes through as a strong woman with solid beliefs in what she has to do to endure the hardship of the lives of immigrant miners. The result is that the reader might be more interested in Jane and would like to know more about her. Still, the reader is happy with the happy ending.

Dubois on Frye

Diane Dubois
Northrop Frye in Context. Cambridge Scholars
$59.99 US

Reviewed by Brian Russell Graham

Diane Dubois begins *Northrop Frye in Context* with "The Ideas of Northrop Frye," consisting of three subsections—"Frye's Critical Utopia," "Frye's Critical Path," and "Frye's Educational Contract"—and taken as a whole, the section represents a fine articulation of Frye's literary theory, how it relates to society, and the nature of the role of education in society. It is followed by Frye's ideas about the university, the church, the poetry of William Blake, politics, and Canada, and the study is concluded with a consideration of "Frye's Academic Influences."

The book is not located within the field of Frye scholarship, and so exactly what kind of contribution the author wishes it to represent is left inadequately defined. I would argue that this study of Frye must be evaluated as two books in one dust jacket, owing to the fact that the account of "context" thins out to a considerable degree in various sections. The first book is a Frye primer, focused on his ideas and comprising a fair amount of summary of his work. The second is something more like a study dedicated to "Frye's Contexts," religious, political, and so on.

The study is particularly vulnerable to criticism when the account of "context" thins out, and the study begins to seem more like a Frye handbook; conversely, it is at its best when a great deal of information about one of Frye's foci is provided. When context thins out, we are left with yet another summary of Frye's ideas. Moreover, crucial ideas are left out, the synopses revealing too many gaps. There is no consideration, for example, of Frye's seminal "Trends in Modern Culture" in the section on Frye's politics. It is, however, impossible to provide an account of Frye's political attitude—the focus should be his Cold War-period outlook—without reference to the one essay in which he provided a comprehensive account of how the American continent might evolve politically and economically at this time and thereby avoid the horrible prospect of hot war. Similarly, not enough of Frye's writings on Blake are included in the chapter on Frye and Blake. The University of Toronto Press published *Northrop Frye on Milton and Blake* in 2005, a volume collecting everything that Frye wrote about Blake in addition to *Fearful Symmetry*, but the volume is not included in the bibliography, and key articles are left out of the discussion.

In this respect, the book should be compared to Jonathan Hart's *The Theoretical Imagination*. What distinguishes Dubois' account of Frye from Hart's is mainly her chapters on Frye on the church, on politics, and on Canada. However, the reader who opts for Dubois misses out on Hart's chapters on *The Great Code*, "History," "Mythology and Criticism," and his material about Frye's creative writing.

Inasmuch as the work is dedicated to context, it provides us with useful information about particular areas of Frye's thought. The most interesting material is included in "Frye and the Church," "Frye and Politics," "Frye and Canada," and "Frye's Academic Influences." For example, in "Frye and Canada," Dubois concludes her survey with an illuminating comparison of "Frye's theories of culture, community and communication" with "the works of Canadian communication theorists" Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innis, and George Grant. In "Frye and the Church," she usefully harnesses Tibor Fabiny's notion that Frye is a typological theorist, which allows her to respond to Terry Eagleton's misrepresentation of Frye. And so on. In this respect, the study is of more interest to the Frye scholar, although, as already indicated, the study does not include enough material of this type.

Diaspora at Home

Loren Edizel
Adrift. Tsar $20.95

Mary Jo Leddy
Our Friendly Local Terrorist. Between the Lines $24.95

Ava Homa
Echoes from the Other Land. Tsar $19.95

Reviewed by Dina Al-Kassim

These three books address the salience of the refugee for contemporary Canadian discourses of national belonging at a time when the right of asylum is being sorely tested. Policies of the current Conservative government are steadily eroding Canada's human rights mission and the world's image of the country as a place of asylum. Ava Homa's *Echoes from the Other Land* imagines the homeland from the vantage of the adopted home, while Loren Edizel and Mary Jo Leddy dispel conventional views of immigrant exile and government benevolence respectively.

Since the publication of *At the Border Called Hope: Where Refugees Are Neighbours* (Harper Collins, 1997), Leddy has drawn public attention to the indignities that the Canadian immigration system visits upon political refugees both at and within its borders. Consciousness of the challenges faced by those seeking political asylum has been promoted in the arts in recent years by the success of *Monsieur Lazhar* (Philippe Falardeau, dir. 2011), which adapts Évelyne de la Chenelière's stage play *Bashir Lazhar* (Théâtrales, 2002) for an international audience. Missing from these popular forms is an account of how the Canadian Security Intelligence Service manipulates the immigration process to procure informants from within refugee communities. Leddy's moving portrait of Suleyman Goven, an Alevi Kurd who fled torture and unending pressure to inform on fellow Kurds in Turkey, fills this gap to show that the right to "non-refoulement" often becomes an opportunity for the intelligence service to delay immigration and security clearance, in Goven's case for fourteen years, while seeking to "turn" asylum seekers into domestic spies.

Founder of the Romero House, Toronto's refugee residence and community support centre, Leddy is a theologian and social activist who teaches courses in religious studies and "political discernment" as a Senior Fellow of Massey College, University of Toronto. As an index of the effectiveness of Leddy's social engagement, I note that in 2011, the IRB granted asylum to only thirty-one percent of applicants while the Romero House boasts of a ninety percent success rate for its asylum seekers. This background in religious study applied to real world problems will help some readers understand the rhetorical choices of *Our Friendly Local Terrorist*, which at times exhorts its reader to moral action or ventriloquizes Goven's pain in urgent, staccato phrases or repetitions reminiscent of prayer. At moments like these, the author's voice merges with another more universal voice, as the prose abandons realist narration and reaches out to catalyze a national ethic. These are strange and welcome departures from the expected tones of political activism; they call upon a Canadian public to militate for change. Leddy makes another unusual choice when she devotes large sections of the text to selected paraphrase of Goven's personal diaries, begun as remedy for bouts of depression and which catalogue not only his responses to every bureaucratic turn of the screw, but also his romantic attachments and deeply personal thoughts. Some readers will question the value of passing on bawdy tales of bodily functions, when the bare facts of Goven's forced military service in Turkey or torture at the hands of Turkish police would suffice to rouse a reader's sympathy. In the service of rendering the "terrorist" into ordinary life,

Leddy's interest in these matters does offer an effective counter to the official story, but this reader, at least, found elements of the hortatory style when combined with tidbits that seem to border on the invasive to be a bit unsettling.

The appendices include a reprint of Sharryn Aiken's "'Manufacturing 'Terrorists': Refugees, National Security, and Canadian Law" (2001, 2002) and a redacted version of the Security Intelligence Review Committee report that decided Goven did not pose a security threat. Aiken's contribution evaluates the anti-terrorism provisions of the Canadian Immigration Act and concludes that systematic racism is only reinforced through current policy. By tracing the development of "terror" and "terrorism" in international usage against the background of countervailing global efforts to establish and promote human rights, as in the 1966 International Covenants of Human Rights, Aiken shows that in the postwar period of decolonization, tensions between the right of self-determination and the power of states to criminalize political dissent have a bearing on Canadian immigration policy, which penalizes an ever-widening field of community engagement and activism for refugees. These documents complement Leddy's narrative and make the whole eminently teachable in a variety of settings. For the general reader, they contextualize a singular story as a global problem.

Ava Homa's literary debut includes seven short stories wound around the theme of Iran's state repression of desire, particularly for women. Topics range from failed marriage, divorce, and disability to queer sexuality, and are handled with a flair for melodrama and psychological intensity. Two stories offer views of Kurdish life in Iran with tales of political repression that echo Goven's real experience, while others portray life in Tehran with its furtive underground parties and intense regulation of morality by police and neighbours. The most delicate and affecting of these is the final entry, "Just Like Googoosh"; a loving couple moves house to escape prying eyes while the wife endures the effects of chemotherapy. As her hair falls out, the Kurdish couple shares a memory of Googoosh, iconic female pop idol and emblem of national pride. In the 1980s, the regime outlawed female singers and entertainers, yet Googoosh continued to perform and signalled her defiance of extremist prescriptions on women's public appearance by refusing to cover her hair—instead, she shaved herself bald. Less successful are the author's attempts to deal with controversial issues such as queer sexuality or female circumcision; Homa's sensationalist treatment of these issues suggests that she addresses a diasporic or western audience at a great distance from the cultural locales depicted. This missed opportunity to educate within and beyond the Canadian Iranian community is a pity.

In contrast, Loren Edizel's *Adrift* is a study in minimalist reserve. It tells the story of a nightshift, hospital nurse named John, who, hailing from a distant, possibly Mediterranean locale, sought political asylum decades ago. John whiles away his breaks writing fictions inspired by the faint details of his patients' lives; slowly, these and other tales take over as John's reveries expand into a fantastical network of paths binding strangers and memories in unlikely combinations. Skirting melodrama as form, the sparseness of the narration infuses the novel with a palpable sense of prosaic exile. Lives spanning oceans and that are lived divided between here and there share in the melancholic anomie such that the immigrant experience is no longer granted pride of place in our imaginary hierarchy of suffering in exile. Misery and regret are just as likely to strike the natal citizen as the asylum seeker or business traveller. Making exile quotidian is one achievement of this spare and, at times, cold and disengaged

novel. Edizel works hard to thwart the received idea that immigration leads inexorably to a diminished life or that exile is a state only immigrants experience; the novel's strength lies in its ability to distance this ready-made perception in favour of an exploration of variations on constrained lives eked out in conditions of economic precarity—the Carré St. Louis' artists and cafes supply much of the colour and interest of the novel—or equally, of global privilege and wealth. Shifting this major trope of multicultural and diasporic literature seems to demand a reliance upon stock figures and stereotypic conversations to convey its message that the life of the cliché carries within it other forms of distance and displacement than can be emblematized or captured in the immigrant's situation. A desire for immigrant stories can easily ossify into a demand for diaspora to remain displacement. Driving home this message, Edizel has John confront this desire and its slippage from curiosity to imposition by saying, "Point is, did you need to know all this, to understand me better? I don't think so. Do you think I don't fit in because I was born elsewhere, or do you expect that I shouldn't fit in despite the fact that I do?"

Comparative Cultural Policy

Monica Gattinger and Diane Saint-Pierre, dirs.
Les Politiques culturelles provinciales et territoriales du Canada : origines, évolutions et mises en œuvre. PUL 42,95 $

Reviewed by Jonathan Paquette

This collected edition is the result of a vast collaborative research effort on comparative cultural policy. After a rich comparative research program led to a series of publications on national cultural policies that were well-received by their French-speaking audiences in Canada and abroad, Monica Gattinger and Diane Saint-Pierre decided to further their work and collaborations in comparative cultural policy to address the question of provincial cultural policy in Canada in all its diversity. There is no doubt that cultural policy researchers in Canada will find this edition to be one of the most significant and sorely needed contributions to the field in recent years.

In terms of theoretical considerations, this collected edition finds its roots in a number of questions that both Gattinger and Saint-Pierre have raised through their academic publications on the heuristic potential and/or limitations of comparative research on sub-national governments (provinces, states, regions, etc.). These sub-national considerations are important given that most models or archetypes of reference are based on national experiences. The last chapter of this book, in particular, furthers this reflection by opening discussion on strategies for a comparative research program at the sub-national level. Building on an overview of the most salient features of each chapter, as well as on their discussions and exchanges with their collaborators, Gattinger and Saint-Pierre point out a number of variables or dimensions that a comparative (infra/sub) national research program should comprise: history, political culture, relationships between national and sub-national governments, demography, geography, as well as the rationale and conception of culture entertained by each province.

While there are a number of interesting insights put forward for comparative research in this edition, both authors might come across as being overly cautious. For instance, the limitations of the applicability of national archetypes to sub-national contexts has not benefited from a more comprehensive discussion, leaving the task of theorizing and aggregating patterns for sub-national archetype construction entirely open. Such in-depth discussion could have addressed the problematical

"identity" of the hybrid category of cultural policy that is defined as building from French, American, and British national models. As both authors of this conclusive chapter observe, most provincial cultural policy tends to fit the definition of a hybrid cultural policy. It is, in my opinion, very clear that this contribution will fuel a number of debates that will guide discussions and research agendas within the comparative cultural policy research community.

While this work must be credited for the theoretical debate it brings to our awareness, the greater value of this work lies in its systematic treatment of each Canadian province's cultural policy. Each province is approached as a case study, and each case study benefits from in-depth coverage based on a tri-dimensional analytical structure focusing on history, cultural administration, and cultural policy. The editors of this collected edition must be applauded for this decision as it gives weight to their contribution. As the logic of case studies command, the different historical and cultural specificity of each province is given equal voice. In doing so, the editors have avoided the temptation of amalgamating provinces into artificial and, at times, questionable regional ensembles (e.g., the Prairies, Atlantic Canada, etc.). This renders the collected edition all the more useful for instructors, students, cultural administrators, and the many researchers or advocates gravitating in the sphere of cultural policy research. Gattinger's chapter, for instance, represents perhaps the single greatest effort to date of providing a systematic treatment of Ontario's cultural policy. In addition to the individual chapters on the Canadian provinces, a chapter on the Canadian North and a chapter on cultural statistics in Canada complete this collected edition. This collected edition is already a well-cited reference in the field of cultural policy, and there is no doubt that its English translation, scheduled to be published by the University of Toronto Press, will only strengthen its popularity and referential value.

Work, Women, and War

Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds.
A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War. U of British Columbia P $34.95

Reviewed by Jan Lermitte

The cover illustration on the recent volume by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw depicts a colourful cluster of four women dutifully outfitting a soldier with his sword and shield. They are absorbed in their work, eyes downcast, their youthful bodies draped in symbols of king and country. This image from 1916 illustrates an attitude of service that was widely expected of women during the Great War. The collection of essays behind this cover successfully examines and discusses the service-oriented lives of women who remained on the home front or worked overseas between 1914-1918. The introduction discusses the relative invisibility of women in traditional war history and cites more recent works, such as Jonathan Vance's *Death so Noble*, that include women's history, but in a limited way. This volume is an important contribution to the many books about World War I because it draws attention to the need for research and analysis of women's lives on the home front and in the postwar years. An extensive bibliography intended for scholars is included. Although Glassford and Shaw are historians, they include essays that are multidisciplinary in content and relevant to the work of academic researchers in gender and women's studies, literary studies, cultural studies, and history.

Shaw and Glassford's goal is "to bring together major elements of women's wartime experience as a step towards meaningfully

(re)inserting the female half of the population into the historical narratives of Canada and Newfoundland at war, from 1914 to 1918." In their pursuit of this goal, they acknowledge the powerful influence of memorialization and commemoration in Canadian war accounts that typically mythologize the male experience (think of Vimy Ridge and Beaumont-Hamel), but they ask some key questions: "Did women as a whole . . . experience their own separate transformation—as women—during the First World War? If so, what was transformed, how, and why?" This theme of transformation is a thread that weaves together all the articles in the volume. Although the various writers do not agree on the types or breadth of change, all agree that women of Canada and Newfoundland did not stand by to watch the war take place. Rather, they took their traditional domestic work to public levels and organized "distaff" work (such as knitting socks and making bandages), fundraising, volunteer nursing, banking, and as the war dragged on, agricultural work, recruiting, ambulance driving, and munitions manufacture. This work was seen at the time as important service done for the country, and a means for women to do their own "soldiering."

The collection effectively addresses the gaps in current understanding of the emotional and active lives of women (and briefly, of girls) during the Great War, but I would like to draw particular attention to four essays relevant to literary scholars. Suzanne Evans' essay, which examines women's material responses to grief and mourning, includes literary analysis of the novel *Rilla of Ingleside* by L. M. Montgomery. Vicki Hallett provides an insightful look at the work of Newfoundland poet Phebe Florence Miller. Lynn Kennedy unpacks the "motherhood motif" in wartime poetry. Amy Tector touches on disability studies with her analysis of the depiction of disability in returned soldiers in postwar Canadian fiction. Glassford and Shaw stress that these articles are starting points for the further in-depth work they want to encourage. Susan Fisher's recent book, *Boys and Girls in No Man's Land*, is a good example of the nuanced, thorough study that needs to be done in this field.

A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service raises questions about the lives of girls and women of Canada and Newfoundland during World War I. We might also ask, how did women serve in Quebec, where there was anti-war sentiment? Or in the North? Or among visible minorities? Did the First World War pave the way for the women's vote? How did women's service in the Great War create opportunities for the Second? We cannot find answers in interviews with women of that time; we can only examine the documents, stories, photographs, letters, and leaflets of the day. When we consider the roles women currently play as soldiers, nurses, and specialists of various kinds in the Canadian Forces and the country at large, we can see that transformation has indeed occurred. Ultimately, the success of this volume will be whether or not it inspires more researchers to delve into this history of transformation.

Object-relations

Helen Guri
Match. Coach House $17.95

Nicole Markotić
Bent at the Spine. BookThug $20.00

Reviewed by Erin Wunker

What is the object of your affection? What if that object is just that: a thing? How can language articulate the modes of our relatings when it itself is out of joint? *Match*, by Toronto-based poet Helen Guri, and *Bent at the Spine*, by Nicole Markotić, each take on questions of object-relations. Psychologist Melanie Kline pioneered the concept of object-relations theory, which posits that unconscious phantasy—that

which is produced within the subject—is fundamental to how we learn to relate to things outside of or separate from ourselves. For Kline, the human subject seeks relations with objects as a means of regaining a lost sense of wholeness. Despite their formal differences, each collection offers a finely wrought exploration of the strangeness of language from a slightly disjointed subjective perspective that demands the reader reorient her expectations.

Match, Helen Guri's first collection, opens with the arrival of the apocalypse. Or rather, as "light gallops in" and signals the beginning, the end of the world is sutured to a ritual we tend to cast as a beginning. "Apocalypse Wedding" brings together the tropes of a Shakespearean comedy and a contemporary dystopian drama. The speaker, who soon identifies himself as Robert Brand, describes an uncanny scene of quiet chaos. There are recognizable markers of matrimonial celebrations, but they are made strange, as if viewed through a looking glass. The groom's mother, "who knew in her wicker-basket certainty" that the event would be a disaster, "now stands balance on one ear in the impossible gravity." "Uncle Charlie makes the best of things." But there is no denying the carnivalesque scene: bridesmaids who have "watched too many zombie movies, / shriek in chorus, hike up their dresses to wade / across the newly liquid river of the atmosphere." This binding together of two people challenges the very foundations of Robert Brand's world. "For one spooled second everything glows," he observes, "then the world starts tipping from its crate." The wedding is not a disaster, as his mother feared, but rather, "the disaster is a wedding," bringing two objects into each other's orbit, and throwing off the delicate constellation of the community's sense of itself. Why? Because Robert's bride is a 110-pound, fully operational sex doll.

Match requires that the reader question subjectivity and objectivity. In the first section, "One: In which I am largely unrequited," the object of Robert's unrequited state is absent. Rather, in long, prosaically structured poems such as "Almanac," we encounter the young boy as he experiences the stupefying confusion that is a lonely childhood. Time is marked through the length of the poem's line:

> High on the hunch of the rattlesnaking
> slide, she bet I was the kind
> to piss the bed.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It was news to me, kid-iotic as I was,
> poking a stick into an
> aluminum can, imagining I was a T. Rex
> or a saint.

The lines of "Almanac" reach back into Robert's memory and paint the hazy outlines of the story leading up to his object-relations. "The Single Life of Lava" offers a more recent snapshot of the now-adult Robert. The haziness of childhood has been sloughed off to make room for the fill-in-the-blank repartee of adulthood, and the line-length reflects this. "Glory me, she likes my _____." quips the lonely, lyric Robert, though he is well aware of the mold he is attempting to fit: "My lines grow more shameless with time, / I'm the proverbial bulldozer." Guri's collection is subtly crafted to reflect Robert's struggle with contemporary expectations of heterosexual masculinity. In addition to shifting the unit of composition to reflect the speaker's emotion or to signal a temporal shift, Guri works too with juxtaposition at the level of syntax. In "Anagnorisis With Sex Aid," Robert describes his divorce as "a breeze shot through / with salt" in an atmosphere in which "all around me a great mind was porpoising." Here, relationships are rendered atmospheric, and thinking becomes a mammal that can live in water. When Robert finally introduces the reader to his beloved, to his match, she is both pure

possibility in a "crate of elsewhere, special delivery" and "dead weight / to the delivery man, who grimaces" as he lifts the box from the truck. The poems that make up *Match* build a complex portrait of contemporary masculinity, alienation, and the ways in which humans build means of relating. The results are disquieting: both beautiful ("She is body, beloved.") and horrifying. In a late poem, "Model," the kindling of Robert's life, of his loneliness, is set alight: "my matchbox car trafficked me to a matchstick house, / wherein my perfect match – in this case, a matryoshka doll – / was cultivating a cathedral of darkness for an inner life." The collection shakes the superficial social sutures that hold subject and object together and apart.

If *Match* considers the relatings of humans through their attachments to objects, *Bent at the Spine* objectifies language to dislocate our habitual modes of relating. Whereas *Match* is a sustained lyric investigation of one speaker's experiences, *Bent at the Spine* asks the reader to shift out of the corset of grammar to experience the dysfluency of syntax. The collection is divided into five sections, and each works language out of alignment. "Big Vocabulary" works with long lines and repetitious words and phrases, and uses enjambment to quickly shift the ligaments of the poem. Puns become osteopathic realignments that move referent from meaning. Take, for example, the following: "If, in deco, a cheese-grater replaces the blender, do you waffle / the deco art?" "Couples" marries uncanny couplets to form ear-bending juxtapositions. "Succular" builds into a breathless expostulation then just as quickly comes to a shuddering halt:

> succumb to Winnipeg
> suck on combs pegged to winter
>
> snap crackle popsicle python
> paste the cracks like clear snake facials
>
> . . . . . .
>
> rearview mirrors look closer than a book jacket
> cute ears press across kooky thumb tacks
>
> . . . . . .
>
> or jack, posts by tuckering fliers post midnight
> then – sigh

The poems in *Bent at the Spine* are fleeting images that are blurred as they rush past. These poems demand that the spine of the tongue bends itself. They bend the reader to their cadence and curvature. They wave at their syntactical grandmothers and wink at the reader as she tries to keep up. "Yes," they acknowledge, "word-play still persists" ("sons and nets").

Crime Pays

Ian Hamilton
The Water Rat of Wanchai. Anansi $19.95
The Disciple of Las Vegas. Anansi $19.95
The Wild Beasts of Wuhan. Anansi $19.95
The Red Pole of Macau. Anansi $19.95

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

Tucked inside my review copy of *The Water Rat of Wanchai*, a tastefully designed bookmark promoting House of Anansi's Spiderline imprint proclaims, "Crime pays." Given the international dominance of twenty-first-century bestseller lists by girls with dragon tattoos and number one ladies' detective agencies, we can appreciate Anansi's glee in introducing the Ava Lee series, with four novels circulating and two more written and in the publishing pipeline, according to author Ian Hamilton's website. That pipeline will soon swell when Picador USA begins distributing the series.

The Water Rat of Wanchai lays the foundation; tellingly, it contains 412 pages set in ten-point font, while *The Disciple of Las Vegas*, *The Wild Beasts of Wuhan,* and *The Red Pole of Macau* weigh in at 357, 340, and 326 pages respectively, in twelve-point.

Hamilton draws on his experiences as a journalist, an executive with the federal government, a diplomat, and a businessman with international links to shape Ava Lee into an intriguing protagonist who addresses contemporary concerns. In her early thirties, Chinese Canadian, gay, and well-educated, she has left a promising accounting career to pursue an uncertain specialty—forensic accounting—which in practice means tracing, chasing, and retrieving misappropriated funds. The money typically flows to and through various offshore havens, so Ava hops onto jets the way gumshoes of yore hopped into their Detroit-built cars. She uses the technologies of our times—her laptop, Google, SIM cards, fax machines, GPSs, and so on—to combat the crimes of our times. And she works with a grey eminence, Uncle Chow, an elderly but still vital Hong Kong power-broker whose networking abilities reach to whatever level and into whatever cranny Ava (and plot advancement) requires.

The purchase and plausibility of the plots vary. *The Water Rat of Wanchai* involves containers of frozen shrimp disappearing somewhere near Seattle. Of course the suppliers and five million dollars are also gone, with Ava Lee hot in pursuit. At times, this first novel seems more concerned with introducing Ava and Uncle, explaining their methods and contextualizing their characters, than with creating suspense. The second and third instalments treat more colourful matters: the online-poker phenomenon in *The Disciple of Las Vegas* and art forgery in *The Wild Beasts of Wuhan*. *The Red Pole of Macau* retreats from such topical issues into familial concerns and perhaps signals Hamilton's intention to give supporting characters more prominent roles. Successful series fiction—crime or whatever—tends to develop characters we care for, and Ava plus her supporting cast continue to evolve. Uncle frequently hints that he desires a lesser role and urges Ava to connect with May Ling, the forceful wife of one of the richest industrialists in China; father Marcus and mother Jennie increasingly turn to Ava to solve family-related financial misadventures; her siblings seem more prominent in each ensuing novel; and new lover Maria quietly seeks more time with Ava and more heft in the series.

The appeal of the series, however, derives primarily from Ava Lee, and Hamilton packs tremendous potential into his heroine. In her early thirties, she balances a strong education and some realistic work experience with youthful vitality; raised and living in Canada, she reflects the humility and politeness that many Canadians imagine as national strengths; of Chinese heritage and able to speak some Cantonese but no Mandarin, she signifies particularly current racial, cultural, and national identities; extremely fit and a master of *bak mei*, a martial art that features quick, accurate strikes at the most sensitive parts of the body such as the nose, eyes, ears, throat, neck, and underarms, she wields a lightning quick, lethal physical prowess; and, as a successful career woman, she uses her considerable income to live an über-chic, brand-conscious lifestyle.

Hamilton uses his likeable heroine and the series as a whole to advance cosmopolitan values and often simply to revel in differences. While always foregrounding the fickleness of global capital shifts, in *The Water Rat of Wanchai*, he portrays poverty in Guyana and suggests that with no economy, no work, no education, and no expectations, the impoverished have no escape. In *The Disciple of Las Vegas* several set pieces sensitively explore First Nations options and help explain when, how, and why so much gambling migrated from Nevada to native reserves and ultimately to the Internet and offshore addresses. A passage in *The Wild Beasts of Wuhan* focuses on the exploitation of foreign workers in Hong Kong and the Sunday congregation of Filipina *yayas* in

Central Park and Indonesian maids in Victoria Park; several chapters later, Ava touches down in the Faeroe Islands, and Hamilton knits a brilliant strand about Jóhanna av Steinum sweaters into the narrative. In addition to addressing the continuing role of the Triad in Asian economies, *The Red Pole of Macau* ranges from analysis of casino investment to discussion of *qi* and Taoism. This wide variety of interests combines with the attractive cast and the contemporary concerns to form a refreshingly relevant series. This reader will happily pay House of Anansi for the fifth installment, *The Scottish Banker of Surabaya*.

Modern Realism Rethought

Colin Hill
Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction.
U of Toronto P $50.00

Reviewed by Marc André Fortin

In *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction*, Colin Hill reimagines and reinterprets the critical history of realist fiction produced in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century by exploring the paradoxes and overlapping developments within Canadian modernist fiction, and its connection/distance from international modernist aesthetics. *Modern Realism* foregrounds the historical development of modern realism in Canada through an engaged study of the cultural, critical, and political contexts around which authors from different regions, periods, and ideological backgrounds produced a body of work connected to international modernist aesthetics and concerns, yet which proved distinctly Canadian as a loosely related but nevertheless defined movement that eschewed formal high-modernist experimentation. Hill's work questions the central parameters of critical engagement with the literary aesthetics of both modernism and realism by exploring the works of a highly diverse yet mutually connected group of Canadian writers and critics that either helped produce, or emerged from, the very ideas that formed the conceptual background to Canadian modern realist fiction.

Hill sets forth to answer one very particular and considerable problem with regard to modern realism: "Exact boundaries between realisms and modernisms, whether temporal, regional, national, generic, aesthetic, or ideological, are notoriously difficult to draw in any literary tradition, and the Canadian situation provides no exception. 'What makes Canadian realism "modern?"' is a question that most critics of the early-twentieth century rarely asked and almost never answered directly." Hill's work offers a starting point in the search for the answer to that question; a beginning because a definitive or direct answer, as Hill acknowledges, will require further work necessary to the recuperation of the texts and authors that have been relegated to the margins of modernist aesthetics in Canada. *Modern Realism* offers an excellent resource for further research, as well as an original and controversial theoretical framework for future considerations of Canadian modernist experimentation.

Modern Realism includes three detailed author studies focused on the works of Raymond Knister, Frederick Philip Grove, and Morley Callaghan, a chapter on modern realist manifestos published in *Canadian Bookman* and *The Canadian Forum*, and interventions on issues related to prairie realism, and urban and social realism. Hill critically examines a broad range of both canonical and obscure works of Canadian realist fiction, some still unpublished, as well as early-twentieth-century criticism of realist literature, together offering the interwoven perspective of both contemporary critics and authors at the beginning point of a literary movement in Canada that shaped future generations of writers. In reinterpreting the dialogue of early-twentieth-century criticism on Canadian literature, Hill's work opens up

a new space for understanding the way in which realism was both informed by, and integrated into modernist aesthetics, despite being considered by some as a "weak" or "conservative" form of modernist experimentation.

In examining the importance of modern realist fiction in Canada, *Modern Realism* re-evaluates the way in which the assessment of modernism and realism has shaped scholarly perspectives on the genre of realist fiction itself. Hill's rereading of prairie realism underscores the larger focus of *Modern Realism* in recovering the history and importance of Canadian modern realist fiction: "I contend that prairie realism is not a conservative, mimetic, and regional genre at the periphery of Canadian literary development. It is a major, even central, component of the modern-realist movement that was unfolding across Canada in the early twentieth century. Prairie realism was among the most modern forms of writing to appear in Canada before 1950, and its writers carried out some of the boldest literary experiments of their period." *Modern Realism* ultimately counters previous critical readings of realist writers and their works; critical interpretations that have most often homogenized a diverse array of modern realist authors into groups of writers associated with particular geographical areas, political leanings, or aesthetic sensibilities. Hill's work makes the case for an affinity between writers working within the mode of realist fiction, such as urban and regional writers, while interrogating the borders that separate the concept of modern realist experimentation from simplistic overviews of thematic groupings.

According to Hill, the paradox of modern realist fiction in Canada is that it has been neglected because of its absolute acceptance by critics and authors, and not because it was ever a lesser form of modernist experimentation. Hill states that the absence of formal experimentation in realist fiction, in what he considers the dominant form of Canadian modernist fiction, was itself a form of experimentation in contradistinction to high modernist works. Modern realism may be seen as a "conservative" form of modernism, according to Hill, but it was nevertheless an experiment in literary aesthetics that was international in scope, and an experiment that has left an indelible mark on Canadian literature. Hill envisions modern realist fiction in Canada as a sustained and influential aesthetic that had no definite end point, and which thus has been overlooked as a movement that shaped both late-modernist and postmodernist authors. His call for a renewed interest in modern realist fiction seems appropriate and timely, and *Modern Realism* offers a clear and in-depth analysis for anyone seeking access to a new understanding of the genre, and an excellent resource for critics and scholars seeking to discover newly refound examples of modern realist Canadian fiction.

Panicked Laments

Koom Kankesan
The Panic Button. Quattro $16.95

Deborah Kirshner
Mahler's Lament. Quattro $16.95

Reviewed by David Leahy

The two books under review from Quattro Books' fine series of novellas share the singularity of exploring different kinds of panic. The title of Koom Kankesan's debut, Tamil-Canadian-focused novella, *The Panic Button*, refers first and foremost to the narrator Thambi's relentless struggle with the panic that pressures from his family, and especially from his mother, to marry an eligible Tamil woman evoke in him. Other forms of panic are also rendered in plausible, complex ways—as when Thambi's tempestuous affair with a white co-worker, Emily, causes him moments of panic about their sexual compatiblity, or when Thambi unexpectedly tries to commit suicide after Emily finally rejects him. Deborah

Kirshner's novella, *Mahler's Lament*, is a fictional account of the day in the life of Gustav Mahler before, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the unsuccessful public premiere of his first symphony, "The Titan," in Budapest on November 20, 1889. Panic seems to rule Mahler. The limited omniscient narration makes us privy to many flashbacks, most of which are disturbing representations of Mahler's egomaniacal relationships with his patrons, lovers, and his sister, Justine, whom he rapes during the intermission of the failed premiere as a means, it would seem, of reasserting his endangered sense of potency.

Kankesan's novella is an important contribution to the small corpus of Tamil-identified literature in Canada, though its representations of clashing values and their gendered complexities within the context of North America will be familiar to readers of contemporary South-Asian authors. There are several moments when tragic collective and individual aftermaths of the longstanding Tamil war of independence, and of the immigrant experience, are poignantly dramatized—as when the long absent patriarch of the family struggles to assert himself, or when the narrative's two male siblings bait and mock each other because of their opposed attitudes regarding arranged marriages, filial piety, and conformity: "'You never settle down. You never do anything serious. Just push with the least amount of effort.' The old feeling had settled between us; the usual routine. I sang *Everything I do, I do it for you* by Bryan Adams to annoy him. After a few bars, he still had not said anything" (41). A critical focus upon the novella's representations of the consequences of collective and individual alienation, however, can lead one to underestimate the narrative's often reserved humour, as when Thambi makes mordant fun of his brother's chaperoned "stag party." However, though Thambi's self-doubting, disturbed voice is plausible and coherent, as are those of all of the primary and secondary characters, it is unfortunate that the editors did not insist that the framing narrative be rendered more effectively. Thambi's lengthy dramatic monologue presumably takes place during a single sitting at a psychiatrist's office and so the lack of interruptions and comments by the silent listener detracts from the novella's verisimilitude; especially at the conclusion when the reader is suddenly reminded of the context of Thambi's talking cure.

Mahler's Lament is a fascinating work of historical fiction, and Kirshner, who is a classical musician herself, does a good job of dramatizing events and phobias of Mahler's short life that contributed to his tortured personality and yet often nourished his musical creations. Furthermore, Kirshner adroitly knits together key events in telling flashbacks so that the pathetic climax of Mahler's rape of his innocent, doting sister is frighteningly plausible. Still, a number of moments read too much like biography or music history. For instance: "At 29, he has become something of a celebrity, a status he secretly enjoys. . . . As far as he is concerned, it is the just reward owed by society to the artist, and he has come to expect the tips of the hat, the nods in the street. This posture, one that could be mistaken for vanity, was not vanity but rather the natural prerogative of someone who had a sense of a higher purpose for which he knew he had been given rare gifts" (40). Fortunately, this tendency is a minor tick, and on the whole it does not detract from the novella's imaginative fictionalization of Mahler's life. It is the uncertainty to what extent the narrative means to critique Mahler's self-absorption, or to commiserate with it in a romantic idealization of the troubled artist, that is harder to discern.

Peindre l'instant, écrire le réel

Michaël La Chance
De Kooning malgré lui. Triptyque 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Molleen Shilliday

Dans son premier roman, la biographie fictive *De Kooning malgré lui*, Michaël La Chance enchante le lecteur par ses méandres philosophiques qui ponctuent la vie du peintre Willem De Kooning et de son assistant Luke Roussel. Ayant survécu à peine à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, De Kooning, amnésique, reste figé dans l'instant de sa presque mort. Il est hanté par le revenant fantomatique de son double, Boris D., un physicien allemand qui était également dans la jeep renversée par un coup de mortier. Les journées de la vie de Boris D. avant sa mort — sa collaboration au programme nucléaire de Heisenberg et sa visite inexplicable à l'abbaye Monte Cassino — deviennent les fils conducteurs d'un récit qui louvoie entre le présent et le passé et reste souvent suspendu au-dessus de l'instant traumatique. Au présent de la narration, les années 90, l'entourage de De Kooning essaie de faire perdurer son succès en faisant du vieux peintre une commodité. Leurs efforts exhibent au public la folie et la démence de De Kooning et les effets de cette exploitation sur les relations familiales sont sournois; le lecteur se demande si le traumatisme de De Kooning sera transgénérationnel. Dans la vie du vieux peintre solitaire, Luke et Käthe, sa petite-fille, sont les seules personnes à prendre ses digressions sur l'art, la lumière, l'imperfection et le temps comme preuves de son génie durable.

Des fragments de la Grande Guerre et de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, qui paraissent, d'abord, étrangers au propos, révèlent les traces de l'histoire qui occupe notre environnement. L'espace illimité et l'atemporalité sont mis au centre de l'œuvre; tout est interconnecté : « C'est le caractère heureux de leur occurrence en des instant et lieux précis qui compose un événement. Chaque événement résulte d'une multitude de coïncidences invisibles, coïncidences discrètes et cumulatives ». Le séjour carcéral du philosophe Wittgenstein à Cassino évoque les recherches ontologiques de Boris D. sur ce même lieu et l'aberration qu'a été la destruction du Monte Cassino en 1944. Le côté scientifique oscille entre l'individu et l'univers, les contraintes spatio-temporelles s'avèrent floues et mouvantes, et le dédoublement remet en cause nos conceptions de l'être.

La fragmentation et la répétition règnent dans l'univers romanesque de La Chance, les blocs d'informations sont soit datés, soit séparés par des espaces blancs; La Chance profite de la folie et de l'excentricité de son personnage principal pour combler son récit de réflexions poignantes sur l'art, la théologie et la science, mais aussi sur l'amour, l'amitié et la vieillesse. *De Kooning malgré lui* n'est point une lecture facile, mais studieuse et émouvante. La cohésion entre la beauté et le traumatique, la philosophie hétéroclite et le quotidien est franchement exceptionnelle. La Chance invite le lecteur à interpeller la relation précaire entre le secret, l'instant et la mort et à accéder momentanément à l'expérience de l'autre. Le trop plein du langage scintille de non-dits et fait du roman une œuvre hors du commun.

Un traditionaliste en avance

Jonathan Livernois

Un moderne à rebours : Biographie intellectuelle et artistique de Pierre Vadeboncœur. PUL 39,95 $

Compte rendu par Réjean Beaudoin

L'étude critique de Jonathan Livernois joint la réflexion pénétrante à l'élan novateur. Il relit plusieurs textes des années 1940 et 1950 que Pierre Vadeboncœur (1920-2010) n'a pas tous repris dans ses recueils d'essais, et la relecture embrasse l'ensemble de sa démarche intellectuelle en l'éclairant de ses premiers écrits. L'analyse d'*Un moderne à rebours* examine les fondations d'une œuvre qui compte parmi les plus significatives de l'essai québécois moderne.

On suit la formation du jeune Vadeboncœur, et on trouve aussi des renseignements précieux sur une période cruciale de l'histoire des idées au Québec : les vingt-cinq ans qui précèdent la Révolution tranquille. C'est en effet pendant ses études au collège Jean-de-Brébeuf que Pierre Vadeboncœur s'imprègne de la culture qui guidera le fond de sa pensée quarante ans plus tard, au cœur des grands enjeux de l'heure.

Livernois repère et fouille les intervalles entre le retour des références historiques qui jalonnent les ouvrages de l'essayiste, laps de temps au cours duquel mûrit sa réflexion qui prend des virages allant parfois jusqu'au demi-tour. Il est de ceux qui ont contribué à l'apparition tardive de la modernité québécoise, mais il a ensuite critiqué les égarements d'une postmodernité qu'il estime « devenue folle ». L'écrivain a assumé cette attitude inconfortable et l'a défendue sans adopter un système d'idées à l'épreuve des contradictions. Sa recherche se tient plutôt entre les leçons de l'histoire et la prospection d'un avenir sans cesse fluctuant dans sa vision. La méthode de Livernois pour naviguer dans ce passé simple doublé de futur antérieur emprunte à l'historien français François Hartog et à son concept de double régime d'historicité de la conscience moderne depuis la Révolution française. Les grandes ruptures, comme celle de 1789, modifient le cours de l'Histoire en altérant la référence aux longues durées de l'antiquité classique et de la chrétienté, alors que les trois derniers siècles de l'Europe rejettent la tradition au profit du devenir, ce qui entraîne le chevauchement de deux modèles de compréhension du train accéléré des événements : on recourt aux schémas des périodes antérieures pour saisir un état social en évolution dans le présent.

Cette perspective permet de resserrer la fonction des figures du Moyen Âge, de la Renaissance et du Classicisme chez Vadeboncœur, pour qui ces mouvements civilisateurs sont porteurs d'une modernité à introduire dans la société québécoise dont la jeunesse historique empêche de distinguer la dynamique propre. Il agit de suppléer au manque d'expérience séculaire en puisant le recul nécessaire dans l'enseignement du passé. Vadeboncœur refuse le dilemme entre tradition et changement : « Les formes anciennes peuvent donc servir un propos moderne » (125). Il faut assumer l'histoire pour être capable d'ouvrir passage à l'avenir, puisque l'ancien revient sans cesse dans le nouveau. « Bien sûr, ce retour des revenants de l'histoire n'est pas le propre de l'essayiste : il atteint la modernité québécoise, comme si le retour du même donnait du temps supplémentaire à une société qui est arrivée en retard dans l'Histoire. » (315)

L'un des apports de cette biographie intellectuelle est de montrer ce que l'auteur des *Deux royaumes* (1978) doit à son éducation classique pour y fonder ses positions les plus progressistes. Son cheminement ne s'écarte pas autant qu'il a pu sembler de certains précurseurs, tels le poète Saint-Denys Garneau, son ami Jean LeMoyne, François Hertel et Lionel Groulx. On sait bien sûr le rôle décisif joué par Paul-Émile Borduas (*Refus global*, 1948), mais il est

aussi instructif de scruter le climat intellectuel qui prévalait à la veille de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, imprégnant le milieu où évoluait Vadeboncœur étudiant, lorsque qu'il était dans la même classe que Pierre Eliott Trudeau au collège Brébeuf. Les deux hommes resteront longtemps amis, et Vadeboncœur collaborera à la revue *Cité Libre* jusqu'en 1962.

Fondée en 1950, *Cité libre* était proche des idées de la revue *Esprit* d'Emmanuel Mounier, dont l'influence s'est fait sentir à Montréal, ainsi que celle du philosophe thomiste Jacques Maritain. Leur catholicisme de gauche inspirait plusieurs intellectuels québécois qui admettaient que le Québec se trouvait engagé dans une transition décisive après la guerre. On a ensuite reproché à Vadeboncœur de se replier de plus en plus, après 1980, sur les valeurs de droite. C'est l'un des paradoxes qui s'attachent à son œuvre élaborée dans une vingtaine d'ouvrages par une pensée des plus complexes et des plus exigeantes. Il n'est pas simple de faire le tour de son parcours, et Jonathan Livernois le retrace avec une remarquable perspicacité en interrogeant la frange interdiscursive qui relie les hommes de sa génération et, parfois, les apparente aux générations précédentes. Pour prendre ce seul exemple, le jugement de l'œuvre de Lionel Groulx (1878-1967) a beaucoup varié chez Vadeboncœur, entre ses articles à *Cité libre* et ses textes de la fin de la décennie 1970. Le passage d'une critique sévère de l'historien à une appréciation plus nuancée est notable. L'auteur des *Deux royaumes* (1978) étant d'avis que le XIX siècle québécois s'était prolongé indument jusqu'au milieu du XX, cet anachronisme peut expliquer à la fois la première condamnation de l'auteur de *Notre maître, le passé* (1936) et sa tardive justification, trente ans plus tard, au moment de refaire les ponts entre le vieux nationalisme et le souverainisme, à la veille du référendum de 1980. Vers 1950, par contre, la stérilité de l'idéologie traditionnelle interdisait toute continuité.

Cette biographie intellectuelle est également une biographie artistique, Vadeboncœur ayant tôt fréquenté les peintres, avant de redécouvrir la voie privilégiée de l'art à travers le « génie de l'enfance », secret de la « maturité des origines ». Le sujet demeurera au centre de ses préoccupations jusqu'à la fin de sa vie.

Le français en question

Serge Lusignan, France Martineau, Yves Charles Morin et Paul Cohen
L'Introuvable unité du français : Contacts et variations linguistiques en Europe et en Amérique (XII-XVIII siècle). PUL 40,00 $

Compte rendu par Chantal Phan

Voici un volume d'orientation académique, qui plaira à toutes sortes de lecteurs. Ancrées dans de solides habitudes de recherche, les quatre études proposées ici donnent des aperçus de l'histoire de la langue française, qui étonneront, amuseront, feront réfléchir. Les notions combinées de norme et de variation informent les analyses. Deux des auteurs sont linguistes et les deux autres sont historiens; ils ont en commun un intérêt de longue date pour l'histoire de la langue française en contexte.

Il est impossible de considérer la langue comme un système figé. Les transformations constantes du vocabulaire, de la grammaire, du style sont bien sûr ce qui permet aux structures linguistiques d'évoluer, de s'adapter. L'importance de cette variabilité se saisit d'autant plus clairement face aux textes des époques choisies ici, les XII-XVIII siècles. Les versions concurrentes des textes français (divers dialectes, différences entre écrit et oral) firent du Moyen Âge la grande époque de la variante. Pourtant, jusqu'au XVIII^{e} siècle, la présence de plusieurs dialectes remet constamment en question le concept de français standard, même dans la production écrite.

Cette problématique se trouve tout d'abord dans le chapitre 1, de l'historien Serge Lusignan. L'auteur traite avec brio un sujet fort disparate. En commençant par les célèbres *Serments de Strasbourg,* il passe en revue la langue populaire ancienne (*lingua romana*), le *franceis* d'Angleterre étudié pour sa primauté littéraire et son influence sur la prononciation continentale, puis la diversité dialectale des XII^{e}-XV^{e} siècles et le *françois* d'Ile-de-France.

Le chapitre 2, de Paul Cohen, également historien, s'intéresse aux événements liés à la politique de la langue, choisissant cinq dates-clés dans un ordre délibérément insolite : 1532, 1567, 1525, 1540 et 1752. Les nombreux détails donnés dans ce chapitre éclairent utilement et de manière souvent amusante des dates et étapes célèbres telles que l'Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts (1540) qui imposait le français dans tout le Midi (où il n'était pas parlé par tous) et la publication de la *Défense et illustration de la langue française* du poète Joachim Du Bellay (1567).

Le chapitre 3, du linguiste Yves Charles Morin, se penche sur la norme de prononciation du XIV^{e} au XVII^{e} siècle, qu'il dit imaginaire. C'est une époque de règles et de règlements. Cependant il y a la prononciation de la ville et celle de la cour; celle de la ville reste si variable que de nombreux accents populaires sont incompréhensibles pour les gens de la cour. L'auteur explore la prononciation des diphtongues et triphtongues, celle des voyelles ouvertes et fermées, les caractéristiques du français de Provence, puis les hésitations de l'orthographe, par exemple les essais de simplification de Lartigaut (« l'ortografe francêze »), tendance qui malheureusement n'a pas pris.

Le dernier chapitre, de la linguiste France Martineau, adopte une méthode très différente. Portant sur la région atlantique, les sections historiques et explicatives sont suivies de résultats d'enquêtes statistiques au sujet d'expressions de la cause : *à cause que, parce que, pource que, car.* Repérées dans des textes du XVII^{e} siècle à nos jours, puis dans des documents oraux pour l'époque récente, les occurrences de ces expressions permettent de distinguer des phénomènes de variation. Ce chapitre fait donc le lien entre l'histoire et le présent.

Si les méthodes et points de vue différents des quatre auteurs surprennent au premier abord, l'on comprend vite l'avantage qu'il y avait à préserver ces techniques et horizons divers. Les philologues trouveront en ce livre un trésor de réflexions fines et bien documentées, qui remettent efficacement en question certaines idées préconçues. Tous les lecteurs de ce livre se régaleront des explications claires et des exemples étonnants, et peut-être surtout ceux qui glaneront ici un peu d'histoire de leur propre coin de la francophonie.

The Toxicity of Violence

Linden MacIntyre
Why Men Lie. Random House $32.00

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

Linden MacIntyre focalizes *Why Men Lie*, the third volume of his Cape Breton trilogy, through Effie MacAskill-Gillis. By 1998, she has left "the Long Stretch"—the local referent for the Cape Breton road where she was raised and the subject of the first volume—far behind and become department head in Celtic Studies at a Toronto university. Her brother Duncan—"the bishop's man" and titular subject of the second volume—has similarly migrated to Toronto where he works with the homeless while "rescuing his ministry." In her mid-fifties, after a lifetime coping with her father, her brother, three ex-husbands, a few live-in partners and "her neurotic male colleagues," Effie feels certain that male behaviour will never surprise her again. Then, through a chance meeting on a subway platform, she re-encounters JC Campbell, an enigmatically attractive

fringe member of the cohort that moved to Toronto in the 70s. Campbell has carved out a successful career as a war correspondent and television producer, and slowly but surely inveigles his way into Effie's confidence and bed. MacIntyre creates fluid, believable dialogue that limns Effie's slide from wariness about all things male to trust of JC and their relationship, all the while building tension by hinting at JC's evasions and deceptions. The tragedies that ensue may surprise Effie, but not this reader.

The novel repeatedly foregrounds and argues a thesis: JC explains that violence changes DNA and travels in the genes to such an extent that we cannot "extract the bad stuff . . . We're up against the permanence of violence." For Effie and JC's generation of Cape Bretoners, the life-shaping violence gathered force in the two great World Wars and the raw resource extraction that fed the maw. After he kills a young girl sniper, perhaps with a knife, perhaps with rape a factor, PTSD twists Effie's father so severely that he terrorizes his daughter as she reaches puberty; and near the end of the novel we learn that JC was often beaten as a boy. Apparently, both fathers were "permanently infected by the wickedness of war." Five decades later, in 1998 in Toronto, the childhood victims fight against isolation by telling lies to themselves and each other. Effie's lies seem benign and well-intentioned while JC's much larger lies hide his menacing violence, but all the dissembling results from their desperate need for autonomy, an elusive quality they define as hard-won solitude and equate with self-worth.

I confess ambivalence about *Why Men Lie*. Aspects of the novel affect me deeply: like Effie and JC, I was a baby boomer, born into an economy and culture frenetically driven by the aftereffects of World War II; like them I sought release from the resource-ravishing locale and mindset—in my case, clearcut logging on the BC coast; like them I migrated to the nearest urban centre—for me, Vancouver—and dove into the hippie milieu; like Effie I eventually made my way into academia; and, like Effie and JC, I occasionally return to my earlier surroundings with barely manageable trepidation. My childhood environment instilled violence as we beat back the wilderness, civilized the inhabitants, and steeped the process in rye whiskey just the way MacIntyre's characters use Scotch. However, unlike JC, as I changed my surroundings and re-educated myself, I strove to curb the violence that I had been taught. Although the toxicity of violence plagued me, I became increasingly certain that the violence was learned behaviour that I could unlearn, not a genetically imprinted trait that I had to endure. And I sought support.

Unfortunately, *Why Men Lie* ripples along without addressing what should, by 1999, be obvious truths. Yes, a woman like Effie needs companionship to cut through her isolation and may tell herself small lies while developing a relationship with a cultured charmer like JC. But MacIntyre's character ignores too many clues about JC's evasiveness, homophobia, and poorly explained fascination with an inmate awaiting execution in Texas. Yes, JC was beaten as a child, yes he eschewed boxing lessons and learned to confront, fight, and maim in response, and yes his years as a war correspondent exposed him to sense-deadening genocide, but his tendency to crush the skulls of those who cross him makes the "violence in my DNA" explanation a tad pat. Support is necessary and available. I read this novel twice, carefully, and recommend it. It's unsettling.

Land, Identity, Community

Bruce Granville Miller
Oral History on Trial: Recognizing Aboriginal Narratives in the Courts. U of British Columbia P $85.00

Pamela D. Palmater
Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Indigeneity. Purich $30.00

Priscilla Settee
The Strength of Women: Âhkamêyimowak. Coteau $19.95

Reviewed by Jasmine Johnston

These three books, published in 2011, offer three distinctive yet complementary approaches to questions of land, identity, and community for Indigenous peoples of Canada. I have chosen to review them in alphabetical order by the author's last name, but this order also happens to suggest a progression from large concerns to personal ones: Bruce Granville Miller assesses issues of oral narratives in relation to Canadian law and Indigenous land claims, Pamela D. Palmater assesses issues of familial and tribal status in relation to Canadian law and Indigenous communities with a special focus on the status of Indigenous women, and Priscilla Settee collects and reflects upon Indigenous women's personal narratives about their community roles and life experiences. The contemporaneous publication of these books also suggests that the main issues addressed in each—land, identity, community—are issues that are historically and currently crucial matters of debate in Canada. These authors address all three issues in ways that sometimes overlap—by examining the legal, personal, and social implications—but also, at times, diverge in their methods. Miller provides an anthropological perspective, Palmater focuses on self-determination, and Settee frames an array of voices by topic—beginnings, art, work, spirit, community.

Bruce Granville Miller, Professor of Comparative Anthropology of Indigenous Peoples at the University of British Columbia, prefaces *Oral History on Trial: Recognizing Aboriginal Narratives in the Courts* by stating that he has spent twenty years participating in discussions about the "conditions under which oral narratives can be entered as evidence" in Canadian courts. These discussions have involved the Indigenous Bar Association (IBA), panels of elders who come from across Canada, and federal bodies. In writing this book, he seeks to use sometimes opposing points of view in order to try to arrive at responsible resolutions to the debate. The main focus of his analysis are land claims such as *Delgamuukw vs. British Columbia*, a precedent-setting case where the oral testimonies of Gitxsan and the Wet'suwet'en Nation elders led to a ruling that oral narratives ought to be permitted as legal testimony. As Miller points out, though, protocols for using oral testimonies have yet to be fully determined.

Chapter 1, "Issues in Law and Social Science," focuses on disciplinary engagement with oral narratives, considering how to define and categorize orature of various kinds and functions. Chapter 2, "The Social Life of Oral Narratives," analyzes the transformations that oral narratives undergo as they are textualized, archived, and utilized for legal proceedings, sometimes in ways that integrate elders' perspectives, but sometimes in ways that fragment the total message of each narrative. Chapter 3, "Aboriginal and Other Perspectives," compares Indigenous perspectives to ways to revolutionize Canadian law, ways that "contamination" (the fear that elders will incorporate written cultural information into their oral testimonies) may actually occur not in records of narratives, but in scholars' misinterpretations of them, and ways that elders' oral narratives have been used in legal jurisdictions other than Canada. Chapter 4, "Court and Crown," assesses court perspectives on oral narratives, including implicitly ethnocentric attitudes

towards personal witnessing. Miller assesses a key background report on oral narratives prepared for the Department of Justice and a Crown expert report, both of which have informed many trials, and he concludes that these reports often misinterpret scholarly perspectives on oral narratives. In chapter 5, "The Way Forward? An Anthropological View," Miller offers an ethnographic assessment of the concept of evidence as it is defined by Canadian law practitioners. He suggests that the contexts within which oral narratives are delivered should be included in legal proceedings, and that doing so would address the problem of "hearsay" (reported knowledge without direct experience) that often undermines court use of oral testimony. Miller concludes chapter 5 by citing seven proposed protocols for using oral testimony. These protocols were drafted for the IBA in 2008 and include provisions for elders to choose their own cultural interpreters, requirements that narratives be videotaped, and the option to move to significant locations for the delivery of elders' oral testimonies.

Miller's book is well-structured. Each chapter is organized under topical subheadings that allow the reader to navigate the many perspectives that Miller assesses, while a list of references and legal decisions cited plus a detailed index allow readers to investigate Miller's academic, legal, and traditional sources further. "Conclusions," the final chapter, is cautiously visionary. Miller proposes that elders' testimonies are not merely repetitions of long-preserved facts but are, rather, the result of cultural experts "work[ing] through intellectual problems regarding the past and present of their communities." Elders are thus expert witnesses and courts ought to "listen *for* and *to*" elders' narratives to "engage the Aboriginal world directly in the Canadian experience."

Pamela D. Palmater is a Mi'kmaq lawyer from the Eel River Bar First Nation and Associate Professor and Chair of Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, who often appears as an expert witness regarding legislation affecting Indigenous peoples. She prefaces *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Indigeneity* by dedicating her book to her father, who always fought for his identity, and her sons, for whom she fights for acceptance. To this, she adds forewords from four Indigenous leaders, each of whom comments on the ongoing fight for self-determination and calls for the end of narrow legal definitions of Indigenous identity, such as the blood quantum rules. Palmater then relates some of her personal and family history, assessing some of the ways that the Indian Act has shaped the experiences of her grandparents, parents, herself, and her children. She writes this book in order to critique current legal definitions of Indigenous status in Canada that have at times curtailed her access to learning the Mi'kmaq language, practising traditional medicines, and participating in her community's cultural activities—and that similarly limit many "Non-status" Indigenous peoples across Canada. Palmater asks the most direct and incisive of questions: since "Canadians would not allow the re-institution of residential schools to assimilate Indigenous peoples," how can they "allow the continued assimilation of Indigenous peoples through the registration and membership provisions of the *Indian Act*?"

Chapter 1, "Legislated Identity: Control, Division, and Assimilation," analyzes the development of increasingly restrictive legal definitions of Indigenous identity in order to serve the Canadian government's desire to reduce band funding. The chapter concludes with a call for First Nations to define citizenship in ways that honour the rights of individual members to participate in sovereign and cultural practices. Chapter 2, "The Right to Determine Citizenship," carries this call forward by addressing the question of nations within a nation, and suggests that the protection and promotion

of unique Indigenous identities both collective and individual are vital to the continuing well-being of First Peoples in liberal yet still colonial democracies. In particular, Palmater assesses the ways that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has been and ought to be interpreted in relation to Indigenous rights. In chapter 3, "The Right to Belong: Charter Inequality for Indigenous Peoples," Palmater contrasts the Charter with the Indian Act, showing how women's rights in particular are caught between these conflicting documents. Chapter 4, "Band Membership vs. Self-Government Citizenship," reviews problems with the Indian Act that are not resolved by Bill C-31 and are in part re-inscribed in Bill C-3 in conjunction with a series of precedent-setting legal cases pertaining to Indigenous status. The chapter concludes with a call to inclusive citizenship: the more Indigenous citizens that First Nations have, the more powerful and dynamic these Nations can be as they seek to protect their lands, resources, and treaty rights for future Indigenous citizens.

Palmater concludes her book by proposing short-term and medium-term solutions to the discrimination legislated by the Indian Act, since land claims and self-government agreements can take many decades to resolve, while individuals excluded from legal recognition of their Indigenous status continue to suffer. She suggests that connections by family, traditional territory, commitment to Indigenous nations citizenry, and a desire to learn and grow should help to determine Indigenous identity as more flexible categories that not only look to histories of First Nations but also to their future well-being. Palmater's cogent reflections on these highly complex legal questions are, as with Miller's book, well-organized by chapter subheadings, an appendix with a chart illustrating gendered differences in legal status for Palmater's family, substantial endnotes, and a detailed index.

Priscilla Settee, a writer, activist, and Associate Professor in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, prefaces *The Strength of Women: Âhkamêyimowak* by introducing the fourteen Indigenous women whose highly personal stories comprise this volume. These stories, including memories of childhood, thoughts on family and community, reflections on professional life, and statements about creative and intellectual convictions, illustrate the Cree concept of "âhkamêyimowak," which is translated into English by Settee as "persistence" and the "strength for women to carry on in the face of extreme adversity." Settee suggests that âhkamêyimowak helps to support the Cree concept of "miyo-wichihtowin," or "having good relations." She suggests that institutional forms of oppression of Indigenous women must be counteracted by good relations between human and animal communities and the environment in order to enact another important Cree concept, "wakohtowin," translated as "natural laws" for the "betterment of all our relations." Each of the women whose stories are included in this collection shares visions of hope for herself, her relations, and the world. Settee's introduction concludes with a call to apply documents such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to First Nations communities in order to "right the historical wrongs" by "draw[ing] on the strength and wisdom of ancient values, wisdom and knowledge to create strong and vibrant communities."

The stories in this collection are organized by topic. "Beginnings" includes childhood stories that often concern abuse and residential schools. However, access to language, learning traditional ways of living on the land, and gratitude for family, elders, leaders, and teachers who provide love and guidance also come up. "Work" continues the stories of some of the women introduced in the first chapter and also

incorporates new voices. A wide array of callings are reflected upon, including hip hop, counselling, language revitalization, oral histories, leadership, and trapping and hunting. The next section, "Art," includes stories about traditional and contemporary creative practices, always with a strong emphasis on the continuity and vitality of Indigenous creative traditions. "Spirit" is an even more personal section, with stories that focus on the ways elders, Indigenous languages, and the natural world can bring healing and hope despite the oppressive forces of colonization. The final section, "Community," returns to the central concept of âhkamêyimowak. In this section, the stories are trenchant manifestos for the future based upon well-informed perspectives on the challenges currently facing Indigenous communities.

These stories contain devastating accounts of rape, murder, suicide, substance addictions, systemic racism, overwhelming work and family demands, and detailed information about pollution targeted at traditional territories. They are challenging to read. However, they also express a great deal of tenderness, respect, affection, hope, and joy, as well as a fierce determination to continue to provide leadership and support within Indigenous communities. Settee's collection offers personally inflected yet globally relevant visions of justice for all First Peoples, and, read in conjunction with Miller's and Palmater's books, the relevance and urgency of Indigenous governance of land, identity, and community are made very clear. While this book does not contain an index or a description of how the stories were collected and prepared for publication, Settee's thoughtful profiles of the contributors at the very beginning of her book provide a holistic framework for the stories based upon the individual women who have chosen to share their experiences and wisdom. As well, story titles are drawn from key phrases within the narratives themselves, emphasizing the eloquence of the participants. Settee states that she and the contributors have long been in community. Thus, this collection instantiates the values of miyo-wichihtowin and wakohtowin through âhkamêyimowak.

Remembering CanStudies

Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins, eds. *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History.* U of Toronto P $39.95

Christl Verduyn and Jane Koustas, eds. *Canadian Studies: Past, Present, Praxis.* Fernwood $34.95

Reviewed by Martin Kuester

On the 1st of May 2012, the international Canadian Studies community was informed that the Canadian government had taken the decision to discontinue the "Understanding Canada" program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. From one day to the next, government funding for Canadian Studies worldwide came to a halt, and in many cases, this was funding that would have generated (and had done so for several decades) considerable further Canadian Studies expenses abroad as well as income for Canadian enterprises in the fields of publishing, tourism, and education. As then president of GKS, a tri-national Canadian Studies association representing about six-hundred Canadianists from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, I admit to having been deeply saddened by this development and the disappearance of a program to which I, like many other Canadianists worldwide, owe financial support as well as the motivation to teach about Canada as the "better" North American alternative. This recent caesura in the history of international Canadian Studies provides a special background to this discussion of two very important and highly informative essay collections—amounting to just under

one thousand pages—that appeared around the time when the decision to abolish "Understanding Canada" was announced. Canadian Studies has been under discussion, we see, not only on an international scale, but also in Canada itself. The first of these volumes deals with the state and status of Canadian Studies, whereas the other one offers useful insights and suggestions for further research on national and international levels—if funding is available.

Canadian Studies: Past, Present, Praxis, edited by Christl Verduyn and Jane Koustas, traces the development of Canadian Studies (within, but also outside of Canada) from the 1970s to the present. It brings together seminal old and new essays and is composed of three parts (Past, Present, and Praxis). The first part contains central texts stating and questioning the need for Canadian Studies as a field of academic research and starts with extracts from Thomas H. B. Symons' report of the Commission on Canadian Studies (1975). This commission had started its work in 1972, and its report is a founding document of Canadian Studies showing "the need for more attention to Canadian circumstances in the curriculum of the country's universities." Interestingly enough, the report also insisted on "the need for a greater appreciation on the part of Canadian governmental institutions of the potential value of a well-planned program of support for Canadian cultural relations with other countries." The resulting (and now discontinued) support of Canadian Studies abroad has generally been seen as a success story. About twenty years after Symons' report, David Cameron looks once again at the condition of Canadian Studies and concludes in 1996 that "teaching and learning about Canada, within the humanities and social sciences, has a significant place within the academic departments of Canadian universities," especially in an interdisciplinary context. For him, too, "one of the most striking features of the past 10 to 15 years has been the flowering of Canadian studies outside the country." Jill Vickers presents the development of the Carleton Canadian Studies program as an example of interdisciplinary cooperation mirroring the different phases of the recognition of Canadian Studies in the academic community from the founding era of the 1960s and 1970s to the era of "new scholarship" in the 1990s. A group of essays on the state of the art of Canadian Studies is then gathered from the millennium issue of the *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études canadiennes.* Among these, Robert M. Campbell's introductory essay points to the successes and perils in the field such as the fact that "funding pressures at the government and university levels can make Canadian Studies activities and processes a target for cuts"; he also shows the chances and difficulties arising for the field in an age of comparative studies and globalization. Thomas H. B. Symons has remained a critic and supporter of Canadian Studies, as his second contribution, "The State of Canadian Studies at the Year 2000," clearly shows. Besides naming successful Canadian Studies programs all over the country, he draws attention to the institutions supporting the study of Canada such as the National Library, the National Archives, and Statistics Canada. Needless to add that from the reviewer's 2012 perspective, all these have suffered from recent government cutbacks. As Symons writes about cutbacks that occurred in the 1990s: "[c]utting Canadians off from these sources of independent research and opinion has been an appalling misjudgement that demonstrates, once more, that governments of whatever political stripe frequently know the cost of some things and the value of little." In another essay from the Millennium edition of the *Journal of Canadian Studies,* John H. Wadland subdivides the development of Canadian Studies into two phases, the first one in postwar and cold-war

Canada and a second one standing for meaningful interdisciplinary cooperation in a more and more fragmented university system. He insists on the importance of the humanities: "While many of our political leaders systematically discredit the humanities and the social sciences in schools and universities, our young people are herded into labelled bins where skill sets are substituted for wisdom, technology for humans, fat wallets for culture and jobs for life."

In the second part of Verduyn and Koustas' collection, contemporary developments and challenges are discussed. Ian Angus proposes "a new rationale for Canadian Studies" and calls for a "rethinking [of] the relation of particularity and universality, a push to levels beneath the nation-state to uncover the communities and identities constituted through the localities and an attention to the different histories and temporalities that are lived there." Raymond Blake similarly insists on Canadian Studies' national function in the realm of educating citizens and informing public policy, thus becoming "a Public Good." Andrew Nurse points to the usefulness of historical materialism in this context, and Mihaela Vieru stresses "the conundrum of interdisciplinarity." For her, Canadian Studies is and should be an "activist discipline" and should "remain critical of both political/social realms and academic constraints" while "stay[ing] open to feeding that initial passion through engagement with publics at large." In "Indigenous Studies in the Canadian Studies Context," Donna Patrick, Timothy Di Leo Brown, and Mallory Whiteduck point out the importance of integrating indigenous perspectives into a Canadian Studies context, as First Nations Canadians have so far been disadvantaged, and as, they insist, "[O]ne cannot understand the Canadian nation-state and 'Canada' without considering the Indigenous realities and histories that are an inherent part of this understanding." Colin Coates and Geoffrey Ewen claim that traditionally, Canadian Studies has mostly focused on English-speaking Canada and that a refocusing on French-Canadian topics is necessary, as demonstrated in a model textbook they have developed.

The third part of this important collection (i.e., "Praxis") focuses on Canadian Studies in a comparative, for example international perspective. Cornelius Remie, former president of the International Council for Canadian Studies, and Guy Leclair comment on "International Canadian Studies: The Community Beyond" and make important suggestions for the renewal and internationalization of the field, a project that might now be imperilled by the government cutbacks. Maeve Conrick reports on Canadian Studies in Ireland as a case study of a foreign research community. She also states why cutbacks are so dangerous for foreign Canadian Studies associations, i.e., that "attracting students to do PhDs on Canadian Studies topics would be all the more challenging, if not impossible." In "Crossing Borders," Mark Paul Richard presents transnational migration from the eighteenth-century Loyalists to twentieth-century draft dodgers as a theme making Canadian Studies more relevant to contemporary students. Jeffrey Ruhl and L. Pauline Rankin present the Trent-Carleton joint PhD program in Canadian Studies as a promising work in progress profiting from a sense of "creative instability."

While several of the essays in Verduyn and Koustas' collection mention the importance of Canadian Studies as a contribution to the public good, *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History*, edited by Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins, offers a wealth of discussions and topics for any student and teacher of Canadian Studies. This, too, is a mix of previously published and new essays, and all of the eighteen contributions offer

important insights into Canada's remembrance of its heroic past, pedagogies of nation-building, and methods of "visualizing and revising the past." The book is a fascinating read because central elements and *lieux de mémoire*, whether they be factual or invented traditions of Canada's collective memory, appear time and again in many of these essays. Striking examples are Benjamin West's painting of the death of General Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, Robert Harris' *Fathers of Confederation*, the Champlain Statue in Ottawa, the last spike completing the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and several of the vignettes in the Heritage Minutes series. This illustrates that the same person or event may become part of different invented histories or, as Hayden White would put it, emplotments. The first such person is Madeleine de Verchères, "the Woman Warrior of New France," whom Colin Coates shows to be imagined in quite different ways. Cecilia Morgan presents Laura Secord as an English Canadian heroine being re-imagined according to various views of the War of 1812. French and English Canadian re-invention of a common Canadian past is approached by Jason F. Kovacs and Brian S. Osborne's discussion of the way the city of Quebec has dealt with the heroic performance of the English Canadian soldiers Short and Wallick in a late nineteenth-century city fire. Ronald Rudin's discussion of the role of Pierre Dugua de Monts and Samuel de Champlain in the tri- and quadricentennial celebrations of the settlement of Atlantic Canada presents another example of diverging provincial and federal, Acadian, and Quebec interests in appropriating historic figures.

In the context of the second part, "Pedagogies of Nation," Ken Osborne addresses the question of teaching and raising the awareness of Canadian history in schools and shows "a fundamental rethinking of the nature and purpose of history education in the schools," changing from "knowledge-based and narrative-centred" to approaches "treat[ing] history as an initiation into the continuing debate that lies at the heart of the Canadian experience." The public display and streamlining of Canadian history in TV productions, such as the CBC's *Canada: A People's History*, is the topic of Lyle Dick's critical analysis, which deplores the marginalization of minorities. Timothy J. Stanley addresses "the racialization of Chinese Canadians in public memory" by interpreting the collective memory building strategies underlying a Heritage Minute film. Sasha Mullally presents the possibilities that the WorldWideWeb offers in "democratizing the past" and offering new strategies for teaching history, but she also highlights the immense cost of digitization and the dangers of falsification and fraud.

The third part of the collection, "Visualizing and Revising the Past," deals with images of nationhood in the fine arts. H. V. Nelles focuses on history painting around the turn of the century, such as Robert Harris' *Fathers of Confederation* or the paintings of Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté. Eva Mackey has a look at the ways in which the colonial past is integrated into a national self-image which often seems to be "exclusionary, assimilationist, and racialized" in its "hybridity discourse." Ruth B. Phillips reads and "dis-members" monuments, such as Benjamin West's painting or the Ottawa Champlain statue, from a First Nations point of view, whereas Ian Radforth discusses the redress campaigns of the Japanese, Italian, and Ukrainian Canadian communities looking for financial recompense for or at least official recognition of wartime injustices in the World Wars.

The collection's fourth part, "Cashing in on the Past," deals with financial aspects of the creation or invention of a national past reflected in the tourism industry. As James Murton shows, in the early twentieth

century, Canadian steamship lines profited from and partly created a view of "Old Quebec" as a European-type folk culture, a process supported by anthropologists such as Marius Barbeau as well as government institutions. A similar "antimodern" development, building on the Acadian Evangeline myth, is detected in Nova Scotia by Ian McKay, whereas Nicole Neatby shows Quebec's government-induced facelift from antimodern "Old Quebec" to modern "Belle Province." While the Molson Canadian beer advertisements focusing on central events of Canadian history may by now have become a staple ingredient of many Studies courses worldwide, Ira Wagman discusses this and other examples of "Packaging History and Memory in Canadian Commercial Advertising." Besides focusing on campaigns for alcoholic beverages (some much stronger than beer), this essay also analyzes the advertising strategies of banks and industrial firms.

In the fifth part, "Entertaining the Past," Peter Hodgins revisits "the search for a usable disaster" in his essay on the Halifax explosion, which he traces especially in a recent television production. Renée Hulan brings the volume to a close with an essay on Canadian historical fiction in English. After giving an overview of its nineteenth-century predecessors, many of whom wrote in the tradition established by Sir Walter Scott, she draws the reader's attention to a strong tradition of historical novels in contemporary fiction. She especially highlights experimental works such as Douglas Glover's *Elle* about Marguerite de Roberval (which draws upon and rewrites an earlier nineteenth-century version of the legend) and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, which focuses on the difference of American and Canadian versions of the West. As she concludes, "By reading historical fiction with attention to form and style, not merely to the story being told or the accuracy of historical detail used to create the fictional world, we gain a deeper understanding of the sense of the past historical fiction conveys, and the country imagined in it."

While acknowledging "some less positive developments in the field," Verduyn and Koustas claim for their collection that "the essays assembled here demonstrate not only the worth of Canadian Studies but indeed its long-standing relevance and vital role on the national and international academic stage." This view is probably shared by most involved in the field as teachers or students. The problem may be that—at least for Canadianists outside of Canada—the chances to teach Canadian Studies will be severely limited by the decision to abolish a government program that was—in hindsight, ironically—entitled "Understanding Canada." It would be unthinkable to see Canada return to the state described in the Symons Report, of Canada not placing "any kind of priority upon her cultural relations with other countries," of "stand[ing] alone among the world's industrialized nations in lacking a well-developed policy regarding her cultural relationships with foreign countries." But this was in the past, and by now—as the collections discussed here show—the study of Canada, in Canada and abroad, has become an important and lively field, and—even without government support—it should provide another example of the spirit of survival so famously described by Margaret Atwood forty years ago.

Enabling Emotion

Keith Oatley
The Passionate Muse: Exploring Emotion in Stories. Oxford UP $29.95

Maria Truchan-Tataryn
(In)Visible Images: Seeing Disability in Canadian Literature, 1823-1974. Lambert Academic $108.30

Reviewed by Veronique Dorais Ram

In 1967, Roland Barthes declared the death of the author; in 2012, Keith Oatley presents the author as still alive, incorporating response and intention into his new book *The Passionate Muse*. Oatley synthesizes fiction and non-fiction to guide readers toward a practical, emotional, and aesthetic examination of how stories play with human emotion.

The Passionate Muse is an interactive text composed of seven short story parts interspersed with Oatley's commentary on how narrative provokes reader emotion. "One Another" is the title of the story that serves as his fictional example of the theories he explores. Set in Eastern Europe, it tells the story of Alex, the protagonist who intends to smuggle a Russian manuscript out of the country to a foreign publisher. In the opening chapter, Alex notes his pattern with women—a weakness that complicates the successful completion of his plan. On the train, he meets Toril, a sexy siren who seduces him into a one-night stand at a Helsinki hotel. There's something suspicious about Toril and in fact, she departs with the manuscript while Alex sleeps. Oatley crafts a plot that allows him to discuss how fiction can invoke a variety of emotions in the reader, from anticipation to enjoyment to love to loss to anger. As readers, we want Alex to succeed and Oatley observes through his analytical chapters how our emotional connection to the principal character guides our reactions throughout the text.

Oatley is a cognitive psychologist and award-winning author. *The Passionate Muse* demonstrates the results of research in a new field he calls "the psychology of fiction." To substantiate his claim that narration acts on our emotions, he presents empirical studies that validate how stories invoke empathy and sympathy. He offers the scripts that not only shape stories, but that influence our daily lives: heroic, amorous, and vengeful, for example. By linking his fictional theory to the day-to-day, Oatley reminds us how our lives are framed by narratives that create connections, build associations, form relationships, and organize our experiences in recognizable patterns.

Oatley invokes Aristotle, Freud, Shakespeare, Chekov, and Forster, without transforming the text into a theoretical treatise for literary scholars only. Indeed, stylistically speaking, the book appeals to a wide general audience; however, this should not undermine its value or take away from its strengths. Oatley successfully conveys theoretical and creative insights into narrative and emotion, making his text accessible to a non-theoretically savvy audience while at the same time ensuring his observations remain compelling to academics.

Hence Oatley's book would appeal to the curious reader, prove useful in creative writing courses, and please audiences involved in the therapeutic potential of stories, such as scholars of intellectual disciplines focused on the innate narrative structure of human knowledge and experience. Oatley himself best encapsulates the rhyme and reason behind the worth of his book when he writes: "People who read a lot of fiction tend to have better understandings of others than people who read more nonfiction. This is because fiction is primarily about people's doings in the social world. Fiction offers a way of knowing more than we otherwise would about others and ourselves." Still, in a time where we are experiencing—from memoirs to blogs—a rise in the confessional mode as a sincere window into the soul, it's refreshing to be reminded that ultimately a

certain level of construction remains when it comes to enabling emotion in text.

Maria Truchan-Tataryn's study, *(In)Visible Images: Seeing Disability in Canadian Literature, 1823-1974,* seems a far cry from Oatley's book, yet like Oatley it illustrates how fiction can help us better understand our social world. Based on her doctoral research, Truchan-Tataryn's book is a version of her dissertation. Her thesis and analysis, however, emphasize the significance of her project and the motivation for the prompt publication of her work: the general lack of published criticism on representations of disabilities in Canadian literature. Indeed, despite the development of disability studies as an established theoretical area across disciplines, the significance of images of disability in Canadian literature demands further attention. In fact, the inaugural issue of the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies,* launched in 2012, exemplifies the importance of the field of research to Canadian studies.

According to the *OED*, a disability is "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities." Along the same lines, the World Health Organization defines disability as "a restriction or lack . . . of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Both definitions highlight disability as restricting, and the WHO definition goes so far as to use the term "normal" as a measure for comparison. In her study, Truchan-Tataryn chooses to use the term disability to refer to any condition perceived as "anomalous, whether it is an intellectual or physical impairment." Her study argues that the body/mind dichotomy is outdated. Her decision to use the term universally underscores a "shift from a medical to a social model" propagated by disability studies.

Truchan-Tataryn opens with an overview of disability studies theories and notes how an analysis through the lens of disability inevitably "engages in the ongoing process of the construction of national identity." She asserts that any Canadian literary work could be read through the lens of disability studies; however, for the purposes of her book, she focuses on eight English-Canadian texts written between the years 1823-1974. Thomas McCulloch's *Stepsure Letters* open her analysis, followed by Ralph Connor's *Sky Pilot*, Lucy Maude Montgomery's Emily trilogy, Morley Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*, Malcolm Ross' *As For Me and My House*, Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water*, Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz,* and finally, Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*. As such, her analysis provides a solid, linear survey of representations of disability in Canadian literature, particularly in relation to the growing historical sentiments regarding national identity. The strength of her study resides in her overarching argument that portrayals of disability reflect the struggle between "ableism and a desire for inclusive pluralism."

Overall, Truchan-Tataryn presents a convincing account of how disabled bodies can provide new insights into what shapes Canadian national imagination. She highlights the socio-cultural construction of disability and perceptively observes how disabled characters dominate the canon in ways that problematize Canada's embracing of difference. Indeed, she prompts us to reread canonical texts such as Ross' *As For Me and My House*, revealing an astute awareness of the presence of disabled figures in Canadian writing. By the end of her book, one wonders how literary critics ever missed these disabled figures.

What proves most striking in her study, however, is the personal anecdote regarding the disabilities of her daughters: "the first and third with disability labels, the second struggling with a feeling of 'difference' for not having a disability." She elaborates, personally and theoretically, on the

complexity of these labels and how society expects families to act as if they fit the status quo, concealing all proof of disabilities to avoid the stigma of being classified as dysfunctional. Truchan-Tataryn's personal experience invokes emotion in the reader, to refer back to Oatley's terminology, and illustrates how fictional representations can inform real experiences. She observes how her family felt forced to perform the role of the functional family in order to avoid revealing the failure of social systems to support different bodies. Her story highlights how literature engages with the social ideologies that impose limiting labels on the body and how disability studies provides a unique discourse on social, political, cultural, and literary complexities.

Perhaps the only regrettable aspect of Truchan-Tataryn's book is her selection of a publisher. As the first detailed analysis of disability in Canadian literature, a more prestigious publisher could easily have underscored the significance of this study within the greater framework of Canadian literary studies. In this form, the book slightly undersells its invaluable contribution.

CanLit in the Americas

Winfried Siemerling
The New North American Studies: Culture, Writing and the Politics of Re/Cognition. Routledge $37.95

Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel, eds.
Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations. McGill-Queen's UP $32.95

Reviewed by Debra Dudek

As a Canadian academic working in Australia, I continue to be taken aback each time someone asks me if I am from America or each time someone elides the United States of America with the shortened term "America." I have had these moments of confrontation probably at least once every month since I moved to Australia nine years ago. Before moving here, I was not aware that America functioned as a synecdoche for the United States, to borrow from Donald Pease, whom Winfried Siemerling quotes in the introduction to his monograph. Rather, Canadians shortened that nation's title to "the States." I begin with this anecdote because both books under review here also open with a discussion about the politics of naming and specifically about how the term "America" excludes other literatures from North and South America. As the titles suggest, both books engage with the position of Canadian literature within larger comparative studies in the Americas; Siemerling's monograph deals specifically with North America and the edited collection includes South America as well.

In *The New North American Studies*, Siemerling provides a historical and theoretical framework for North American studies based upon W. E. B. Du Bois' trope of "double consciousness" as a way of destabilizing a politics of recognition. As Siemerling summarizes, "In exploring the heuristic value of Du Bois' evasion of equation for the reading of unavoidable contradictions in later North American narratives, I seek to recover in particular Du Boisian double consciousness not only in its necessary but also in its trailblazing and innovative dimensions. Both problematic *and* enabling, predicament *and* chance in situations of cognitive instability and asymmetrical power, double consciousness produces multiple accents and contradictions; in a kind of parallel processing, it shifts from exclusively replicating recognition and the return of the dominant to re-cognitions and cultural and cognitive simultaneity. . . . I read Du Bois' counter-discursive dialogic re/cognition of one of modernity's pre-eminent Old World accounts of recognition as paradigmatic

trope of New World cultural emergence, and a continuing challenge to North American thinking about multiculturalisms and postcolonial difference." I quote this passage at length because part of the task of engaging with this book is also partaking in the performance of the prose. My alliteration is not accidental either; many of Siemerling's sentences stretch and bend, turning in on and extending outward from a cacophony of consonants.

Siemerling builds upon this introduction to his argument in five subsequent chapters: "Comparative North American Literary History, Alterity, and a Hermeneutics of Non-transcendence"; "W. E. B. Du Bois, Hegel, and the Staging of Alterity"; "Double Consciousness, African American Tradition, and the Vernacular: Henry Louis Gates and Houston Baker"; "Native Writing, Orality, and Anti-imperial Translation: Thomas King and Gerald Vizenor"; and "Genealogies of Difference." Siemerling maintains the idea of double consciousness as a touchstone in each of the chapters, which move from literary history to theoretical definitions to close readings of particular texts. The chapters range in length from eight pages (chapter 3 on the staging of alterity) to fifty-seven pages (chapter 5 on Native writing), so while Siemerling situates his literary analysis within a larger argument about double consciousness as an appropriate model for analyzing Black and Indigenous writing in Canada and the United States, the bulk of the book focuses on the works of four writers, which provides the book with its greatest strength. In the two chapters on the African American tradition and Native writing, Siemerling provides a range of examples of how the concept of double consciousness functions in literature to highlight the productive ways that doubleness, multiplicity, and contradictions foreground complex cultural and racial interactions.

In the lengthiest chapter—and the only chapter not to have been published in an earlier version elsewhere—Siemerling provides a comprehensive yet focused analysis on the body of Thomas King's works and an extended reading of Gerald Vizenor's "crossblood poetics" in *The Heirs of Columbus*. The twenty-eight page essay "Thomas King, Coyote, and Columbus: 'two different dimensions of time or consciousness'" covers King's doctoral dissertation *Inventing the Indian: White Images, Native Oral Language, and Contemporary Native Writers*; his iconic essay "Godzilla vs. Postcolonial"; his two novels *Medicine River* and *Green Grass, Running Water*; and his short story "A Coyote Columbus Story." The essay's most sustained analysis circulates around a discussion of how dual and multiple time function in *Green Grass, Running Water* through trickster time; through Eli's return as *revenant*; and through the story of Babo, which is a "parodic inversion of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,' with its tales of slavery, insurrection, and symmetrical destruction."

In the conclusion to *The New North American Studies*, Siemerling summarizes his intent for the book, which includes his hope for the type of scholarship that it will inspire: "By contrasting contexts in which cultural emergence and difference are articulated and differing strains of multicultural genealogies develop, comparative explorations (such as this one) can make different codings of cultural difference conspicuous, and foster alternative conjugations of the inevitably necessary if projective confirmations and conformities of recognition with the equally urgent cognitive chances of re-cognition." This book highlights the breadth and depth of Siemerling's knowledge about the formation and culmination of race politics in Canada and the United States and about how these politics are represented in literature by select Black and Indigenous writers. Overall, the book

invites contemplation about the relevance of North American studies and provides a model for reading via a poetics of double consciousness.

Debates about the gains and losses of acknowledging a hemispheric turn in the study of Canadian literature extend into *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations*, edited by Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel. As Siemerling and Casteel state in the introduction, "With this volume, we seek to make an intervention into comparative American studies by suggesting several possible access routes into a hemispheric contextualization of Canadian literature." The collection is divided into four sections: "Defending the Nation?"; "Indigenous Remappings of America"; "Postslavery Routes"; and "Quebec Connections." The three essays in the first section question the usefulness of situating the study of Canadian literature within a broader comparative hemispheric paradigm, and the following three sections contain essays that could be considered case studies of the type of literary criticism that arises out of such a paradigm. Of the thirteen essays collected in this volume, four are revised reprints, some were commissioned, and others were invited from critics who participated in the 2003 meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association and the 2005 Second World Congress of the International American Studies Association. The essays move seamlessly within and between the sections, with writers often referring to each other's chapters.

Perhaps the strongest and most overt example of this interaction is between Herb Wyile's essay "Hemispheric Studies or Scholarly NAFTA? The Case for Canadian Literary Studies" and Catherine Khordoc's "Looking Beyond the Elephant: The Mexican Connection in Francine Noël's *La Conjuration des bâtards*." In his essay—from the opening section of the collection—Wyile voices his concern "that hemispheric studies will take the form of a comparative regime in which the literature of the United States dominates—that in a literary version of 'the US and its Americas,' Canada, along with all the other 'Americas,' will be lost in the shuffle." In order to outline his position, Wyile draws upon Pierre Trudeau's image of the relationship between Canada and America as being akin to a mouse sleeping next to an elephant, and he ruminates that in such a case "it's hard to see what's on the other side of the elephant." In the final essay in the volume, Khordoc takes up Wyile's image of the elephant in order to argue that Noël's novel "serves to remind us that the elephant that lies beyond Quebec's and Canada's southern border does not encompass all of the Americas. By looking beyond this elephant, it is in fact possible for Québécois literature to assert itself because it can develop significant connections with other American cultures, thus freeing itself from the conventional colonial paradigm of the centre and the periphery."

As I was reading *The New North American Studies* and *Canada and Its Americas*, one question kept niggling at me: what can the framework of North American studies or hemispheric studies provide that broader comparative literary studies cannot? I am not sure that my question was answered by the end of Siemerling's monograph, but Khordoc's analysis of Noël's novel came closest to articulating a satisfying response and to alleviating my concerns (which I have to say are in line with Wyile's). Khordoc's analysis of magic realism and historical metafiction in Noël's novel combines the best features of literary criticism and connects such features to hemispheric studies. Khordoc argues, "Noël's innovation [in using these two narrative features] is that the cultural space represented is very broad, encompassing all of North America, in which different cultures and languages indeed cohabit on one continent, but by

retelling certain episodes of their histories, she contests the paradigm of a national history, revealing a certain common heritage among the countries sharing a continent." It seems to me that this type of analysis keeps an eye on the "continuing concern for local specificities that might be occluded or effaced by extranational, transcultural perspectives," to use Wyile's words.

I do not mean to suggest that the other essays do not situate their analysis within a hemispheric context. They do. In her essay on how the works of three diasporic authors evoke the figure of Chief Sitting Bull, Sarah Phillips Casteel shows how these texts suggest "the continuing reliance of contemporary writers on the figure of the indigene to construct a sense of New World belonging and indicate[] that we are addressing a hemispheric, rather than narrowly national, problematic." Also dealing with diasporic narratives that challenge "dominant narratives of nation," Maureen Moynagh analyzes the representation of slavery in African Canadian fiction and drama because they "offer a series of vantage points from which to consider the nation in relation to a transnational trope." Essays from the final section on "Quebec Connections" cover topics including the diversity of Western societies as expressed through public language in cities; a comparison between Québécois and US Chicano/a writing; and an analysis of *Rojo, Amarillo y verde* by Bolivian Canadian author Alejandro Saravia.

By reading this collection, I learned about a new text, a new author, a new way of thinking about a familiar text, and/or a new model for analyzing literature in a transcultural context, and for those reasons I recommend this volume for anyone interested in Canadian literary studies. In the introduction to *Canada and Its Americas*, Siemerling and Casteel state, "Our hope, then, is that this collection may prompt further investigations into other possible routes and pathways that would open up hemispheric readings of Canadian literature and thereby help to render Canadian cultures and literatures more visible within the burgeoning field of hemispheric American studies." That the field is indeed burgeoning remains to be seen, but if it is, then it is important that Canadian literature secures a place in the field without losing its ability to continue to bloom on its own.

Wayward Saint

Sylvie Simmons
I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen.
McClelland & Stewart $35.00

Reviewed by Mark Harris

Writing a life of Leonard Cohen is a thankless task. Quite simply, the man has too many fans, and each of his idolaters worships an icon a little bit different from the one adored by all the rest. For some, Westmount's most famous poetic son is primarily a writer; for others, he is almost exclusively a singer. There are those who delight in their hero's spiritual quest, just as there are those who vicariously get off on his seemingly endless sexual encounters. Although Cohen's following is worldwide, expatriate Montrealers, Zen Buddhists, non-Orthodox Jews, Rue Saint-Denis intellectuals, women with high IQs and even higher romantic expectations, London music journalists, closet believers in monotheistic religions, and late night booze artists are probably the sub-categories most susceptible to the man's unique—and uniquely seductive—charm.

Although she's based in San Francisco, Sylvie Simmons was born in London and she makes her living as a music journalist. She also writes fiction, and her best-received previous biography was of Serge Gainsbourg, yet another exemplary song-writing Jewish hipster. With a background like that, it was inevitable that her

life of "Leonard" would differ radically from that of, say, literary scholar Ira B. Nadel.

Differ it does, sometimes for the better, but often not. What is perhaps most surprising is that the pages Simmons devotes to the poet's career prior to the 1967 release of *Songs of Leonard Cohen* are far more intriguing than the chapters that follow. Indeed, her account of the man's early years is as insightful as it is enjoyable, even though her knowledge of that time is seriously defective, while her insight into what came after seems close to infinite.

Thus, as the book proceeds, our esteem paradoxically tends to decline. The author's heroic attempts to come to grips with a time and place to which she can lay no personal claim (the pre-Quiet Revolution Quebec in which Leonard Cohen was raised) is all too quickly replaced by a world she knows full well, the shifting musical scenes of New York, Nashville, and Los Angeles. Simmons might not understand much about Canadian poets, but she seems intimately familiar with the resumes of just about any session musician, back-up singer, or musical arranger you might care to mention. The production of each Leonard Cohen album is explored in painstaking— at times, *painful*—detail, and the itinerary of every last tour is analyzed with the assiduity of a military campaign. Occasionally, the musical detail becomes so stifling one wants to exclaim (to partially paraphrase C. S. Lewis in a radically different cultural context), "Oh no, not *another* fricking front man!"

There are likewise frequent lapses in thematic continuity. The young poet was a convinced vegetarian, but the old troubadour seems to have given up on this, even though he otherwise follows spiritual disciplines that might daunt Trappists half his age. What caused this change of heart? You're not going to find out here.

An even more vexatious problem is Simmons' seeming disinterest in the Québécois side of Leonard Cohen. This new headache is not altogether separate from the previous one. Thus, while witness Arnold Steinberg was probably right when he said that "Leonard's French was certainly minimal" in the 1950s, that most definitely is not the case now, when the aging pop star fields questions from *La Presse* reporters with effortless grace. Clearly, something happened in the interim—but what?

Many of the Canucks in Cohen's past, both francophone and anglophone, are either absent from the portrait altogether or else inadequately understood. Simmons makes *some* effort to "get" Irving Layton (although not enough to realize that his once great poetry declined tragically with age), but A. M. Klein, F. R. Scott, Louis Dudek, Lewis Furey, Carole (*not* Carol!) Laure, Lionel Tiger, and Rufus Wainwright are, beyond their immediate narrative functions, reduced to little more than names on a page.

To be fair, Simmons does a pretty good job of describing Mountain Street's most famous Saint Germain-des-Prés style watering hole (although she must be relying on archival sources, since *le Bistro chez Lou Lou les bacchantes* disappeared decades ago). When Leonard turns down the Governor General's Award for *Selected Poems, 1956-1968*, we are informed, "This was most unusual. Only one other winner in the past had refused the honour and its $2,500 purse—a French separatist who was making a political protest." No doubt . . . but which one? This lack of Québécois precision is fairly typical. Simmons doesn't even seem to be aware that Cohen's Montreal home is located in Le Plateau, reputedly the second most livable neighbourhood on earth.

As for her subject's literary career, the author is respectful but not much more. After the publication of *The Energy of Slaves*, she devotes only a few more pages to her subject's poetic and prosaic effusions. And in regard to *Beautiful Losers*, she clearly has no idea what to make of Cohen's

literary masterpiece. Instead, she largely focuses on its initial lack of success (yet my 1976 vintage paperback boasts of half a million copies in print).

Still, even if *I'm Your Man* gradually betrays its early promise as a literary biography, it never ceases to register as spritely pop journalism. Those who tend to think of Leonard Cohen as a "prophet" must be given pause by the knowledge that, in addition to Judaism and Zen, the man has serially embraced the tenets of "core" Hinduism, Scientology, and even the "catastrophic" philosophy of Immanuel Velikovsky, a style of spiritual "infidelity" that eerily shadows the carnal impulse to be nobody's man for very long. This "old smoothie" remains as cagey as ever in regard to his complicated relationships with his mother and other women, and it is easy to guess why his openness to all forms of religious expression is counterpointed by an equal suspicion of the more intrusive forms of psychoanalysis. Always quick with a quip, Leonard continues to play his cards close to his vest, and the wittiness of his responses tends to stifle probing inquiry (when I asked him why he thought he was the most popular singer in Poland, after a moment's reflection, the poet replied, "Over there, they have this tradition of liking ugly guys who can't sing"). This sort of gentle self-deprecation has prevented a lot of rocks from being overturned.

In Leonard Cohen's *oeuvre*, the line between transcendental truthfulness and the snake oil con is often razor-thin. No doubt this is the secret of his abiding appeal. Or, as the poet warned in one of his famous lyrics, "I told you when I came, I was a stranger." As the years pass, it looks increasingly as if he'll leave as one, too.

"Lingering after Mass"[1]

Thomas Wharton

Appreciating Robert Kroetsch feels very apt right now, since we seem to be stuck in an endless winter straight out of the novel *What the Crow Said*. Critics who don't live in Alberta might categorize that novel as a postmodern tall tale with magic realist influences. We Albertans know what it really is: a weather report.

Kroetsch's fictions do reflect an Albertan reality. Then again it seems that with every passing day Alberta becomes more of a Kroetschian fiction.

The piece titled "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto," from Kroetsch's collection on the writing life, *A Likely Story* (1995), isn't manifestly a work of fiction. It's a memory piece about a formative moment in the writer's life. Still, I find that the piece takes me, as a reader, through a shifting borderland between fact, memory (sometimes my own), and story, a place that I like to call Kroetsch Country. In Kroetsch Country you must abandon your assumed notions about a lot of things, for example boulders. And genres.

Is this an essay? A memoir? Maybe it's a memoir hiding a manifesto in plain sight. A purloined genre.

The title tells us the writer *wanted* to write a manifesto, but thereby implies that it didn't get written. So maybe this piece is really a brilliant excuse for not writing a manifesto. Maybe it belongs in the time-honored "dog ate my homework" genre. Perhaps much of what we call Canadian literature is just brilliantly disguised excuses. For not being Americans, for example.

I think I just came up with that idea, but didn't Kroetsch already say it somewhere? Even if he didn't, I still feel I should credit him with it.

In Charles Darwin's 1872 work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* he characterized the joyous playful behaviour of dogs as "flexuous movements." I find that a pretty good description of what it's like to read Kroetsch. This memoir piece is one of my favourite examples of his ability to dance language and form into "flexuous movement."

There's a story about the composer Handel that feels appropriate here. One Sunday Handel attended Mass at a country church, and near the end he asked the organist if he might have a try at playing the people out. The organist grudgingly consented. So Handel sat down at the organ and played. He played with such beauty and skill, he gave so much more than was necessary or expected, that the congregation lingered in the aisles in silent admiration. The envious organist whispered to Handel that he had botched the job—the people weren't leaving—and he brushed the composer aside to

show him how it was done. As soon as their own organist started playing again, the people exited the church with their usual haste.

Kroetsch is our literary Handel. He doesn't do what he's supposed to, beautifully. He doesn't get to the point, insightfully. Just when you think he's playing you out, you find yourself sticking around for more. He writes an essay that doesn't behave like an essay. He writes a manifesto that's a memoir, or both, or a detective story about a missing genre.

Miss Boyle, the teacher remembered in this piece, reminds me of that country organist. Kroetsch recalls how he came to Miss Boyle's first grade class already knowing how to read and write, and so upset her system. To please Miss Boyle, Kroetsch was forced to pretend he didn't know how to read and write, and so he learned it all over again.

The Miss Boyles of the world, and I confess at times I pose as one of them, know how a proper memoir, or essay, is supposed to be written. In these proper essays the job gets done properly. A reader is given everything in its place, a proper beginning, middle, and ending. A reader reaches the ending without any uncomfortable surprises and hurries out, having got what she came for.

This doesn't happen in a Kroetsch piece. You're reading along and suddenly the narrator gets hung up on the impossibility of a memory, or the possibility that his language is falling apart even as he uses it. There are sudden tangents, non-sequiturs, hollowings-out of meaning reminiscent of Zen koans. The narrator interrupts the story he wants to tell with other stories, none of them conclusive. He darts around, backtracks, puzzles over things before moving on. The essay as loiterature.

But I was getting to that formative moment in the writer's life. It's an incident from Kroetsch's childhood that he sees as being one of the first times he became a writer. He doesn't believe that one day he was not a writer and then somehow the next day he was, end of story. He says that he became a writer many times.

Or maybe he's saying that this becoming a writer happens every time one sits down to write. You start to learn your alphabet all over again.

Then again, maybe Kroetsch is saying that the self is nothing other than the stories it tells itself. The self IS this storytelling activity.

And here I'm afraid that, unlike Kroetsch, I'm going to have to give away the ending too soon. What this piece lingers toward so wonderfully is the memory of a frozen winter Sunday at the Catholic church near Heisler that Kroetsch attended when he was a boy.

That church, Kroetsch tells us, was unfinished. The steeple was never built because the farmer who put up the money decided he was no longer a believer. He'd had no idea how much steeples cost. I quote: "As a result of his change of heart [the farmer] was killed in a farm accident and his wife went mad. She became a witch who chewed gum a lot and then put wads of gum in quart-sized sealers because she knew the devil was trying to get hold of some of her spit."

But I digress. Or rather, Kroetsch does.

After Mass had ended that frozen winter morning, Kroetsch, a small boy then, reached up to dip his fingers in the marble font and found, to his horror, that the holy water was frozen solid. The priest's blessing, which was supposed to make the water sacred, hadn't changed it in any way. It had turned to ice, which meant it was just ordinary water, doing what all water does below zero.

I have to say that the first time I read this passage, I didn't quite get it. At that time I had just written a novel that featured a glacier as a main character, and as a result I'd developed a respect for ice verging on spiritual awe. That a liquid can transform into a solid and back again seems to me next to miraculous. So it took me a moment to understand Kroetsch's dismay at what his fingers encountered that morning.

And he was dismayed. He was shocked, horrified. Father Martin, the parish priest, was loved and trusted. He avoided any activities outside his priestly role. When he blessed holy water, they all knew it was blessed: "[Father Martin] knew what he must do—and didn't bother himself with questions. One time when visiting home, I asked him about a priest who was a friend of his. 'Oh, Father Hickey,' Father Martin said. 'He's in Rome now. Studying theology. Whatever that is.'"

Kroetsch is probably the furthest thing from a religious writer you could find, but in that moment of life-changing shock at the absolute ordinariness of water, I hear an echo of some lines from the mystical Indian poet Kabir: "There is nothing but water in the holy pools. I know, I have been swimming in them."

Kroetsch doesn't bring us to that moment of frozen disillusionment, or enlightenment, until near the end of the piece. Digression is how he gets to the heart of the matter, and on the way there he tells quite a few stories, often apparently just for the fun of it. But the piece doesn't feel cluttered, or scattered. As a reader I begin to look forward to these flexuous movements, these strategies of surprise and deferral.

If Kroetsch has a narrative credo, it's probably "never tell the reader anything until she's dying to know it."

Along the way to the holy water font, Kroetsch catalogues the seedy particulars of his secret love affair with an erratic boulder. He tells the story of the two hired men digging a well in the farmyard who ask the hopelessly spoiled and lazy young Bobby Kroetsch to fetch a bucket of drinking water. He does what he's told, but urinates in the water, then brings the bucket to the men and tells them he's peed in it. They don't believe him. "You did not," one of the men asserts, then takes the pail and drinks. A reader may begin to wonder why this story is being told, or if it's even true. "You did not," the reader might say, and keep reading.

Kroetsch the boy couldn't hold his water but Kroetsch the writer can. He holds onto his holy water story even longer to look back at a poem he wrote when he was seventeen, a poem that troubled him deeply because it was not at all what he'd set out to write. It was a heavily moralistic piece about a dying Japanese samurai, punished for taking the law of God as vain: "And now he lay broken, inert, inane."

What Kroetsch discovered by way of that early poem was that "somewhere in the generosity of literature was a tyranny that was making me write a poem that I did not want to write."

In this statement I hear a clue as to his writerly strategies of deferral and self-erasure: if the literature and language we've inherited have this kind of pervasive, almost invisible power over us, then the writer's flexuous movements, the darting in and out of stories, backtracking, breaking off, disappearing, are a way of resisting such tyranny.

As I say, Kroetsch eventually gets to the incident of the holy water font, but to my surprise he doesn't stop there, even though that moment makes for a terrific punchline. It's like karma for peeing in the drinking water. No, instead Kroetsch goes on to tell

another story, about an event that happened years later, when he was already an established writer and went to visit his grandfather's sister in St. Cloud, Minnesota. He meets this ancient woman, Aunt Rose, who doesn't seem to recognize him, though it's hard to say for sure because she doesn't speak. She opens her mouth as if to answer him but says nothing. Kroetsch is bothered by this, but later realizes what a gift Aunt Rose's wordless mouth really is. Her mouth, he says, was a nest.

It was a riddle he must offer his answering into. It was the holy water font.

I think I know what he's saying about the power of metaphor. I also had a Catholic boyhood. The holy water font in our modern, well-insulated church in Grande Prairie never froze over. But once, while leaving Sunday Mass, I dipped my fingers into the marble font at the door only to find that it was bone dry. And like Kroetsch I'm sure I glanced up in horror at the adults around me. They all dutifully dipped their fingers in nothing at all and made the sign of the cross as they always did, and hurried outside, eager to get to their lunches and football games on TV.

(I now wonder if my horror may also have been partly guilt and fear of punishment. I served as an altar boy in those days, and though I don't remember this for certain, one of my duties may have been to keep the holy water font filled).

For me, Kroetsch Country is in some ways the landscape of my own past, my own becoming a writer. But I also cherish his work because it reminds me not only to look carefully at what's there, but to stop and take a good look at what's not there.

To look intensely, but also playfully, tenderly. To remain vulnerable to shock, wonder, even love.

An old woman's mouth could be a nest. A boulder could be a lover. Water could be ice.

Kroetsch reminds me that those disquieting moments when things don't fit, when things don't appear as they should, when they don't appear at all—those are moments not to rush past but to read and write one's way into.

When I was a student in Rudy Wiebe's prairie fiction class we took a field trip to Kroetsch Country. We visited Heisler near the Battle River and met Kroetsch's cousins Del and Jeanne. They showed us a film about their famous cousin. Later we visited the author's old family farm. A man dressed in jean coveralls and a dirty red bandanna greeted us. He looked like an actor who had been hired to play a farmer for our visit. We remained skeptical. You have to understand, we were young urban sophisticates. We didn't quite believe in farms.

Nor could we quite believe this was really Kroetsch's homeplace. Bert Congdon was the farmer's name. The Kroetsch family hadn't lived here for many long years, but Bert turned out to have something of a Kroetschian wit. He mentioned that once he'd built a birdcage then went looking for a bird to put in it. When we asked which room had likely been Robert's as a boy, Bert said, "take your pick."

Maybe there's something in the water at that farm.

We chose one of the silent, unslept-in upstairs bedrooms and decided it was Kroetsch's because he wasn't there. We didn't find him in the kitchen garden out front either, planting seeds. It was the absence of the author that finally convinced us we were in the right place. Like Aunt Rose's mouth, Kroetsch's absence from his homeplace was a silence into which we might offer our own questions.

After the visit with Aunt Rose, Kroetsch returns to the subject of the frozen holy water. And in his oblique, suggestive way, leaving plenty of room for silence and the reader's answering, he weaves together some of the strands of his thoughts and memories:

"When I set out to write a story or a poem, or a love letter—or, for that matter—a postcard—I approach again the door and exit, there in the biting cold of a prairie winter morning, in the Wanda church. . . . I reach one hand over my head, beyond my line of vision, toward the water in the font, toward that open mouth of water. . . . Blindly, I trust. I reach. And again I am surprised by the tips of my fingers. Again I am surprised—into the impossibility of words—by the perfect and beautiful ordinariness of water. And I have written my manifesto after all."

And I hope I have expressed my appreciation.

Thank you.

NOTES

1 An appreciation of Kroetsch presented in the Department of English & Film Studies at the University of Alberta, 10 March, 2011.

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"Loss of the Steamship *Pacific*, November 4th, 1875"

Poetry and Commentary

Loss of the Steamship *Pacific*

James P. Delgado

The loss of the steamship *Pacific*, somewhere off Cape Flattery on November 4th, 1875 is now forgotten, a historical footnote at best for some. In its time, the tragic loss of the ship and the death of all aboard, save two, was a devastating event that affected families and communities up and down the coast, from the sawmills of Burrard Inlet, the young settlement of Victoria in British Columbia, and the American settlement on Puget Sound, to the burgeoning metropolis of San Francisco.

Pacific was a pioneer of west coast steamship service. Built in New York in 1850, the 2250-foot long, 1,003-ton *Pacific* was one of many steamers caught up in the California Gold Rush. The news of the California gold discovery of January 1848 reached a fever pitch at the end of the year and throughout the early months of 1849. Hundreds of ships sailed from the eastern service via the narrow Isthmus of Panama, a centuries-old link between the Atlantic and the Pacific. The United States Mail Steamship Company ferried passengers between New York, New Orleans, and Chagres, Panama's Caribbean port. From there, they crossed the Isthmus by dugout and mule train to Panama City. Then, they boarded steamers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company for San Francisco. The "Panama Route," in its heyday of 1849-1869, transported three-quarters of a million passengers and over $700 million in gold, as well as mail and valuable freight.

After a brief stint carrying passengers between New Orleans and Chagres for the United States Mail Steamship Company, *Pacific* departed from New York for San Francisco in March 1851. Arriving at San Francisco on July 2nd, the steamer operated between there and Panama City, and then San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua for the next four years for the Vanderbilt Line, a competitor of the Pacific Mail. Laid up in 1855, *Pacific*, like a number of other gold rush veterans, entered coastal service in 1858 when Captain John Thomas Wright of San Francisco bought her for his Merchant's Accommodation Line, which connected San Francisco with Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia ports in direct competition with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. After two other owners, *Pacific* passed into the hands of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in 1872. Pacific Mail ran her between San Francisco

and San Diego until 1875, when they sold *Pacific* to coastal steamship entrepreneurs Charles Goodall, Christopher Nelson, and George C. Perkins.

Steamship service between San Francisco and Victoria had blossomed after the discovery of gold on the Fraser River in late 1857. John Wright's Merchant's Accommodation Line began running the steamer *Commodore* to Victoria in April 1858, and purchased *Pacific* in July in response to the rush. Within the next year, 105 steamship voyages connected San Francisco and Victoria as tens of thousands of Americans headed north to the new gold strike. Ironically, it was another gold discovery in British Columbia at Cassiar in 1872 and a new rush that spanned the next few years that returned *Pacific* to Victoria service in 1875.

Steaming to Victoria at the end of October, *Pacific* made a voyage down to Puget Sound to Tacoma before returning to Victoria on the morning of November 4th to load cargo and passengers for the trip to San Francisco. Among them were British Columbian businessmen heading south to do business in San Francisco, returning California visitors, and miners leaving Cassiar for the winter—or for good. Apparently both overloaded with cargo and passengers (the steamer had accommodations for 253 persons, but more tickets than berths had been sold), *Pacific* steamed out of Victoria at 9:30 on the morning of the 4th, listing badly to starboard. To the right of the steamer, the crew finally filled the lifeboats on the portside with water, and the weight pulled *Pacific* on to a more or less even keel. The struggle to right the steamer took hours; it was not until 4:00 pm that *Pacific* crossed Cape Flattery and headed out of the Straits of Juan de Fuca into the open ocean.

Meanwhile, the ship *Orpheus*, heading for Nanaimo to load coal, was approaching Cape Flattery after sailing north from San Francisco. About 10:00 pm, in the darkness of the Cape, *Orpheus*' officers were startled by the lights of an approaching ship. As they watched in disbelief, the ship, a steamer, hit *Orpheus* on the starboard side and kept going. *Orpheus*, her rigging damaged, also kept going.

The steamer that struck *Orpheus* was *Pacific*. After the collision, water had poured through the hull, drowning the boiler fires. *Pacific* was sinking rapidly, and as passengers milled on the decks, the crew tried to launch the boats. Their efforts failed as boats overturned. Passenger Henry Jelly, aboard one boat, was thrown into the sea as his overcrowded lifeboat flipped. Only five men made it back to the surface to cling to the overturned hull. *Pacific* did not have much longer to live herself. Minutes after the collision, the ship broke apart and sank, pulling many down with it. A handful of survivors, buoyed by the wreckage that had broken free of the hull, drifted off into the night.

Jelly and one other man swam from their overturned boat to the top of the pilothouse, which was floating nearby, and drifted through the next day. As they rode the waves, they passed wreckage with other passengers clinging to it, but the ordeal was too much for most. Jelly's companion died on the afternoon of the first day, and he drifted on, alone now, through another night. The following morning, the passing ship *Messenger* spotted him and rescued him, battered and exhausted, from his precarious perch. He would not have lasted much longer. Jelly arrived at Port Townsend on November 7th, just three days after *Pacific* had departed. The news reached Victoria and the rest of the coast quickly and horribly. "The catastrophe is so far-reaching," said the Victoria *Daily British Colonist*. "Scarcely a household in Victoria but has lost one or more of its members. . . ."

Jelly's account was doubted until another survivor, *Pacific*'s quartermaster, Neil Henley, was rescued. Like Jelly, he had clung to wreckage, in his case, the remains of the

steamer's hurricane deck. A small group of survivors, including *Pacific*'s captain, Jefferson D. Howell, had joined Henley on his raft, but the sea had taken all of them. Near death, Henley was spotted by a passing ship, the US Revenue cutter *Oliver Wolcott*, and rescued four days after *Pacific* had sunk. Shock and disbelief gave way to indignation as bodies and debris washed ashore and the account of the two survivors showed that the aged steamer had been so rotten that her bow had crumbled with the blow to the *Orpheus*. A Victoria coroner's jury condemned both *Pacific* and *Orpheus*' officers, and pointedly noted that the collision had been "A very slight blow, the shock of which should not have damaged the *Pacific* if she had been a sound and substantial vessel."

The wreck of the *Pacific*, despite several searches for a Wells Fargo shipment of gold and the riches of some her passengers, has never been found. *Orpheus*, the other participant in the drama, was, ironically, wrecked on November 5th when her crew crashed her ashore at Barkley Sound on the western shores of Vancouver Island after losing their bearings. The skeletal remains on the ship lie on the seabed to this day, a provincially registered heritage site surveyed and studied by the Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia.

The epitaph of *Pacific*, written by one of the victims, is displayed by the Vancouver Maritime Museum. Sewell P. "Sue" Moody, pioneer lumberman and owner of a Burrard Inlet sawmill, was en route to San Francisco on *Pacific* to do business with his partners in the southern city. A popular man, Moody was filled with energy and was one of British Columbia's most "enterprising" citizens. Six weeks after the sinking, a fragment of the lost steamer was discovered on the beach below Beacon Hill at Victoria. Penciled into the whitewashed fragment was a final note from Sewell Moody. "All lost, S. P. Moody." Before the sea had claimed him, and not knowing that anyone would make it out of the sea alive, Moody had sent a message that was finally delivered from beyond the grave. It, like this poignant poem of loss and hope, are powerful reminders of that fateful night of November 4th, 1875.

Loss of the Steamship "Pacific," November 4th, 1875.

By Rev. Geo. Mason, M. A., Rector of St. Paul's Church, Nanaimo

Speed on thy course, Leviathan of art !
Thou boast of modern science ! Safely speed
From port to port with all thy living freight
Of human souls, more precious than thy load
Of earthly dross, exhumed from mountain depths,
Or washed with anxious toil from mingled sand
On river beds. Speed on in proud disdain
Of wind and storm ! Obedient to thy will
The waves of ocean bear thee on thy way,
And lift in vain their crests of angry foam
To harm thy guarded bulwarks, or affright
The careful pilots of thy destiny !

The dark November clouds may low'r, the sun
Shroud its meridian brightness 'neath a veil
Of threat'ning mist:—dreaming of joys to come
In the gay City of the Golden Gate.
They heed not nature's frowns who crowd thy deck,
Thou spoiler of old Neptune's vaunted sway !
The happy children gaze with laughing glee
For the last time on their forsaken homes;
The merchant heaves a sigh of glad relief,

Expectant of his holiday from care;
With fondly ling'ring thoughts the maiden waves
Her 'kerchief flag of tender, mute farewell,
While on the chilly breeze floats soft and low
Her parting strain—"Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye!"
Soon shall Columbia's snow-capt mountains fade
In evening shadows from their home-turn'd view,
Soon shall fond mem'ry's mirror of the past
Lose its reflections 'mid imagin'd scenes
Of unknown pleasures in the coming time;—
And all our winter gloom dissolving change
For the bright sunshine of the balming West.

Hush!—did'st thou hear?—was it the death-shriek woke
The midnight slumbers of that silent home?
Hush!—it is nought!—nought but the watch-dog's howl
Of melancholy omen, boding ill;—
Or screech of night-bird hooting to the gale
In fiendish mockery of man's distress.
Sleep on, beloved ones! for a while sleep on
And gather up your strength for morning light!
A day of sorrows waits you! gird yourselves
With prayer, and lean upon th' Eternal love,
"Though He destroy, yet will I trust in him!"
Be this your motto! and your quivering souls
Shall bear the shock uninjur'd, and along
The course of life shall presently sail on
In calmness to the haven, where they rest.

But—hush—again! the news! the dreadful news
Has reached our shores! has paralyzed the hearts
Of all! Oh! say, it is not true! What! lost!
All lost! All! All! but one snatch'd from the deep,
A solitary messenger of woe,
Left on the cruel waters to recount
His tale of misery, the fatal crash,
The rush, the panic—accents of despair,—

The infant's wail,—the Mother's piercing cry,—
The brave man's fight with death, and chivalry
Unselfish even to his latest gasp.
And now another, rescued from the waves
But to confirm the tidings of their fate,
Pants forth fresh horrors from the awful wreck.
All lost! No! No! the agony is o'er
The dark, cold waters of destruction past,
And on the tearless shore they rest, God grant,
In peace, awaiting now perennial bliss,
Purg'd from all earthstains in th'o'erwhelming tide
By God's consuming Love, wash'd in the blood
Of Him whose dying pangs outweigh'd the sum
Of mortal agonies, who tasted death
For all, that all, who will, might never die
But only sleep—Mother! she is not dead.
Tho' she return not, thou shalt go to her
In the far land ; when sea shall be no more,
And from its depths are yielded up the dead—
Pitiless Ocean! thou hast done thy worst !
We ask not this of thee,—to hurl us back
In ruthless scorn the forms of those we loved ;
Harrowing our souls with hideous spectacle
Of marr'd remains, relinquish'd—but in vain.
Hide them!—Oh! hide beneath thy briny pall
Corruption's spoils until the day of doom!
Thou can'st not rob us of th' immortal part!
Beyond the utmost fury of thy storms
The Spirit soars, and holds Communion still
With kindred hearts in voiceless sympathy.

'Tis said the Royal Dane in olden time
Bade his obsequious courtiers place his throne
Before the advancing tide; with solemn pomp
He gave his sovereign mandate to the waves;
Rebellious to this delegate of heaven,
But to th' Almighty ruler loyal still,
Th' unconscious turf roll'd on and heeded not
The impotent usurper's futile word.
Thus in his wisdom did the prince rebuke
The idle flatt'rers of his earthly power,
And vindicate His Majesty, who "holds
The waters in the hollow of His hand."
Well might we learn in these presumptuous days
A lesson from this simple tale of Eld.
Ye launch your monster vessels on the deep,
With scarce a thought of the Omnipotent ;

The forces of the Universe obey
The magic scepter science proudly wields.
Flush'd with your triumph Nature is defied—
Danger despised, till danger's self has come,
And finds you unprepared with all your arts
Against the common accidents of life!
The untamed billows mock your pigmy toys,
When mercilessly rushing on their prey
They gain their vantage, and the stricken ship
Sinks neath the paean of their roar, an hopeless wreck.

Afterword

John Wilson Foster

The "Loss of the Steamship *Pacific*, November 4th, 1875" by Rev. George Mason, an Anglican rector from Nanaimo, British Columbia, is a poem commemorating in the assumed tones of sorrow and anger the wreck of SS *Pacific* off Cape Flattery, the northwestern tip of the Olympia Peninsula, Washington State (US) and not far from Vancouver Island, British Columbia (Canada). One list of shipwreck casualties gives 236 as the number of those who died when the *Pacific* collided with another ship and sank, but a contemporary account gives the total as over 270.

This occasional poem is 112 lines in length, giving Mason room for drawing a number of lessons, most of them Christian, and is written in blank verse (unrhyming five-beat lines), the classic metre for English poets who wish to combine the formality of verse with a flexibility required by insight and argument. The poem exhibits the tendency of blank verse to compose itself into paragraphs, often twelve lines in length and sometimes fourteen, as though the blank verse were naturally resolving itself into sonnets, that other classic English verse form. Indeed, the poem ends with an almost independent sonnet (beginning "Well might we learn in these presumptuous times") and they are the most impressive lines of the whole.

Mason begins with a mock invocation, addressing directly all such fast proud ships and encouraging them to believe in their own vulnerability. He turns then to the passengers and what we as readers already know to be the pathos of their imagining their future in California. A narrative skeleton is meant to give firmness to the observations and emotional outbursts, as Mason recalls the expectancy on deck in Victoria before departure (with passengers' daydreams of the golden destination, San Francisco), the sudden and fearful premonition coming to those on land ("Hush!—didst thou hear?"), the terrible news of calamity, the survival of one passenger (H. F. Jelly) and one crewman (Neil Henley) who recount the collision, the panic and despair, the chivalry in vain, the mass deaths. The rest of the poem consists of Mason's address consecutively to a dead mother who lost her child, the pitiless ocean and men heedless of God's omnipotence.

The extent to which this poem displays formulas (however deeply felt it may be) is due in part to the fact that shipwrecks with considerable loss of life were almost commonplace in the nineteenth century and before, and poets naturally had been responding with verse printed in local newspapers, or, if merited and from the pens of proven poets, in volumes of verse. The year 1875 had already seen the collision of *Vicksburg* with ice on its way from Quebec to Liverpool and its sinking with

seventy-five souls lost (May 31st) and the wreck of *Schiller* off the Scilly Isles with 312 lost (May 7th), and was to see the wreck of *Deutschland* off Harwich, at the cost of fifty-seven souls (December 6th). It was much the same every year, the death toll relentless, the ships foundering wholesale. Two other wrecks associate themselves with the SS *Pacific*. On January 22, 1906, SS *Valencia*, making the reverse run from San Francisco to Victoria ran aground on Vancouver Island, and though it was only sixty feet from shore, there were deaths in the rough weather and fear-stricken passengers and crew sang "Nearer My God to Thee," six years before that hymn was to be immortally connected to *Titanic*. And in 1856, the identically named SS *Pacific* of the Collins Line disappeared between Liverpool and New York with anywhere between 190 and 280 souls on board.

The drowning of five nuns among the lost souls on board *Deutschland* inspired the Jesuit English priest Gerard Manley Hopkins to write his famous "The Wreck of the *Deutschland*" a mere month after Mason had commended the loss of *Pacific* to verse. Hopkins was a troubled soul and his celebrated experimental metres and rhythms (haywire to the uninitiated) were appropriate forms of expression for his questioning, angst-ridden, ultimately affirmative reaction to the drowning of five pious women who died while calling on Christ to come quickly. Hopkins can give the impression of sometimes being angry at God, or at least baffled by Him, whereas Mason's anger is directed at Man's overweening pride. Three years later, *Euridice*, a training ship for young seamen, sank off the Isle of Wight with around 300 crew, all of whom were lost. Hopkins again responded with a poem, more traditional than his previous one, perhaps because his spiritual anguish was less despite the far greater loss of life. Still, he wrote: "Deeply surely I need to deplore it, / Wondering why my master bore it."

Mason was a more orthodox priest than Hopkins and his poem anticipates sentiments found, for example, in the innumerable sermons preached around the English-speaking world on April 21st, the first Sunday after the sinking of RMS *Titanic* in 1912. For example, Mason addresses a "Leviathan of art" (the very word that was used to describe such giants as *Titanic* years later) and a "boast of modern science." Science in its most obvious guise of engineering marvels was seen in Mason's day as typical of "these presumptuous days" and it was a sentiment at least as old as 1829, when Thomas Carlyle, while acknowledging the benefits of applied science, warned against the attempt to best Nature through machinery. Mason echoes Carlyle when he ironically bids the ships "Speed on in proud disdain / Of wind and storm!" This apparent support of hubris is of course Masons' verbal irony, foreshadowing the dramatic irony of calamity awaiting *Pacific*. Commentators, particularly religious commentators, made much of this irony when *Titanic* went down, their sorrow mingling with the gratification that derives (as they saw it) from God's showing Man who is Boss.

Carlyle also saw the new steamships widening the gap between the rich and poor, an issue that surfaced when *Titanic* went down with poor European emigrants and rich American businessmen on board. For Mason, the human cargo on such ships as *Pacific* is far more precious than "earthly dross, exhumed from mountain depths, / Or washed with anxious toil from mingled sand / On river beds." It is hard not to hear in this sideswipe at materialism an echo from Milton's *Paradise Lost* of the fallen angels under direction of Mammon plundering the mountains of hell for gold and other precious metals to build Pandemonium. But Mason has in mind the gold either in California (prospectors started or finished in San Francisco, "gay City of the Golden Gate") or in British

Columbia (from Victoria, as James Delgado tells us, prospectors set off for the Fraser River where gold was discovered in 1857). Mason is careful to place on board the merchant off on holiday from the cares of business.

Like the survivors of *Titanic*, Mason's sole survivor tells of "the fatal crash, / the rush, the panic" and of that male chivalry that many saw as one of the few consolations amid the sadness of loss in 1912. Chivalry carries the notion of vain bravery. Man pits his "monster vessels" (what would Mason have said or thought had he imagined a ship as huge as *Titanic*?) against Nature and in observing this, Mason threatens to turn Nature from God's instrument into a ruthless, hostile force unto itself—"Pitiless Ocean! Thou has done thy worst!"—just as many commentators interpreted the iceberg's destruction of *Titanic* as an episode in the continuing warfare between Nature and Man. But for the religious, like Mason, the real, fruitless, and hopeless "war" was between God and Man, who would ignore Him and who operate their giant machines "with scarce a thought of the Omnipotent," and yet in whose forgiving bosom the dead rest, another source of deep if sorrowful gratification, though only after such painful lessons as the *Pacific* disaster. Man has neglected to learn from the history of King Canute, seen by Mason, correctly, not as a foolish defier of Nature (and hence God), but as a wise demonstrator to foolish courtiers of the invulnerable power of Nature (and hence God).

Mason comes full ironic circle when he ends his poem: the waves that "lift in vain their crests of angry foam" at the poem's outset and the ship's departure become at the end "untamed billows" that "mock your pigmy toys." The "sonnet" with which Mason closes his poem carries echoes of an earlier, if non-Christian, sonnet, "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Since in Shelley's poem the broken statue is "sunk" in the sand and composes a "Wreck," the desert and ocean are similar; the lone and level sands make pigmy the vast remains of the kingly effigy. Mason's poem is like a gloss on the implied argument of "Ozymandias," to which has been added his orthodox Christianity. "Loss of the Steamship *Pacific*" is a very modest composition in strictly poetic terms, but it is surprisingly rich in Victorian cultural motifs and sentiments, though expressed at the edge of the Empire.

Contributors

Articles

James **Delgado** is an archaeologist and historian who specializes in shipwrecks of the 19th century. Former director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum, he has written 32 books on the subject and retains a passionate interest in the ships and seafaring stories of the West Coast.

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Maia **Joseph** teaches in UBC's Arts Studies in Research and Writing Program. Her research focuses on urban literature and poetics, urbanism and regionalism, and the ethics and politics of artistic practice. Her work has appeared in *Canadian Literature*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and the *Canadian Review of American Studies*, and she is co-editor of *Tracing the Lines: Reflections on Contemporary Poetics and Cultural Politics in Honour of Roy Miki.*

Travis V. **Mason** teaches ecocriticism, poetry and poetics, and postcolonial and Canadian literatures. He has been awarded a Mellon and a Killam Postdoctoral Fellowship at Rhodes University, South Africa, and Dalhousie University, respectively. His articles and reviews have appeared in Canadian and international journals and books. *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays*, *Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* (2013) is available from Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Laurie **Ricou** taught at the University of Lethbridge before moving to the University of British Columbia in 1978. His books include *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*, and *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory* (2007). He served as Associate Editor of *Canadian Literature* from 1982 to 1996, and Editor from 2003 to 2007.

Katherine Ann **Roberts** is an Associate Professor at Wilfrid Laurier University where she teaches in both the French and North American Studies programs. She has published widely in scholarly journals on Quebec women's writing, Quebec nationalism, and more recently, on Canadian western writing and masculinity in 1960s North American film. She is currently completing a book manuscript entitled "West/Border/Road: Narratives of Place in Contemporary Canadian Fiction, Film and Television".

Magali **Sperling Beck** is a Professor of English at the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil. She has a PhD from the University of Alberta, Canada. Her main research interests include contemporary North-American writing, travel writing, and life writing.

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Angela **Waldie** teaches at Mount Royal University in Calgary. Her primary research interests include species extinction, bioregionalism, western Canadian and American literature, and ecopoetics. She is currently writing her first poetry manuscript, entitled "A Single Syllable of Wild."

Thomas **Wharton** was born in Grande Prairie, Alberta. His first novel, *Icefields* (1995), won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book, Canada/Caribbean division. His second novel, *Salamander* (2001), was short-listed for the Governor General's Literary Award and the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize. A collection of short fiction, *The Logogryph*, was published in 2004 by Gaspereau Press. His most recent book is *The Tree of Story*, third of a fantasy trilogy for younger readers called *The Perilous Realm*. His work has been published in the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and other countries. Wharton is an associate professor in the department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, where he teaches creative writing.

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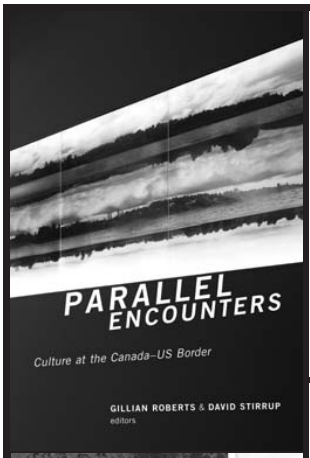

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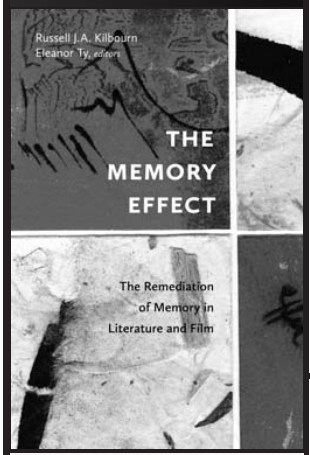

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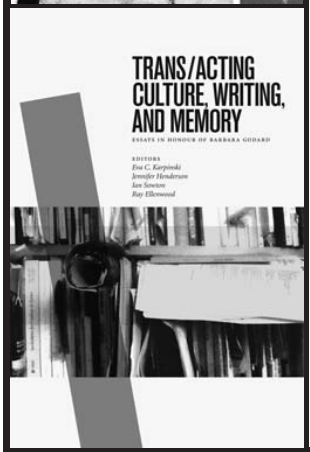

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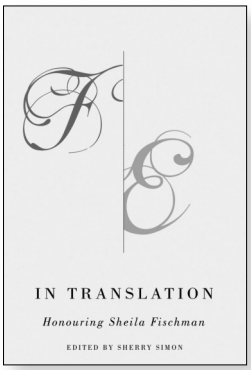

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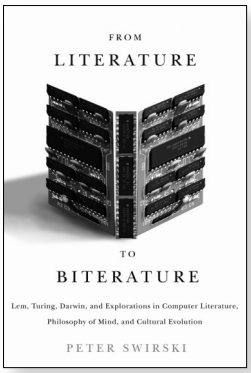

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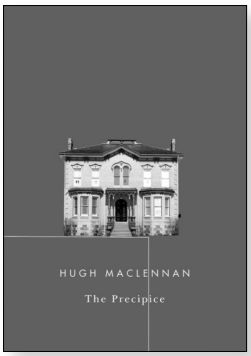

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