Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review Winter 1997 $15

155

Contemporary Poetics

Canadian Literature

congratulates

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recipient of
The University of British Columbia Medal
for Canadian Biography

for *Various Positions:*
A Life of Leonard Cohen
(Random House of Canada Ltd.)

Canadian Literature / Littérature *canadienne*

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 155, Winter 1997

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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Publications Mail registration number 1375
GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by the University of British Columbia and the SSHRCC

Canadian Literature is indexed in *Canadian Periodical Index* and *Canadian Magazine Index*. It is available on-line in the *Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database*, and is available in microfilm from University Microfilm International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan USA 48106

For subscriptions, back issues (as available), and annual and cumulative indexes, write: Circulation Manager, *Canadian Literature*, #167 - 1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2
TELEPHONE: (604) 822-2780
FAX: (604) 822-5504
E-MAIL:reviews@cdn-lit.ubc.ca
poetry@cdn-lit.ubc.ca
http://www.swifty.com/cdn_lit

SUBSCRIPTION: $40 INDIVIDUAL; $55 INSTITUTIONAL; PLUS GST IN CANADA; PLUS $10 POSTAGE OUTSIDE CANADA

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
dchin@cdn-lit.ubc.ca
Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Typefaces: Minion and Univers
Paper: recycled and acid-free

Canadian Literature welcomes submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, #167-1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z2. Submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

Articles should follow MLA guidelines for bibliographic format. All works accepted for publication must also be available on diskette.

Canadian Literature reçoit des soumissions d'articles, d'entrevues et autres portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs oeuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

Les manuscrits doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux articles anonymisés), adressés à l'Éditeur de *Canadian Literature*, 1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z2, et accompagnés d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

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Editorial

Poetry, Poetics, Criticism

0. Oh?

> To your regular diet of technical or business material, add a little poetry. Wait please—don't stop reading this yet! I'm not suggesting this only to offer you the aesthetic and spiritual gifts of poetry. Poetry will help you write better memos, letters, and reports. (Cheryl Reimold, "Principles from Poetry. Part 1: Persuasion," *Tappi Journal* 68.12 [1985]: 97; quoted from Tom Wayman's essay inside)

> Institutions of information fulfill the enthusiasm for solutions:
> But poetry is always something else. . . .
> Poetry is an expenditure of language "without goal," in fact a redundancy; a constant sacrifice to a sacrifice. It is possible that one should speak here about love, in other words about reality, or the probability of answering the sourceless echo—about responsibility. (Arkadii Dragomoschenko, *Description*, trans. Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova [Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1990], 20-21)

I. A First Chorus on Poetics

—How to start? One way would be to admit there is no coming to terms with *poetry*, *poetics*, and *criticism*, and there is only coming to terms: etymologically, for example, which gives us "something made," "about something made" (*peri poietikés*, in Aristotle's phrase), and "judgment."

—Very neat, but not very helpful: origins are hardly binding on posterity, which in any case usually has trouble locating them, and a term's meaning inevitably shifts over time. Semantic fields are no less worked over, expanded, abandoned, recolonised, enclosed, contested, and so on than any other sort of territory.

—So take a historical view, then?

—That would be another way, certainly, and one which would acknowledge that what a poem is, or is understood to be, has never been constant, nor has what people choose to do with it or use it for: Aristotle, Longinus, Geoffrey de Vinsauf, Dante, Boileau, Goethe, Wordsworth, Mallarmé, Pound, and Milosz, amongst others, differ considerably on this subject, and

that's staying within the Western traditions, which, rich as they are and affected as they occasionally are by, say, Arab or Chinese influences, still share the same watershed.

—Not what is a poem, then, but when?

—Perhaps, but what about, where is a poem? A disciplinary (that is, a conceptual) approach might be another way here: a poem is found amongst those things that aim to please, and so poetics would be a branch of aesthetics, and criticism a cicerone or a pander, depending on your point of view.

—But would poetics really be a branch of aesthetics? That's only one possible conceptualisation, even if it has much to recommend it; poetics, after all, no less than the poems it aims to describe, prescribe, or even proscribe, can just as well and just as usefully be allied with or subsumed under anthropology, biology, ethics, gender studies, literary criticism, psychology, rhetoric, semiotics, or sociology.

—Which is a way of recognising that just as criticism can do many things (judge, elucidate, explicate, comment, converse), so too can a poem, and it typically does more than one thing at once: instruct, delight, baffle, know, express, imitate, communicate, be, contain, answer, sound. Any adequate poetics would have to account for this multi-facetedness, which undoubtedly explains why there have been and still are so many poetics.

—So let's just admit that there is no poetry without poetics, and recall the paradoxical fact that it must precede poetry before it can follow after, since without poetics not only would there be no comprehension and no sustaining commentary, there would be no originating composition.

—Maybe so, but a poetics needn't be and usually isn't made explicit before anyone goes about composing, reading, or formally responding to a poem.

—True, but only where the poetics in question is shared, or not in competition or conversation with other conceptions of the poem, text, wordthing, thoughtsong, or whatever—the very fact of variable nomenclature points again to different conceptions of poetics, the products of each of which will have their own distinctive purchase on the face of things.

—Except of course that the face of things, like language itself (which is what helps us both create and come to know that face), is multi-faceted, and so any poetics and its poems necessarily leave larger or smaller gaps where they fail to get a handle on certain of the word's or the world's ways.

—And a good thing too: otherwise there'd be no more poems to make, and commentary would be redundant.

—Well, I'm not sure most poets or readers give much thought to poetics, which is about as interesting as talking of tofu instead of eating beancurd, and even if some poets do give it thought, very few of them are any more articulate about the whole business than your sweaty hockey player is when someone shoves a mike in his face at game's end and asks about how he scored the winning goal: stuff about the muses or voices or images arriving from out of the blue or cadences felt in the forearms is hardly any more satisfying an explanation than someone's saying, "the guys played good tonight and I was just in the right place when the puck came my way; after that, I put my head down and shot, and in she went."

—But that's such a male metaphor, though at least it makes clear that a poem and therefore the poetics that enables it are gendered and social constructs as well as someone's own makework.

—Oh, come on, this poetics stuff is just a lot of academic post-hockery: the poet simply sets the poem down on the page and the reader reads it.

—It's not quite so simple as that, you'd have to agree, since no one ever wants to write without first having read; and if the poem on the page looks or sounds different from what they're used to, many people just turn away from it, as a large body of readers has been doing for a good century now: I don't know much about poetry, runs one well-travelled line, but I know what I like—and yet that espousal of tasteful ignorance cannot be made without an implicit poetics.

—Can't say I agree at all, unless you want to make majority opinion defective whenever it conflicts with minority views.

—You may not agree, but I do, and I'd add that if there's any post-hockery it's played mainly in commentary, though the twist here is not only that poems made according to emergent or archaic or little-known poetics will find no or few readers without commentary, but also that there's no such thing as poetic immortality without this secondary activity, since almost all poetic hosts would die without their critical parasites.

—Even translators, whose business it is to multiply the possible worlds and wordways that exist within a given tongue, rarely work without the aid of commentary and criticism, and can easily be thought of as participating in the latter tasks.

—And why not go further? Isn't "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer" at once a poem in its own right and a translation of and commentary on "Bushed," Atwood's poem extending the afterlife of Birney's in its indepen-

dent dependency? And couldn't the same be said of Bringhurst's "Anecdote of the Squid" in relation to Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape"?

—There's no escape from secondariness, it seems, a point all the easier to concede when we recognise that from the very start poems have often made a habit of commenting on their own or other poetics: think of the bards who show up on Homer's epic stage or of Chaucer's sharp theoretical turns in narrative mid-flight, not to mention poetic treatises on poetry, such as Lu Ji's or Sikong Tu's. Some of those old boys may have reached a popular audience but they certainly knew that theirs was a learned pursuit with its own conceptual groundwork.

—Point after point inadvertently proved in the making: references to "the page" and "reading" already imply a textual rather than an oral poetics, which signals our inescapable cultural belatedness: if it's true that we can craze print with the trace of talk—and that has been the explicit aim of many poets in recent decades, so much so that ecriturial countermovements have sprung up against demotic poetics—it's also the case that our spoken words inkstain the air almost from the time we first plunge into language, since in a culture with writing mother and father tongues cannot help but entwine like caducean serpents around some prior and usually taken-for-granted axis.

—But isn't "immortalising" commentary needed only when poets and their work no longer have an integrated social space? Like now.

—If so, then Leonard Cohen's your mythical merman, and his seachange from poet to popstar is epoch-making, for it means that his afterlife—largely because he's gone so savvily in for the widely shared poetics of mass-market culture and in pseudo-ancient fashion energized his worldweary lyrics with electrified music—won't be confined to classrooms and quarterlies. A movie star, after all, edited his last selected.

—Let it be said again, you mean, only with a further claim for good measure: poem and poet alike are social and gendered constructs, and the creatures of marketing and media as well.

—So, if it's not quite post hoc, poetics is still necessarily in hock to its particular organs of dissemination?

—Precisely the point of so much marginal composing since Mallarmé blanked out the invisible page and the homemade demi-mondes of parapublishing made space for those few readers left undigested by book-of-the-munching.

—Enough said. Look, any poem that matters remains unsullied by such circumstantial slings and arrows, since it occupies its own as-it-were transcendent space in which we can sail whenever we read or hear it.

—We? Who's we?

—Here by way of illustration is a centuries' old scrap: "Dronken dronken y-dronken / Dronken is Tabart at wine / Hey . . . sister, Walter, Peter, / Ye dronke all deepe, / And I shall eke! / Stond alle stille — / Stille as any stone: / Trippe a littel with your foot / And let your body go."

—Perhaps you've got a point there; for the funny thing is, a poem both is and is not the sum of its confluent contexts; knowing those things might enhance your pleasure or understanding in the reading, but they are no substitute for a direct encounter, or for a further poetic response.

—"We all have our altars & icons," as Mouré says, unexempt herself.

—You mean, then, that the present (and hence the poetics) of any given culture is always asynchronous with itself: the more so, the longer and more layered a culture's historical memory or the broader and more aggregate its multicultural and multilingual reach. Even the mainstream, which in the cultural freemarketplace might as well be called the maelstrom, contains strong residual and emergent strands of flow variously entwined with the dominant, which in Canadian anglophone poetics might be called the "trivial anecdotal."

—And if the dominant flows mixed with the residual and the emergent, it also meets unpredictably with any number of current-altering eddies, shoals, falls.

—But wait: here's a postcard dropped in from out of the blue.

Moses supposes his toeses are roses, but Moses supposes erroneously. This from one of the apocrypha, the prophet as vaudeville poet. And a toe by any other name?—one of the bronchial tubes through which we breathe the earth; a clitoral homologue rubbing us right whenever we move (hence the wearing of shoes in civilized cultures); a stylus shared by all legged creatures, though each steps in with its own brand of choreography. [signed] *Worden Edgewise*

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—[*Omnes*, out of synch] Well, what can you say to that? Maybe "on words and up words."

II. Take Two: A Prospective Text Tiled from This Issue's Essays and Opinions

> If [field] notes replaced essays, we might get nearer to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical, and critics might develop a jazz-like alertness to the spontaneous reactive moments of other critics. Such a group of readers might become like responsive soloists, taking turns, using the different *timbres* of their instruments to play out and improvise together on the underlying "melody" of a single text. (Keith Harrison, "Notes on 'Notes from Furry Creek'")

In transplanting these traditional images, Clarke creates a new geography, a site rich in history from which new voices speak, which he defines in *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile* as "Africadia," an alternative to the view of Canada as "bush garden". . . . Clarke's "Africadian" pastoral vision questions and expands the role of the traditional liminal figure, the borderland dweller who mediates between two worlds. Here the Black Nova Scotian poet inhabits and traverses territory divided along economic and, especially, racial lines. (Dorothy Wells, "A Rose Grows in Whylah Falls")

> If we want to preserve Canada's cultural heritage, which does seem fragile and in many ways under attack, we need to tell our stories as if they matter. It's tricky, and rather sticky, trying to put your finger on exactly what happened in the back rooms of publishing and government bureaucracy leading up to the demise of Coach House Publishing. There's no doubt that Mike Harris's followers didn't know the value of what they were hitting when they swung the big axe, but those of us who speak in support of cultural institutions are doomed if our praise and indignation are equally unfocused. (Norman Ravvin, "Stopping in at the Coach House")

In the weeks remaining to him, he composed poems. He sent five to his youngest daughter who after moving from an internment camp in the interior of British Columbia was living with her own husband and son in a shack in Alberta. They were five poignant meditations on death. My mother said she knew after reading them her father was about to die. (Terry Watada, "Poetic *Karma*")

> For Davey, this [annotated map] is evidence of a belief that here language points to a reality outside itself; he claims that "Pencilled additions act both to insert the narrator into this factuality and to document that somebody was actually 'there'." But these additions can also be read as an example of the inadequacy of any attempt to represent "factuality." Language is a map of what it pretends to

> represent and thus is always incomplete, like the printed map; the pencil marks are both marks of the occasions of their production and traces of all that is not mapped. (Julie Beddoes, "Mastering the Mother Tongue")

When I hear a faint blurry nasal honk and think "nuthatch," I find it hard to agree with Hegel that by naming the animals in the Garden of Eden Adam "annihilated them in their existence as beings." A Robert Hass poem speaks of this notion that "a word is elegy to what it signifies." If words can be bombs, erasers, or subtractors, can't they also be pencils, pointers, gestures? (Brian Bartlett, "For Sure the Kittiwake")

> Certain assemblages of words we call poems succeed beyond question at bridging the core solitude of human existence. Each of us is alive in a fleshly and perishable body, linked however tenuously to family and community, to a social past and present, and still each of us labors basically alone to experience and process our life. What *relief*—for surely that is the root of the exhilaration we feel when a work of art overwhelms us—to sense that another human voice possesses the ability to stir us, to reach the ear or eye of our innermost being. (Tom Wayman, "Why Profess What is Abhorred")

Mouré's poetics seeks to foment a crisis at the heart of authoritative discourse, to place both readers and writers at risk. When Tregebov asks, "Who can read Mouré and not feel stupid?" she enacts this crisis, revealing an anxiety about the critic's own ability to speak authoritatively, to establish the necessary critical distance from which to view the works. Instead, the critic who is led to ask this question has become the object of the text's critical gaze. (Lisa Dickson, "Signals across Boundaries")

> To some extent the tunelessness of much contemporary poetry is due to a theorocratic/moralistic disapproval of beautiful language. St. Bernard was said to have struck off the heads of flowers by his path as he walked, because their beauty might distract him from pious thoughts. Similarly, contemporary theory-saints suppose beauty might "reconcile" us to submit to evil; they claim that as long as injustice exists we must not make beauty. (M. Travis Lane, Letter to the Editors)

To my mind, then, the notion of Milton Acorn as writer of poems was—and to some significant extent still is—inevitably complicated by my perception (and, I think, the general public reception) of him not simply as a person who wrote poems but as a *persona* of sorts. Yet, just as inevitably, I have found myself turning and returning to Acorn's poems in recent years as I have begun to make my own commitment to writing poems—and have thus begun to reflect on

> the implications and the complications of being a Prince Edward Island poet. Whatever that means. (Thomas O'Grady, "Advice from Milton Acorn")

> In the three or four years between *The Blue Roofs of Japan* and *The New World Suites*, I did a lot of listening. I began, then, to understand that Gould was the most colossally improbable of all Canadian poets—and that he was, more improbably still, one of the greatest. To say this is also, perhaps, to contest what "poetry" means. I use the word as I must, and not as a name for the quaint little versified or verse-like bursts of verbal nostalgia, amusement and confusion that pass without remark in oral cultures but in literate cultures often get written and printed. (Robert Bringhurst, "Singing with the Frogs")

III. And a Third Thing: A Post-Scriptum Foreword

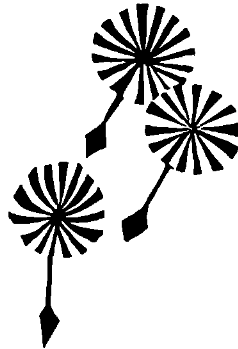
From a single strand of DNA, apparently, it is possible to reconstruct an entire organism, though few advocates of the process trouble to ask what such a resurrected organism would even be without a larger community against, with, and within which to live. Quotations, perhaps fortunately, lack such latent integrity; the filaments of their severed thought cannot be used to replicate the body of work from which they have been cut—only to suggest something of its stylistic scent and intellectual bent, both of which have to be recovered through close contact. Even so, the preceding sampler of quotations does suggest something of the variety, interest, and pleasure to be found in this issue on contemporary poetry and poetics, just as the separate fragments together gesture towards the larger communities of poetry's writers and readers, speakers and listeners.

If the poetry composed in Canada today can be imagined as a multilingual, multi-faceted, and wholly ungraspable crystalline composite, then what the current issue offers is a good look through several quite different critical lenses at several of the crystal's quite different surfaces, each of them represented here by specific anglophone poets, poems, and poetics. By any measure, there is more missing than present, but that is true of every look at anything; and the dream of total inclusiveness can sometimes take on features of the old—and still recurring—nightmares of exclusivity and hardline hierarchy (both dreams are, after all, products of the same civilisation).

Readers who do not find what they are looking for in issue #155 are invited to submit for consideration their corrective accounts of the absent, the forgotten, the disappeared, or the effaced. Similarly, I want to restate the

call for poems made in the editorial to #149 ("Inhabiting the Interstices") asking "for the widest possible range of submissions, which might even include longer texts (or parts of them), provided that the contributors would be willing to see the texts excerpted from by the editors, as well as unpublished translations (with the originals) from poems originally written in French or any other language by Canadian writers."

Note. The nature of this issue and its contributions are such that not all of the articles follow the MLA format for notes and bibliography normally required by *Canadian Literature*. I.H.



Breath
(An Introduction to Du Fu)

Books should begin and end in pleasure.
The breath that was referred to as
war or loneliness, or poverty or loss,
could equally well be spoken of as friendship,
love, or wine. The range of meanings
is not important, so long as we can get together
every week or so,
make these small protests against our own characters
and, like teasing feathers from an ancient pillow,
find out what it is that might be in our minds. That way,
whatever is found is valuable.
Perhaps the centuries part, and feelings are transmitted—
even if, in the final analysis,
each poem is the product of endless
negotiations and compromise.
The syntax then takes on a formal quality,
though moderated, one hopes,
by a colloquial diction, an openness
to irony and humor, all of which
might break up the self-imposed
isolation of the poem.
That way, when the visitor comes to the small cottage
on the border of misanthropy and hyperbole,
we can open the door and say "C'mon in.
Let's have a few drinks together
and get quietly hammered."

Lianhua Xiang

Stop writing the guidebook.
Our ancestors reached here as well.
They tasted this wind, and they left us
this cache of old footsteps.

They left us these splinters and flakes
of ideas: the inedible bits of their thought
that fell where they sat, night after night
by the fire, to sharpen their questions.

This is no first ascent and no record-book summit.
They also were here, and they left us
their spent breath
and the touch of their hands on the stones.

They inhaled the same light with their own eyes
and exhaled their shadows the same.
So why didn't they stay if they came here?
And where are they now?

Every day is the first. Every day
is the second, the third and the last.
Every step is the center, the edge,
the beginning and end of the path.

Lisa Dickson

"Signals Across Boundaries"
Non-Congruence and Erin Mouré's *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*

You're not going to get it. I didn't. And I read the whole book. —RICHARD VAUGHAN

Coming near the end of his review of Erin Mouré's *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*, the above frank declaration is not Richard Vaughan's final pronouncement on the collection. Admitting he didn't "get it," Vaughan nevertheless goes on to conclude: "However, having read many poems, and entire books of poems, where I did indeed get it, and real quick too, I'll take Mouré's 'difficult' work over some yawn-inducing breakfast nook lyrics anytime. Poems are not crosswords (although they are sometimes Scrabble)" (118). The range of critical responses to Mouré's challenging work demonstrates a similar, though not often quite so sanguine, ambivalence. There are those who, like Lorraine York and Colin Morton, take up the challenge of Mouré's "difficult" works and shift their reading strategies to accommodate the demand the poems make on the reading subject, moving from crossword hermeneutics to participatory Scrabble. For York, Mouré's "[p]oetry is not the act of an author 'giving' messages to a passive reader; it is a passionate embrace, wherein the reader joins his/her lips to the poet's, connecting and giving life to the text" (135). Morton also turns to the reader for the completion of the poetic equation: "The onus rests with the reader to do the carrying, to interact with the text and become a poet in the act of reading" (39). But Morton's evaluation is a more qualified reaction to the "rigorous workout" (39) this act of readerly creation

entails. For him, the question is "not whether Erin Mouré will continue to develop, but how far her readers will be able to follow her. Already she has moved to the edge, where communication falters" (38).

Such an observation leans toward the more overtly anxious responses of writers such as Rhea Tregebov, who find in Mouré's complexity and structural experimentation a tendency to "create a disconcerting dizziness in readers: words insist on their wordiness and won't lie nicely on the page referring to outside reality, telling you things" (57). In its way, this discomfort with the lack of conventional lyric referentiality is the response Mouré's poetry ideally should elicit, if we subscribe to the poet's often stated suspicion of "meaning." For Mouré, "meaning," as an accessible commodity of poetry (a thematic "product" for consumption), is burdened by convention and habits of thought which act as a kind of anaesthesia, a seductive comfort that co-opts resistance. Resistant reading, she argues, entails a movement away from that which makes us feel a comfortable belonging:

> Yes, breaking those neural patterns hurts, it can be confusing—that god, 'meaning', crumbles and we say *meaningless, meaningless*—but this saying is just the dominant order crooning inside us, afraid its commodities will lose us, so it calls us back to it. It longs for us. We love it. ("Access" 10)

By this logic, Tregebov's reading performs precisely the kind of discomfort that enables resistance, and her lingering nostalgia for words that lie nicely on the page marks the crooning voice of the comfort, belonging and lyrical accessibility that Mouré argues are modes of hegemonic control.

This seductive comfort, in Mouré's political poetics, is the tyranny of "common sense," a notion closely linked in its hegemonic force to "grammaticality" as it is defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Like Mouré, Deleuze and Guattari share this conviction that accepted grammar is linked to the power of the dominant order:

> Forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws. No one is supposed to be ignorant of grammaticality; those who are belong in special institutions. The unity of language is fundamentally political. There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language that at times advances along a broad front, and at times swoops down on diverse centres simultaneously. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 101)

Deleuze and Guattari isolate a similar system of comfortable insider normalcy and outsider isolation and iconoclasm that Mouré identifies and

Tregebov reluctantly performs. To follow the rules is to be safely inside the hegemony of social laws; to break rules is to find oneself institutionalized (in asylums, hospitals, prisons and, of course, schools); it is to push to "the edge, where communication falters." For Dennis Denisoff, Mouré's difficult poetry and outsider status demonstrate "that the potentially alienating quality of discourse is a power that one can co-opt in a strategy of semi-liberation" (118). Such a strategy by no means makes anyone comfortable, and this productive discomfort is a significant aspect of a political poetics that takes as its space of performance the politics of meaning itself.

Mouré's poetics seeks to foment a crisis at the heart of authoritative discourse, to place both readers and writers at risk. When Tregebov asks, "Who can read Mouré and not feel stupid?" (60), she enacts this crisis, revealing an anxiety about the critic's own ability to speak authoritatively, to establish the necessary critical distance from which to view the works. Instead, the critic who is led to ask this question has become the object of the text's critical gaze. In this sense, the structural challenges represented by the poems in Mouré's last collection of new work, *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*, have a double valence, working to question, disrupt and destabilize the unity and authority, not only of the poetic utterance, but that of the critical act as well. This doubled focus is a central principle of Mouré's political poetics which insists on the complicity and responsibility of both readers and writers in the negotiations of power and authority that occur within language. To this end, Mouré posits the text as performance where the boundaries of the individual and of the poem become sites of relation, scenes of intersubjectivity that challenge the seductive comfort of "grammaticality."

At the same time, however, this sense of the "potentially alienating quality of discourse" in her work has exposed Mouré to charges of inaccessibility and intellectual elitism. Beyond the more cursory treatment of reviews, the critical climate surrounding Mouré's poetry is characterized by a paucity of extended or in-depth study, a strange circumstance given that her prolific poetic output enjoys almost continual publication in literary journals and has garnered the recognition of a Governor General's Award (for *Furious*, her fourth collection, 1988). Given this reticence on the part of critics, Mouré's own discussions of her texts occupy an important and conflicted position, for it is here that the theoretical framework of her poetics is made most explicitly available. The strategies to which Mouré has turned—interviews, essays, manifestos—in order to negotiate the twin challenges of

critical silence and accusations of inaccessibility raise the question of the role played by what I will call Mouré's exegetical persona and of her extra-poetic writing in the context of a poetics that places such emphasis on the destabilization of authority.

A recurrent theme in Mouré's extra-poetic writing, the commitment to dialogue and communication informs the poetry on multiple levels, and is implicated in her conceptualization of subjectivity and the nature of being in the world: "I think that it's important that my work exists in the community, but it's important that other people's does too, and that other people do things from their angles. No single writer's work can be read with no context, and it's these various angles that create a context. The play between them is more important than the things themselves" ("Acknowledging" 134). What we might call Mouré's poetics of discomfort performs as one of its grounding movements a critique of conventional notions of individuality, replacing them with a reformulated model of community based on intersubjectivity and what she has termed "non-congruity."

Intersubjectivity by definition imagines, not homogeneity or the erasure of boundaries between subjects, but rather a relation that reconfigures difference, much in the way that Mouré's notions of context and community depend on a diversity of angles of perception that work toward greater possibilities of understanding. For Mouré, to romanticize the "individual voice" is to assume a social structure which, like the politics of grammaticality, is based on a dichotomous relation between safe self and isolated, deviant other. The "individual" in this model is one who is guaranteed by her or his own sense of personal merit and whose comfort as an autonomous entity depends on a denial of the interimplication of privilege and oppression. In her critique of Lacan's mirror stage in her essay, "The Anti-Anæsthetic," Mouré identifies the entrance of a subject into the Law as an alignment with a whole series of exclusions, a reinscription of a normativity that, successfully negotiated, assuages anxiety and provides the comfort of belonging. This "anaesthesia," the drift toward the centre which makes us "forget, or repress, or define in terms acceptable to the order," creates in those who cannot "successfully" negotiate the demands of normativity—"(women, blacks, natives, lesbians, working class, combinations of these)"—an anxiety whose ravages are written on their bodies in a variety of ways, from alcoholism to small-pox ("Anti-Anæsthetic" 16). Such a relation of the individual to an abjected Other is conservative and seductively stable, for "[r]ousing

'individual' feelings plays with the dynamic of individual power/powerlessness—and channels energy so it is less disruptive to the Dominant Order" ("Access" 10). Even the "marginal" in this case rearticulates the norm from which it deviates, or, failing this kind of co-optation, is erased altogether by being defined as non-grammatical, or "meaningless." This conceptualization of difference, Mouré writes, is ultimately an apparatus of the status quo: "Thought, unwatched, tends to resolve itself in a binary way, a natural leaning toward decreasing anxiety in the organism. . . . What we call our 'difference' doesn't save us from this dynamic. . . . And falling into difference as mere opposition. It's the same thing. And one reinforces the other" ("Polis" 202-03).

To counter such recuperation, Mouré suggests an identity of community that is based on an understanding of difference, what Mouré calls "non-congruity," that does not resolve itself according to a logic of opposition. Social organization based on non-congruity effects a deconstruction of the opposition between same/different, emphasizing instead "[the] *sense of 'with'-ness, 'joint'-ness that conveys no hierarchy-of-terms.* Which is how our community as women can / must exist. As an 'among-many.' Not reproducing those hierarchies" ("Polis" 203). In this formulation, the self and the Other, the inside and the outside, may be conceived, not as opposites, but rather as interconstitutive terms in dynamic relation. Rehearsing and reworking the themes of "the body's"[1] relationship to memory and language, the poem sequences of *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love* explore this dynamic relation of terms, where such difference is constitutive of selfhood. While many of the sequences in the collection deal with these issues, I will focus on two illustrative examples, "Speed or, Absolute Structure," and the third section of "Everything," "3) The Cortex."

Central to Mouré's treatment of the Franklin expedition in "Speed, or Absolute Structure" (*Sheepish Beauty* 40-45) is this concept of non-congruity, for it is the ground of the subject and of agency. The 1845 Franklin expedition to the Arctic appears in this sequence of seven sections (and two supplements, "CODA: 'Meaning'" and "CODA: Robert O's Rules of Order") intertwined with images of a modern cholera epidemic in Peru. The two narratives are linked by an understanding of agency and identity as they manifest themselves at the limits of human endurance. Historically, after three years trapped in the Arctic ice, the remaining sailors of the expedition left their ship pulling small boats filled with a strange collection of

combs, slippers, writing desks, and other articles useless to arctic survival. One popular explanation for this irrational act is that the sailors contracted from the canned provisions lead poisoning which ultimately impaired their judgement. For Mouré, the Franklin expedition illustrates not only the relationship of a poisoned body to the mind, but the crisis of identity when that body is confronted with the absence of context. On the ice field, the European-based human identity becomes the only reference or point of scale: "'beset for three years' in ice / now heading across the ice away from *terror* / toward 'home'"(1, 16-18). Mouré constructs an image here in which "away from" and "toward" have in addition to their objective spatial meanings (the ship named *Terror*, and home on another continent), resonance as co-ordinates of the mind, vectors of fear and hope, memory and desire, "*terror*" and "home." This is an image of an identity constructing itself in the absence of a context readable according to established and familiar terms of reference.

It is this absence of context that Mouré posits as an explanation for the strange cargo the sailors carried during their attempted escape. The objects of the cargo come to be constitutive of identity as projections of the body, sites of difference through which the sailors create the boundaries necessary for the construction of context. In a footnote, Mouré quotes Israel Rosenfield's *The Invention of Memory* on the subject of difference: "How we perceive stimuli depends on how they are categorized, how they are organized in terms of other stimuli, not on their absolute structure"(5). Alone on the ice field, a space for which their culture has offered them no linguistic bearings, Franklin's men are confronted with their own absolute structure: "The dissolution of physical boundaries / creating unstable ground / by which we cannot 'recognize' the figure" (7, 1-3). Such a radical absence of recognizable context prevents the organization of stimuli and leads to a desperate attempt to preserve a dissolving identity. "[O]n unending ice where the body had exploded already / into its parts / combs etc" (5, 24-27), the apparent nonsense of the cargo becomes the new context for identity, "inner meaning jettisoned outside the body" (5, 18), where an Other is created which defines the boundaries of the self. This creation of the external allows the body to be constructed as origin retrospectively from the position of its "jettisoned" meaning (in this case, combs, toothbrushes and slippers). Identity, like language, is a product of the "signals across the boundaries" (Rosenfield qtd. in Mouré 5), a relation of differences where absolute structure,

such as an essential, individuated bodily experience, is a null space. The individual, in Mouré's paradigm, is an emptiness when devoid of some readable context, and it is the differential signals *across* the boundaries, not simply the boundaries themselves, that allow the self to cohere. Within the concept of non-congruence, the individual organism becomes a kind of civic space where one is both constructed *as* an individual and is able to connect through interdependence to the multiple selves of the community.

Meaning, in this poem, is dependent upon an Other, someone to read the hieroglyph of the body, something to form an outside of the self, and of the poem. The final section of the poem, "CODA: 'Meaning'," which is itself outside of the numbered sequence of the poem, turns to this space of inter-subjectivity in the image of the touch: "your hand on mine, pulling us upward" (3). This section begins to shift from the language of death and disease to a kind of ecstatic communication:

> O here too, the body
> exploding from its centre
> jettisoning its glow in uncontrollable
> motion, presses outward
> reverberates, testing (9-13)

Unlike the bodies exploding on the ice into shards of familiar objects, or the body consumed by dehydration due to cholera, this exploding body, this orgasmic "glow," is a consequence of touch, the pressure of another's hand. Here, this "signal across the boundary of the person / from me to you & back" (14-15) marks a potential escape for an individual turned into a radical absence by the lack of context; the "hieroglyph moving on the / sheet of ice, the head's contagion of fear" is, in this experience of self shared by another, no longer wandering a boundless space, but rather something knowable, something "traversable" (6-8).

Potential freedom in difference is not a stable or safe space free of discomfort, however. The vibrio of the earlier sections of the poem, the agent of disease, opens this coda—"vibrio, vibrato, vaginal" (2)—bringing together the two narrative lines. This final section, by introducing the vibrio, the bacteria carried from contaminated food to the hungry body, assures the reader that the communal space where subjects interact with each other and with the world that forms their context is never devoid of risk. It is a necessary state, however, for the risk inherent to this deconstructive bodily experience is nevertheless productive of memory, identity and agency:

Given a choice between food & boiled water
the hungry choose

to ingest the vibrio.

Choose to jettison
the self. Which is this:
to be present,

extant in the present tense,
to create that motion of the body
by which memory
is possible. (4-13)

"Choice" here, between starvation and dehydration, between "*terror*" and "home," is limited and dangerous, associated with disease and "madness." And yet it *is* choice, which even at its most limited and dangerous is an expression of self, something "extant in the present tense." The "meaningless" cargo conveyed at great risk by sailors who had reached the limit of endurance is a final act of speaking, a negotiation of selfhood.

"Speed, or Absolute Structure," then, explores the seam of contact between inside and outside, self and other, the dangerous terms constitutive of an individual identity relying for its very reification on their dynamic relation. "Everything" (*Sheepish Beauty* 30-32) also explores the intersubjective space where the body makes memory. Deploying a similar strategy of multiple narrative lines, this poem uses structural experimentation to increase the sense of dynamic interaction both on the level of thematic content and on that of form. This structural experimentation creates the need for the reader to enter actively into the poem's processes, to become, as Morton suggests, a poet in the creative act of reading. As conventions of scholarly dissection and explication break down in the face of the multiple possibilities of meaning, the poem provokes a crisis of critical methodology that makes visible both this active participation and the poem's resistance to exegetical desire.

"Everything" is a sequence of three poems tracing the processes of memory encoded as physical sensations, a catalogue of "Images collected in the transfer basin / of the cortex" ("2) & Saw" 29-30). The sequences are laid out in newspaper-like columns which we read from top to bottom, from left to right in the familiar way. When we reach "3) The Cortex," upon which I will focus here, we encounter something different. In order to discuss this structural shift, I provide the section in full here:

3) THE CORTEX

[1] The physical resemblance of her arm to
the rest of my body,
where it has touched, trembling or
so sure of itself.
[5] Herself.
Amid the grey hammers of a civil war.
The consequence of the touch is a
viscous fluid blooming pale white
in the centre,
[10] subtly accused of lack of originality

the work switches gears easily.
They can't otherwise imagine, & don't
of chaos thru the mind.
laughing.
[15] If the line works, life is beautiful,
having leaped over a great distance
in the present tense, but joy,
leaps up

fills

[20] To think as such, fills
with laughter, these spaces.
The middle is all, curious, folded over
& slid into the envelope,
laughing.
[25] I want to say "virile."
Even in middle age.
The dispersion of the languages until their
books exhibited such confusion they were
or verve. In spite of which,

[30] Torn birds are out eating the grass, after all.
believe in uncertainty, or the loops
But do you see it? What has the girl done, this
Always laughing.
she said, touching her arm
[35] knowing happiness is unattainable
she said, which is everything
unbidden, its centre palace . . .

"we," touches us

If we read this poem section in the familiar way, from the top to bottom, the syntax deteriorates, the sense breaks down and we become disoriented. The poem demands something else: a shift of reading strategies that will allow the reader to break the rules of reading, to violate the white space between the columns. At certain points in the poem the work "switches gears," flowing across the columns rather than up and down. The first possible switch follows the lefthand column down the page, beginning with "The consequence of the touch . . . " (7) and going on through to: "subtly accused of lack of originality / the work switches gears easily" (7-11). We then jump across the column to "Torn birds are out eating the grass, after all" (30) and read the rest of the poem from left to right as though the work were not divided into two columns at all. The second possible switch begins in the right-hand column: "The dispersion of the languages until their / books exhibited such confusion they were / subtly accused of lack of originality / or verve. In spite of which, / the work switches gears easily" (27-11). Another reading begins, like the first, in the lefthand column with "The consequence of touch . . ." (7), moving across the column at line 10 to line 29: "subtly accused of lack of originality / or verve. In spite of which, / the work switches gears easily" (7-11).

Several things will be apparent from this short inventory of possible readings, all of which follow our expectations of syntax and sentence structure. First is the difficulty of explaining the various trajectories using words and scholarly citation: readings one and three have cited the same line numbers, although they in fact follow different paths; reading two shows us that we are moving backward through the number sequence from 27 to 11, where in actuality, the lines move forward in the conventional way, in spite of what the cited line numbers suggest. I have tried several methods of assigning intelligible line numbers to the poem, and short of providing a new system for every reading, I have found none that will escape this apparent confusion. This situation leads me to admit that, either conventional linear citation (our habits of assigning position) simply do not work, or they work very well and describe exactly the convoluted, non-linear trajectories of the poem, trajectories that resist our attempts to extract segments from the whole for scholarly dissection. In describing the various movements of the sentences across the columns, I have attempted to map in words what I would rather point out with an index finger, following the movement of the eyes, tracing a path from line 27 to line 11 that goes forward, despite what the numbers appear to say. Thus, the physicality of the text continues to assert itself, and in so doing, reveals a gap between the scholarly discourse of interpretation (citation, extraction, quotation) and the matter and movement of the poem as a whole. Asserting itself as a complete, complex entity, the poem will not submit to dissection of a conventional kind.

In addition to challenging methods of citation, the multiple switching points of the poem create contradictory readings that do not resolve themselves. In the first reading, we are told that "subtly accused of lack of originality / the work switches gears easily" (10-11), which describes a kind of capitulation or retreat in the face of critique, an attempt to find a new path that would avoid such criticism. In the second reading, beginning in the righthand column, switching to line 10 and back to line 29, we get: "their / books exhibited such confusion they were / subtly accused of lack of originality / or verve. In spite of which, / the work switches gears easily" (27-11). This reading works against the first by asserting a kind of defiance, stating that the work will do as it likes in spite of critique or convention. Even in their apparent divergence, the two readings do converge at the point of self-reflexivity, as the poem performs structurally its content.

These not-quite-parallel readings mark a moment where multiple trajectories of meaning, in their apparent *divergence*, enable a *convergence* on

another level. This convergence takes place *between* the two or more parts that comprise it; in this sense, the poem functions like what Deleuze and Guattari have called a rhizome, a structure which they oppose to the hierarchical, teleological model of the tree:

> The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and . . . and . . . and. . . ." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? . . . These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, imitatory, symbolic . . .). (*Thousand Plateaus* 25)

The rhizome, like the blade of grass, grows from no centre, is not teleological, but instead negotiates its way between things, connecting and interconnecting at any point, an intersubjective interaction between forces. The tree, by contrast, is centralized, is an organizing principle based on hierarchy, *telos*, and the stability of the verb "to be." Seeking to escape conventional vertical logic of superior and inferior, higher and lower, insider and outsider, the rhizome as a model for thought is excessive, its continual sprouting and a-rational connectivity asserting a sort of movement, relationality. The "and . . . and . . . and . . ." posits a structure where the "successful" subject is not defined by a submission to grammaticality, or, conversely, the "deviant" subject as the negative and illegitimate term of exclusionary norms Mouré associates with the Law. With its emphasis on between-ness, the language of the rhizome resonates in Mouré's articulation of a poetics of the preposition in "The Acts," where the preposition—"*On across under toward* us" (*Furious* 95)—emphasizes relation that escapes conventional notions that privilege the thing over its motion. Also a kind of "and . . . and . . . and" that supplements the poems of *Furious*, "The Acts" which form the final section of the collection correspond to and comment upon its poems. In "The Act" that coincides with the poem "Three Signs," Mouré could be speaking also of "Everything" when she suggests a reading strategy that can accommodate trajectories of meaning that pass between the syntactical parallels of the poem. Such a reading involves a "leap" out of the poem: "I want those kinds of transitions wherein there's a kind of leap that's *parallel* to the rest of the poem. Where the parts are seemingly unrelated but can't exist without each other" (*Furious* 93). This is not a dialectic of thesis and antithesis, with a consequent synthesis forming a newly completed ground

for further dialectic, but a co-constitutive relation, a "line of flight" (Deleuze, *Dialogues* 10), the rhizomal structure that is a multiplicity:

> In a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what there is 'between', the between, a set of relations which are not separable from each other. Every multiplicity grows from the middle, like the blade of grass or the rhizome. . . . A line does not go from one point to another, but passes between the points ceaselessly bifurcating and diverging. . . . (Deleuze *Dialogues* viii)

"Everything 3) The Cortex" follows just such a rhizomal structure. In the bottom half of the poem segment, we can read the columns either up and down or across, each option providing us with multiple interpretive trajectories. We may read, "If the line works, life is beautiful, / having leaped over a great distance / in the present tense . . ." (15-17). This first reading speaks of language's ability to create a space of hope, the "if" suggesting possibility. Leaping "over a great distance / in the present tense," language pulls together in the "transfer basin of the cortex" experiences disparate in time. Language, with its ability to bring the past—the "loops / of chaos through the mind" (31-13)—and future—"if"—together in the present of the act of speaking, collapses space and time in the relational act of organizing experience in the telling of a memory. Like language, the bodily act of memory itself collapses these distances in the sedimented layers of the mind. In the first two sections of the poem, the repeated experience of sun on the skin of the arms triggers a past experience:

> Her arms ached the same way.
> They came up with languages
> of a hitherto unknown disparity.
> She was not inside the restaurant,
> but sleeveless in the particles of light.
> Declension.
> The past participle let
> go. ("2) & Saw" 16-23)

Although she is not experiencing the restaurant in the present, but rather as a memory, the physical sensation of her arms aching in the sunlight, collapses the distance between past and present. In this sense, the body, like language itself, is a time-traveller.

The word, "declension," occupies an in-between space that is key to the interaction of trajectories of meaning in "3) The Cortex." Declension denotes both grammatical inflection and, at its root, turning aside, a slope

or slide. In its etymological sense it suggests a swerve from the main, a slide from level ground. In its grammatical sense it links this swerve to an implied multiplicity of cases, gender and numbers. Declension is a noun, a thing, that also captures motion; even as a principle of grammar it enacts a cascade of possibility that is both static and dynamic. The second possible trajectory of "3) The Cortex," like the first, captures this motion, this possibility: "If the line works life is beautiful / she said, touching her arm / having leaped over a great distance / knowing happiness is unattainable / in the present tense, but joy / she said, which is everything / leaps up" (15-[34-36]-18). This reading further develops the relation of the body, the touch of an arm. The intersubjective nature of this touch is signalled by the confusion, in the pronoun "she," of the identity of the person touching and the person touched. It is even possible that, in this touch between two women, each woman also touches her own arm, her own self. The "great distance" covered is an interpersonal space that cannot be closed, we are told, "in the present tense," for love between women is one of those terms rendered at best ungrammatical and at worst invisible in the dominant heterosexist economy. Yet this touch does leap this space, or at the very least opens the possibility in the word "if." The first sequence of lines speaks of language, the second of a relation of bodies. Between them, however, is a rhizomal structure; the line passing between the body's memory and the always present-ness of language is that of desire. Just as the switching of gears in the top half of the poem speaks of the poem's own attempt to break away from conventional expectations of language and poetic structure, these a-parallel readings speak of the potential for lines such as the ones here to open language to another way of being. Between parallel readings is a sustained idea of a language that will make *visible* the excluded term of love between women in the intersubjective touch that allows a woman also to touch herself. This embodied language is both within and outside the poem: in the body and in the words; both a grammatical inflection and a turning aside; exploiting grammaticality (the syntactical flow of language) and at the same time excessive of it (two different paths of sense); bound by the present tense and yet able to collapse memory and desire into the space of the poetic utterance.

The normally elided term of lesbian love reveals itself to be folded into language, visible in the spaces opened by structural experimentation. To read this immanent excess, we must break conventional reading patterns,

negotiating between sentences that flow down and jump across the columns. In its breaking of the rules of strictly linear interpretation, the poem makes this excess explicit, relocating and in effect reopening closure in such a way as to suggest that resolution is temporary and transitional, in a constant state of declension. If we follow the syntactic instructions of the poem and choose one of the possible routes to the switching point and then continue to read to the bottom of the page, the upper section of the right hand column (20-26) is left out, unless we go back and read it later. If we do go back, the poem appears to end at "Even in middle age" (26), in the *middle* of the column. The grammatical instructions we are given cause us to circumnavigate this section, which is held in reserve like the answer to a riddle. Like a joke. This space, however, gives no answer but its own excess, its laughter:

> To think as such, fills
> with laughter, these spaces.
> The middle is all, curious, folded over
> & slid into the envelope,
> laughing. (20-26)

The lines are slid into the poem which continues to fold back and into itself. Even if we do not read the lines they continue to disrupt by being something that the poem leads us away from, leaving a spatial echo of excess and supplementarity. The only way to read these lines, not as an afterthought by going back from where we have been led, is to misread the poem, to read the columns from top to bottom in spite of the fact that sense and sentence structure fall apart. Either way, the joke is on us. Like the intersubjective touch between women, with its confusion of pronoun reference and its games with sentence structure, these lines are both in the poem and curiously outside of it, both grammatical and turned aside, laughing.

All of the possible readings, switchings and structural foldings of the poem exist in a state of simultaneous relation that places a good deal of pressure on the reader's habits of making meaning. In this way, the multiple possibilities of "Everything 3) The Cortex" engage the reader in the interrogation, not only of the meaning of the poem, but of the nature of the act of making meaning. The meaning of the poem cannot be reduced to any one of the multiple possibilities suggested by the structure of the poem, but is an effect of their relation. As my discussion of the resistance of the poem to scholarly citation demonstrates, Mouré's structural manipulations draw the critic into the text in such a way as to open critical methodologies to question.

This reflexivity is also a means of making visible the processes of interpretation, the implication in the text of the reader who cannot stand beyond the boundary of the poem and "listen" to the authoritative voice of some unified humanist subject. In this the experience of the poem is no different than any other reading experience; the difference lies in the level of discomfort this relationship provokes, which in turn brings the creative (some could say, violent) act of reading to the fore. Anxiety increases as the reader attempts to bring lyric conventions and rules of grammaticality to bear on the simultaneity of a rhizomatic structure, but as the syntax of the poem collapses, derailing our habits of reading, it leads us into multiplicity and possibility. The alternative logic this discomfort enables is manifested in the awkwardness and difficulty arising from the deployment of conventional critical strategies, even seemingly innocuous ones such as the assignment of line numbers.

The awkwardness and discomfort that open the way to multiplicity are constructed in these poems as the risks inherent to anti-anaesthetic and its logic of dangerous interaction of difference, signals across the boundaries. Manifested in structural experimentation that attempts to break habits of reading, the principle of dynamic interaction works toward the articulation of a bodily experience of difference that is not based on a hierarchy of terms ranged in exclusive dichotomies of insider comfort and outsider abjection, distress and invisibility. With its own principles of interconnectivity, non-teleological growth and in-between-ness, the Deleuzian rhizome offers a model for this alternative logic, and, paradoxically enough, provides a unifying structural principle to help to organize a critical discussion of the poetry's resistance to conventional principles of organization. It seems that the desire for exegetical authority and comfort dies hard. It is this paradox that brings us in an elliptical way back to Rhea Tregebov's longing for words that lie nicely on the page, telling us things, and, through this longing, to the question of accessibility.

In her article, "Corrections and Re/Visions: Mouré's *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*," Tregebov points to what she sees as Mouré's complicity with the forces she seeks to subvert: "[T]o the degree to which Mouré shelters within the walls of theory, rather than making it the internal bone structure of her writing, she is supporting her innate smartness with a theoretical underpinning that has all sorts of powerful structures (i.e., the Academy) valorizing, honouring and codifying it" (60). At its heart, this is a question

of accessibility. If she does indeed "shelter" within the walls of theory, does Mouré in fact perpetuate the very forms of privileged specialized knowledge she seeks to challenge? Does her poetry exclude many, when exclusion is, for her, dehumanizing? This is an uneasiness which Mouré has herself expressed. For her, the responsible poet is always at risk, must always negotiate the danger of becoming what she opposes, and so must lay bare the inner workings of poetic construction. Mouré turns Tregebov's metaphor of the skeleton inside out, claiming that "consciously creating a space where the seams are not invisible" is necessary to the poetic act for, she continues, "Without this kind of effort, we will perpetrate a reading surface and status quo of social structure that excludes many. And when even one person is excluded, we reduce our own humanity" ("Access" 10). For Tregebov, this emphasis on inclusion presents the readers of Mouré's work with a contradiction. The level of difficulty of many of these works seemingly identifies Mouré's audience as a small one, one that is familiar with the linguistic theory and the philosophical and political debates that form the works' contexts. As Vaughan has so piquantly put it, "without a copy of Atomic Particle Physics 101, constant weader might gwet wossed" (117).

Rather than defend her work against accusations of inaccessibility, Mouré responds with a critique of the concept of accessibility itself. "Literal meanings of the 'accessible' just place women and working-class people, as the lowest common denominator in the reproduction of the social order" ("Polis" 206), she asserts. Poetry which, on the level of content, actively criticizes the social order has its place, but for Mouré, the site of contestation is not simply content but form: "The 'accessible' contains patterns of thought/speech that are socially ingrained. . . . It makes us feel intact as individuals . . . we feel comfortable reading it. The 'content' may disturb us, but the reading *surface* sends us sub-textual messages that *everything is fine*" ("Access" 9). As I have attempted to demonstrate through my discussion of Mouré's "difficult," a-grammatical work, the discomfort arising from structures that resist our attempts to read them is an integral aspect of her political poetics which attempts at every turn to make a reader feel, if not disconcerting dizziness, at least that everything is *not* fine. Mouré does not speak for the elided terms of the social world, the working classes, people of colour, combinations of these; her strategy of inquiry aims rather at a sustained critique of the ways meanings are made that code these other voices as invisible.

Mouré occupies a precarious position with regard to her readership. If she does move to the edge where communication falters, how are we, to take up Colin Morton's question, to follow her into a radical rethinking of, not only the roles of reader and author in the making of meaning, but of the nature of that act itself? Further, how are we as critics to re-evaluate our own desire for exegesis, our desire to make sense of the poetry, whether from within her proposed framework (its own brand of grammaticality) or from another? No matter how much the internal structure of a text like "Everything" insists on the visibility of the reader in dialogue with the text, there is still the nagging awareness of Mouré-the-poet; in a collection bound by the authorial signature, the image, no matter how spectral, of a controlling consciousness is difficult to exorcise, especially in the context of a discussion of a political poetics. With an awareness of this precarious relationship between text and critique, Mouré comments, "People who are making sense are just making me laugh, is all," and, "I want to write these things . . . that can't be torn apart by anybody, anywhere, or in the university. I want the overall sound to be one of making sense, but I don't want the inside of the poem to make sense of anything" (*Furious* 92). An interpretive act that seeks to follow Mouré's instructions must, therefore, approach the notion of and desire for meaning with full awareness of their potential for the artificial closure of the poetic project itself. From this point of view, there is no position the critic can occupy that is not implicated in the critique of the violence of language that permeates Mouré's poetic utterance. The critical act as self-reflexive interrogation of critical orthodoxy and of established modes of reading becomes the "matter" of the poems, as Colin Morton observes: "In the process the poems' 'subject' becomes not so much the 'meaning' to be derived but the act, the reader's act of making those links" (39). From the perspective of this paradigm of reading predicated on readerly discomfort and indeterminacy, the poems, as I have been attempting to demonstrate, *make sense*. And thus we arrive at our paradox and the problematics of Mouré's exegetical persona.

My own work is illustrative of this problematics. Early drafts of this article were characterized, as I was told by my readers, by a tendency to take Mouré at her word, to establish her as the authoritative critic of her work, when the explicit project of both her theoretical writing and my own critique of her poetry was to discuss how the poetry itself works to challenge such authority.[2] In working through the implications of these comments, I

have come full circle to the question of accessibility in the context of Mouré's critique of authority and the related issue of the unified speaking subject. How, I must ask myself, can I argue that Mouré's political poetics subvert authority if Mouré's extra-poetic texts stand within my own critical practice as centre, origin, Word? In light of what Tregebov describes as "[t]he dearth of any real critical evaluation" (54) of the poetry, Mouré's theoretical writings fill a vacuum; what she says works, it fits, it lets us in. The implications of this kind of "access" are worth some discussion.

The very difficulty (and, one could say, obscurity) of Mouré's texts generate both productive anxiety (signalled by Tregebov's nostalgic longing for "voice"—"a self of some sort!" [58])—and the critical embracing of a paradigm which, while it enables a radical reclaiming of non-sense, also lays out a structure by which all of this indeterminacy and anxiety make sense. It is through this paradigm that the poems, in Tregebov's words, "allow [us] entrance" (55), and the "voice" that Tregebov invokes, if she does not find it in the poems, is readily supplied extra-textually in Mouré's own critical/theoretical writings and interviews. Providing a kind of theoretical rosetta stone for the complex maneuvers of the poetry, these writings and interviews bear the burden of our desire for meaning, our "natural leaning toward decreasing anxiety," and it is because of this function that I have come to refer to them as an experience of Mouré's exegetical persona. I use persona here precisely because it stands between text and author, because it both presumes a speaking subject and defers it, for this is a role played by Mouré's own theoretical and critical writing.

This exegetical persona is a positive relief for a critic confronting something like "Everything," or "Speed or, Absolute Structure," poems that do their best to escape the notion of a unified intention. Even to speak of the "speaker" seems absurd in a poem like "Everything," where the multiple readings insist on a simultaneity that thwarts the linear performance of a reading in a single voice. A most rhizomatic structure, this poem and many others in the collection can, in Morton's words, "leave you breathless, head reeling" (39). It is a mercy to read that the inner workings of the poems are not of themselves supposed to *make sense.* We know this because we have been told as much in the conversational, question-and-response, accessible format of the articles and interviews that comprise so much of the critical repertoire surrounding Mouré's work.

While Mouré has written several articles dealing specifically with her

political stance with regard to language,[3] the interview, a form which comes closest to the type of interaction that she appears to advocate, provides an apt illustration of the problematics of Mouré's exegetical persona. It is perhaps Mouré's belief in and commitment to her conception of community that accounts for the preponderance of interviews in the critical repertoire.[4] The interview, however, is itself a difficult and potentially contradictory form. On the one hand, it places the poet into this space of dialogue, into conversation where the poet as speaker becomes one voice in a fluctuating field of negotiation. Mouré herself asserts this in an interview with Nathalie Cooke in an *Arc* special issue significantly entitled, "Who's Afraid of Erin Mouré?":

> Yeah. . . . I just like to participate in the interview as an equal, and not have to defend what I'm doing—like if you want to attack me, I'm not interested, sort of thing. I'd rather have room to talk, and you talk, and then the readers, hopefully, can listen in on an interesting conversation, and they can draw their own conclusions. Like, they can like what I'm saying, or not like it, or disagree with me, or whatever, you know? (52)

The colloquial tone of this interview—its "like"s, "you know"s and "whatever"s—reinforces the sense of this exchange as a dialogue we as readers overhear, and minimizes the sense of editorial intervention or textual mediation. On the other hand, the interview as a form also reproduces the very structures of unified subjectivity and authority that the content of Mouré's statements in this context seeks to subvert. In the same interview, Mouré recognizes this danger: "Yeah. So I end up explaining feminism, explaining things, or explaining that you shouldn't be afraid of theory or explaining that it didn't matter if it was a bit hard to read; even poetry that's easy to read doesn't exactly, like, sell like hotcakes . . ." (52). Here, in the one-to-one (to one) relationship of subject and interviewer (and reader) we arrive at a relaxation of anxiety through casual, low-key exegesis. Here, (finally, we think) we will get the straight goods in plain talk from the horse's mouth, the key, the paradigm that will allow us entrance, that will make the poetry make sense. This exegetical voice appears in my work and in that of other critics who have attempted seriously to engage with Mouré's difficult texts. In Dennis Denisoff's reading of "Corrections to the Saints: Transubstantial," for example, the tendency to "hear" Mouré's exegetical voice, the voice of authorial intention, manifests itself in introductions to quotations of the poetry such as "Mouré states . . . . She goes on to state . . ." (117). The word, "state," implies a kind of transparency of poetic language

that I believe Mouré would contest, and yet, given the fact that the most sophisticated discussions of what the poems are supposed to *do* are performed by Mouré herself, this lingering sense of transparency is difficult to escape. I would not go so far as to agree with Tregebov that most of the critical repertoire tends "merely to genuflect to Mouré's obvious talent, avoiding both careful reading and any genuine critical evaluation" (54). I will say, though, that the difficulty of the poetry, combined with our "natural leaning toward decreasing anxiety," places Mouré's own self-reflexivity in jeopardy of reinscription as authority, origin, Word.

This is not, as it might appear, an invalidation of Mouré's political and poetic project, for, in a very real way, it is a performance of it. My own text performs the struggle with authority, with the drift to the centre, with the seduction of sense, with the desire to make meaning even if that meaning is "only" the political and strategic efficacy of resisting the making of meaning itself. Mouré's own project performs a similar slippage and desire: the attempt to move away from monologia, from statement to conversation, from self-containment to context; all of this desire is haunted by the authorial signature that binds a written text and an extra-poetic persona always in danger of becoming an authority.

Nor will I suggest that Mouré's extra-poetic persona should be bracketed off from readings of the poetry in order to avoid the dangers of intentional fallacy. Such a bracketing is contrary to the poetry itself, which persistently confronts intention in order to problematize the notions of both stable intention and formal self-containment. All of the poems that appear in the collection either explicitly or implicitly designated as "Corrections," reworkings, and problematizations point to and draw in that extra-poetic persona in order to open it to interrogation. While I resist the temptation to resolve the tensions of the problematic relationship of intention to text, I would like to suggest a shift of perspective. It would be a question of asking, not, "What does Mouré's exegetical persona reveal about what these 'difficult' poems *really mean*?" but rather, "How does the poetry work to undermine the gestures of critical orthodoxy (the *structure* of criticism along with its content), *not excluding those of Mouré herself*?" The emphasis would in this case shift from how well or how poorly the poetry reproduces Mouré's poetic or political mandate to an exploration of the ways that the poetry contests its boundaries, rewrites and re-enacts the very crisis in which that mandate is implicated. Such a shift moves from boundaries to the signals

across boundaries, opens up a line of flight between reader, poet, critic, and text. However problematic it may be, it is necessary to keep this exegetical persona visible; the emphasis on responsibility in this poetics demands that intent be allowed neither to dissolve into a background of unlocalized and abstract post-structural dead authors, nor to assert itself in the poem as a monological proclaimer of a unified "vision." A poetics of discomfort must make the poet herself the most uncomfortable of readers.

If Mouré does shelter within the valorizing walls of theory, which means at present within the academy (although she is not a "member" of it), she also attempts to challenge the existence of those walls, to deconstruct the ground she stands on. Yet the danger of co-optation is always present, as Bronwen Wallace writes in a letter to Mouré: "Let's not kid ourselves. Language-centred writing can be just as easily co-opted as any other kind.... We can all be 'used by convention'. They've got the guns. We have the numbers, but we're not angels yet" (in Mouré, *Two Women Talking* 23).[5] Throughout her work, Erin Mouré uses language to interrogate language's oppressive modalities, exploiting grammaticality in order to posit an alternative logic of representation. Part of a strategy of resistance to the crooning of the dominant order—and our desire for it, which necessarily implicates us in its perpetuation—this interrogation seeks to alter the trajectory of language that devalues and silences the voices and experiences of those deemed "marginal" and "other"; it is a poetics that applies force to resist inertia, for "to move the force in any language, create a slippage, *even for a moment*" (*Furious* 98) is to enable a discomfort that works against anaesthesia.

NOTES

1 The tendency to think in terms of "the body," rather than of "bodies," in the theories of psychology and phenomenology that subtend Mouré's work raises the question of an essentializing discourse that would seem to efface the kind of difference important to Mouré's politics. This issue merits a more extensive analysis of the role of bodily experience in Mouré's work than I have space to perform here. I will enclose this term in quotation marks in order to signal that any invocation of such a body is both provisional and open to debate.

2 I am aware that it is unconventional to refer directly to anonymous readers or to early drafts of a critical response. However, given the nature of my discussion and its emphasis on dialogue, process and critical self-reflexivity, I feel that it is necessary to acknowledge and address what has become a significant contribution to my thinking with regard to both Mouré's poetic and my own critical adgenda.

3 See for example, *Two Women Talking* (with Bronwen Wallace), "Poetry, Memory and the

Polis," "Examining the Call for Accessibility," "To Speak These Things: A Letter."

4 See, for example, her talks with Robert Billings, Peter O'Brien, Dennis Denisoff, Nathalie Cooke, and Janice Williamson.

5 Government funding of the arts is an excellent example of this conundrum. All of Mouré's collections have been published with financial aid from the Canada Council. In fact, of the collections of poetry and literary journals in my personal library, all but one, *Carousel*, produced at the University of Guelph, receive government assistance. Is this co-option or an excellent example of the power producing its own sites of resistance?

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Natalee Caple

Filial Knowledge

As if in coming to understand something you believe that thing to be infected with your knowledge of it and its usefulness to you begins to appear structural so that, inevitably, you begin to assume that the thing you understand must have been created by you and is, therefore, your property.

The night sky to astronomers and your body to every doctor on the planet.

Purchase through comprehension and the destruction of meaning by desire.

And the deflection of guilt nothing more than an endless conversation between two mirrors in a sunlit room.

Keith Harrison

Notes on "Notes From Furry Creek"

We probably need the discovery of one more critical theory less than the finding of yet another insect species. But none of the essays in *PMLA*, with their comforting sense of mastery, give the at-risk excitement of critical openness, the reader's experience of trying to sort out what's going on *as* it's going on. The highly finished essay of literary scholarship doesn't feel like an *essai*, a "try," or "test," or "trial." The admirable "close readings" of New Criticism, for example, presuppose all ambiguities will resolve themselves into a complexly articulate organic unity. Structuralist approaches either ignore individual texts or box them into binary patterns. Critical "interventionists," by definition, whether Marxist, Freudian, Feminist, or post-Colonial, troop in with *a priori* flags to impose closure, descrying and denying the possibility of critical openness. Deconstructionists do not venture into a field of words without clutching a decentering implement which will uproot the entire crop, and leave behind a predictable un-meaning. Even with Iser, Fish, and most reader-response theorists, critical perceptions and emotions feel safely integrated into an undigressive pattern, as if everything is recollected (and revised) in tranquillity. And what that calm, reflective state of second thoughts and delayed perspectives loses *is* the process of intense shocks that makes up aesthetic experience. What criticism needs, then, is a way to get closer to the pleasurable (sometimes scary and bewildering) rush of responsiveness itself, the pulsing of intellectual encounter, raw sensory data, and the suspense inside the reader's breathing about where a text might end up. As a way of setting

down this kinetic aliveness, I propose what might be called "field notes." These critical notes would have parallels to projective verse: the critic "puts himself [or herself] in the open—he [or she] can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself," and "the shaping takes place ... each moment of its going" (Olson, *Human Universe* 52, 55) .

Maybe like a geologist, the critic takes a hammer to a chosen rock from a specific stratum exposed by design or accident at a particular site, cleaves it open, hoping to find a fossil—a form that has persisted as a bodied image—and in a small notebook makes quick notations about location, and shapes and colours, sets down guesses that might later be theorized, and—even as rain-water is washing the dirt off the writing hand to mix with the fluid ink—the mind (unsure of final worth) speculates about the possible mineral mix before back-packing out the heavy sample for assaying and carbon-dating. Before the notes are cleaned up, expanded, and organized, before the fragmentary hides itself in shapely paragraphs, before obscurities are obscured, before ideological purity edits out stray thoughts, before the provisional becomes permanent, there might be what Charles Olson calls "the PLAY of a mind":

> It is true, what the master says he picked up from Confusion: all the thots men are capable of can be entered on the back of a postage stamp. So, is it not the PLAY of a mind we are after, is not that that shows whether a mind is there at all? (55)

Perhaps the critic, like the writer of projective verse, should forget the design-governing strategy of the thesis statement, and "... get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen" (Olson 53). The critic might be a semi-skilled typist noting responses to the text as quickly as they occur, perception by perception, remembering like the Beat writers to use "... the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" (53). Would such readings be sloppy, partial, incommunicable, self-indulgent? As a novelist, I don't like critics using literary texts to build bonfires to their interpretive vanity, but I am interested in watching those moments of aesthetic response when damp kindling flares to brightness.

I hope the effect of a "field notes" criticism might be like reading scribbled margin notes, the underlinings and hand-drawn stars, the running arguments in library books (or on washroom walls, or on the net, or in vibrant class discussion). Although at times rude, crude, and indecipherable,

such shared commentary can offer immediacy, pointedness, and the emotional engagement lacking in the attenuated, yet bulky conventions of scholarship that claim intertextuality. If notes replaced essays, we might get nearer to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical, and critics might develop a jazz-like alertness to the spontaneous reactive moments of other critics. Such a group of readers might become like responsive soloists, taking turns, using the different *timbres* of their instruments to play out and improvise together on the underlying "melody" of a single text.

The following poem by Pat Lowther invites a response of kinetic openness through its title:

Notes From Furry Creek

I

The water reflecting cedars
all the way up
deep sonorous green—
nothing prepares you
for the ruler-straight
log fallen across
and the perfect
water fall it makes
and the pool behind it
novocaine-cold
and the huckleberries
hanging
like fat red lanterns

II

The dam, built
by coolies, has outlived
its time; its wall
stained sallow
as ancient skin
dries in the sun

The spillway still
splashes bright spray
on the lion
shapes of rock
far down below

The dam foot
is a pit

for the royal animals
quiet and dangerous
in the stare
of sun and water

III

When the stones swallowed me
I could not surface
but squatted
in foaming water
all one curve
motionless,
glowing like agate.

I understood the secret
of a monkey-puzzle tree
by knowing its opposite:

the smooth and the smooth
and the smooth takes,
seduces your eyes
to smaller and smaller
ellipses;
reaching the centre
you become
stone, the perpetual
lavèd god.

Title:

- notes are parts of songs too. cf. her music poem, "In The Silence Between": "It is as if huge / migrations take place / between the steps / of music / like round / stones in water: / what flows between is / motion so constant / it seems still"
- notes fragments of whole but plural, multiple (vague index to three parts of poem's structure), bits of knowledge, role of observer as learner—perception preceding/proceeding without hypothesis
- Since Keats's odes, title prepositions crucial to tell how emotions fit with objects in space: "*to* a nightingale," Romantic address, cry for communion, lyric apostrophe of transcendence and ironic gap vs. "*on* a Grecian Urn," reflection upon, meditation about. For Lowther, "*From*." What can be taken away, as well as derived, and also maybe (a sense of failure?) at a distance, an artistic remove from source

- a name, creek—north of Vancouver, with "Furry," soft and warm, colliding with expectations of mountain coldness. Animal presence implied, threat of bears, fury? Or something undrinkable. [But my neighbour on Hornby Island, Marilyn Mullan, who's just retired as head of the mining museum at Britannia Beach (a couple of miles further north) says Oliver Furry was a trapper, grub-staked by furriers in Vancouver hoping to find gold; he followed Dr. Forbes (a medical doctor who did prospecting on the side) and staked claims and worked for gold at Britannia in 1890's, until a syndicate was formed out of early claim-holders to raise capital to mine. (Involved Moodie, railway figure and son of literary Susanna. His daughter interviewed as an old woman > never allowed to play with other kids: snobbery across the generations.) New York interests bought out first syndicate at Britannia Beach, and developed a mine that produced a little gold and a huge amount of copper.]

Section I

- "The water reflecting cedars"—precise present participle observation, mirror theme (see her "I.D." & "Reflecting sunglasses") merging of land and water (with air in reach of trees into sky) an echoing fullness, unity of nature & world—cedar the emblem of West Coast; native arts of making: canoe, poles, lodge, basketry
- "all the way up"—perfectly, heaven implicit [conventions of no caps at start of lines (except for beginning of sentence that becomes note #1) and no line-stop punct. until last section]
- "deep sonorous green—": back to musicality, double harmony metaphor through interfusion of sight and sound, the synaesthesia of "deep" as both bass note and intensifier of colour of life; experience of senses felt and anatomized at once, "reflected" upon, while the dash typographically updates the "O" of Romantic identification, or alerts us to a haiku-like shift
- "nothing prepares you" > anxiety, fear of future, a foreboding, acknowl. of inability to cope, startled as the line floats off into blankness, or future words. [With this phrase, hard not to remember that her husband threw her murdered body into Furry Creek] ["What came to me was Furry Creek. Now I've loved it all my life. I know it like the back of my hand. My father worked there 25 years. I was raised in Britannia Beach a short distance away, and my wife and I spent some of our honeymoon there..." Roy Lowther, *Appeal Book* 353]

- "the ruler-straight" order of geometric line and human measurement vs. the drooping, tapering sprays of fan-like cedar branches. Comments on the opening image/sound; "log fallen across" > noun comes after the line break, the thing that falls into reader's line of sight after delay, but this line ends with a prep. leading to expectation of more: "across" what? Never given because another perception is recorded instead in rush and discontinuity of note-taking
- Though "fallen" and "log" signify mortality, an image of a bridge here & the next line, "and the perfect," counterpoints with sense of awe, so neg. and pos. alternate, form emotional rhythm that gives context to "water fall it makes," where separation of morphemes restores the separateness of thing and act, so "makes" becomes a creative shaping, the Maker, the immanent God of "Tintern Abbey" (Wye=Furry), as inspiration for the poet as "maker" (cf. her "Inheritance": "a long life of making")
- "and the pool behind it" through parallelism implied as perfect too; "pool" felt as a *verbal*, an action as much as a thing, because of prior separation of "water fall"?
- "novocaine-cold" sense of touch, unfeeling feel, implies swimming/bathing/immersion, and dental assoc. paradox: painful needle to kill pain
- "and the huckleberries" taste sensation, assoc. with escape from civiliz. fraud, "Lighting out for the territories" of Huck converges with escapism of Romantics, breathless quality of repeated coordinate conjunction > a naïve syntax of child-like innocence, a pure responsiveness to sensations, ordering newness
- "hanging" ominous, anticipative, like reader before concluding line, suspended between sky and water—observer, as in opening lines; "like fat red lanterns" illumination, "fat" a neg. word given sense of abundance; delicious, ample light, enough to navigate by, festive welcome
- no period at end because no terminating stoppage; process of green nature sonorous, sounding on. [cf. Pat Lowther's mother's remark: "She seemed to grow by herself. She was no trouble. She just grew." (back cover of *Final Instructions*)] In last word, upbeat ending of brightness linked to human design, "lantern" as human object, along with "ruler" and "novocaine," offer tropes of measure, curing of pain, restorative light: edenic

Section II

- "The dam, built"—opp. the one made by fallen log, the pause of comma to split product and process; obstruction of Nature's flow def. of human

creation? ["I was headed for South Valley dam. There was a dam on Furry Creek. It's called Furry Creek dam. We call it South Valley Dam. My father looked after it for 25 years." Roy Lowther 359]

- "by coolies, has outlived" the shock of lang., the casual racism, oppression, esp. in natural setting, post-edenic consciousness now, made *concrete* in origins of dam, the colonial history of West Coast North America, the exploitation of Chinese, but inanimate has "outlived" the builders, a kind of monument to human effort; the what delayed: "its time; its wall" its limits of usefulness, wall of prejudice & also metaphor of time as confinement & evoking China civilizing achiev. of Great Wall against "stained sallow"—almost pathetic fallacy where object takes on "colouration," pale yellow of workers, and moral "stain" of "whites" > the BC female writer's fascination with cultural otherness of Chinese: Pat Lowther's poem, "The Chinese Greengrocers" [now in *Time Capsule*], bits of Emily Carr's autobiography, Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel*, Daphne Marlatt's long poem, *Steveston*, Marilyn Bowering's novel, *To All Appearances a Lady*: a book to be written about representing gender through ethnicity?
- "as ancient skin"—personified as if the thing had become its builders; as if technology had been returned to origin in human bodies; "dries in the sun" to become opp. of creek
- Stanza break, new sent. & "The 'spillway still" ambig. and oxymoron: structure there, but no water flows over it > life *and* immobility, but next line "splashes bright spray": action light wetness, "on the lion": animate form of predator menaces in "shapes of rock" and we're back to the unmoving, now "far down below" the creek's reflecting surface. [Now relative wilderness has become a golf course & condominium development: "The hardest part of playing Furry creek is keeping your eye on the ball. Superior golf requires intense concentration, particularly when playing the most beautiful course from sea to sky on earth. But bearing this in mind, we've designed our 6,200 yard all-terrain masterpiece to be as forgiving as it is challenging" (brochure "bumf") > but I found in Furry Creek a hard, dimpled ball, with black letters, "LEGEND"]
- St. 3—"The dam foot" (like a comic curse) "is a pit," a metaphor of death, Dante's hell or Poe's confinement > paradisal feel of first section undercut; "for the royal animals" brings back lions, and (zoomorphic?) impulse of humans to create recognizable shapes; cognitively and aesthetically imprison; "quiet and dangerous" noise from spillway water, not from

(un)roaring animals, making menace more menacing > because "nothing prepares you"

- setting is dramatized in conflictual terms (pentad of story with Trouble)—switch from "coolies," racism, etc. to animals that can hurt "in the stare," scopic; merely cinematic fear, a playful illusion in reflecting watcher? The "sun and water" in a stand-off, with the bystanding "I" not openly part of poem yet

Section III

- "When the stones swallowed me"—threat of lions seemingly fulfilled here, 1st person pronoun > initial use as *object* of action, in past tense, so dramatic episode itself omitted; a Jonah hint of miraculous survival?
- "I could not surface" evokes Atwood, with some of the same R. D. Laing sense of drowning in depths as almost preferable to being superficial, but the personal can't fuse with Nature, except temporarily: "squatted" > not erect like trees; also a trespass, to stay on property of another, i.e., remain outside a legal or natural belonging
- "in foaming water" angry, again precisely observed detail of fall, foaming at mouth=madness? > sounds before and after the making of words; "all one curve" curl of body, curve of spray of water, human and water together in a visual echo, (sub)merging
- "motionless," body like rocks, unlike water, 1st comma at end of line to emphasize that stillness, but "glowing like agate" > from death to light, psych. reversal & an echo of lanterns
- first period in poem, rock-certainty, shining exhilaration, *satori*
- St.2—"I understood the secret" universal, mystical, unqualified (until next line); "of a monkey-puzzle tree"—a little bathos, puzzlement; the one tree that supposedly monkeys can't climb because of spikey texture, maximum surface [[Iain Higgins, editor of this essay at *Can. Lit.*, writes in the margins here, "note too the "*a*" (not *the*)" [insight coming from and to the particular, not via Platonic Ideal?] & "also totally out of context, no? this is cedar/fir country" [bleak paradox: consciousness displaces, alienates, even as it connects?]]]
- "by knowing its opposite:"—her colon promising an answer, the riddle about to be resolved > progression in poem from observation to imaginative engagement to immersion to illumination
- St.3— "the smooth and the smooth" rep. as emph., and washings of wonder-

ment; "and the smooth takes," loss, erodes, eliminates the superfluous, discovers essential form within; "seduces your eyes" > 2nd pers. pl. evasion & appeal to common experience when it's particular; "I" again, but enlarged, shared: "Like Neruda, Lowther knows that it 'isn't easy / to keep moving thru / the perpetual motion / of surfaces' in a world w[h]ere the bodies are 'laid / stone upon stone'; but the process is necessary: `You are changing, Pablo, becoming an element / a close throat of quartz / a calyx / imperishable in earth'. At the psychological level, Lowther's preoccupation with stone, the most resistant of the things in the physical world, represents a desire to eliminate the surfaces, edges, boundaries that separate [hu]man from [hu]man and [hu]man from objects in nature" (Geddes *15 Canadian Poets plus 5* 395)

- "to smaller and smaller" stones?, more acute, minute and exact perception > "ellipses," of course the eyes' own shape, so organs of perceiver and perceived, self and world, "*reflect*" each other, as in opening lines of cedar and water
- "reaching the centre"—not *at* the centre, but getting towards it like Tantalus grasping; away from periphery, nearer core: in-site/insight
- "you become"—what? By truncating the line, a teleological statement offered, but aim left off, as if process itself is purpose > the condition of being alive which includes old self being swallowed, over and over
- But with "stone, the perpetual," the shock of death-like fixity > hard, inanimate, unfeeling yet immortal. A horror image, but monumental, like "coolies'" dam (bad pun on Grand Coulee dam?); "stoned": 60's vocab. here in altered state of consciousness, beyond prosaic reality that stones usually represent (cf. Samuel Johnson's kicking a stone: "Thus I refute Bishop Berkeley"); Pat Lowther's '74 collection called *Milk Stone*, in the midst of such contemporary Western Canadian poetry publishers as The Very Stone Press (?) & Turnstone Press, and—long before Carol Shields's novel, *The Stone Diaries*—"Notes From Furry Creek" was posthumously printed in *A Stone Diary*
- "lavèd god." 2nd period, archaic word, musical emphasis, Romantic diction, Keats? > Pat Lowther's neg. capability to look outside the window and be—not sparrow pecking around in gravel—animate & too easy!—but the *gravel* itself, the small rocks. A passive giving of self to l.c. pantheistic god in washing by Furry Creek; eternal in process of cleansing, renewal [*S.O.E.D.* "Now chiefly *poet.*1. *trans.* To wash, bathe. ... 2. *trans.* Of a body of water; To wash against, to flow along or past"]

• An ending in which I can "explain" every word, but somehow I'm left outside; not washed clean by cosmic consciousness: Why this balking? Is it something in the poem, or a flawed reading, or does this sense of emotional strandedness reveal the limits of communicability, or just follow from the particular slant of my life (where Death, a heavy stone flung at the forehead, knocks out certain kinds of signif. and enchantment along with the living daylights), or is the balked response at the poem's close due to an obtruding biographical awareness > ["Cases of domestic violence against women resulting in murder are so commonplace they have taken on a horrific banality ... leaving them [the children] alone to piece together a history from amongst the wreckage." Beth Lowther, in letter requesting access to sealed documents marked "Exhibits"]

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Bernice Friesen

De Medici

1.

Fog eats the hills.
Catherine, anorexic daughter
of rag-trade merchants,
takes a cab from Florence to
the Ile de France,
stands contrapposto
at the lip of a wine bar
to meet princes.

She winds her legs with Vaseline and cling-wrap
When she models for the agencies, the runway,
takes up cigarettes, absinthe,
a French waiter with Moorish eyes, stubble,
an aspiring painter.

They are Kouros and Kore.

"How men will love
the turning away of your neck," he says,
"There were days when men could not bear
the eyes of women on them
even in death."

2.

He paints her naked,
tells her to avert her eyes
from his mind, to look instead
at the ochre stain on his smock
above the groin, spin
back to the renaissance,
when every cock
was the worm of death,
bloating her with humanity
and plagues.

"Downcast your eyes.
It's not your lips that smile,
not your eyes, but your skin.
Snake your neck back.
Your arms are wings.
Let them open your breast
and air and eyes will fly around you
forever.
Feel the lust of a thousand
unborn men flutter upon your breast.

"You see what the painting will say?
I don't want you.
I want you.
Here is the thread
to take me with."

He paints her naked
with names:
rose madder, maddened rose,
raw sienna, burnt sienna,
lamp black, viridian,
raw umber, green earth,
and she is addicted,
bound by her image.

At the first exhibition
she becomes a present in oils,
her own dowry, wrapped for
the Dauphin (who was
always pulling strings).

3.

It's not as if marriage took a lot out of her.

She meets Watteau, aging
into the enlightenment.
He wants her to gain a little weight,
practice the dimpled
pink bummed fling
into the ruffles of a rhododendron.

She becomes known as
the patron with the silk arse
and the silver purse.
There is a sculptor
she fascinates herself with,
who forms the dead
into tombstones,
rips the tendons from corpses
to see where they go,
keeps pale hands
under his bed.

He observes how the outer
feminine genitalia
resemble the human ear.

He could speak of things
he'd like to do to her body,
but they would deafen her.

4.

She dies at fifty.
The Dauphin lays her effigy in the Louvre
on a lascivious bed of marble.
Here, she offers herself
finally for total consumption,
naked to seduce the dead, the statues,
men who have a taste for thin girls,
old girls, with corded necks
straining to look away from
the decay that strips bodies of sex,
the delicacy of breast and testicle.

There she is among the Fragonards, the
Cabanels. Forced to keep the same
bad company as she did in life. At least
she didn't heat the sheets of the Spaniard.
Picasso was a bastard, but no one can
tell a woman that, unless she also
dresses her hands with graphite,
has her own bones and brushes,
turns her body to charcoal and
scrapes herself along a white plaster wall.

5.

Was this the long vacation of
life? she thinks,
her history of art?
Now, back to business.
The states of death and pre-conception
make little difference.
An infinite number of people
do not exist at the Louvre
and this is one of them.

Sure, she had some good times, too,
which might not be clear,
gazing on her stone portrait of decomposition,
the object men have made her,
still life with words:
exhaustion,

death.

I want you.

I don't want you.

Eric Miller

Wonder & Guilt

Know that despite all ambient gems the weather
offers your senses no defence
nor does your pleasure extenuate the circumstance.
At five in the afternoon a prism may roll in the snow
flashing the phases of a cryogenic rainbow
riffling a catalogue of the Group of Seven times seven
with a deft and polar gypsy hand
and it would seem therefore that your cheeks really take on
robust immaculacy and the infantine aura of a tabula rasa.

Cloud-coloured gulls may blow toward their roost far off
such flaps as they make hingeing whim with luck
desultory as royalty's acknowledgement
their wings a baroque and boreal beribboning of ice.

They drift . . . No: they would only appear to drift
beyond Necessity as beyond the condos
but Necessity has unerring taste
clipping close around the casual-seeming contour
the way your own eye as merciless as graceful
pecks out these forms from vapour—
in other words none of this,
not the meticulousness with which each burr
wears a panache of persuasively substantial innocence
nor the way snow medicates the cracks of the willow
nor the tufted cosmetic that matches chickadees
perfectly to the monochromes of this meteorology—

none of this can,—
expect none of it to
exculpate beyond hard, hardest measure.

Every time snow's
unbroken imprimatur of wilderness
never falls false
capricious resource though renewable

but this asylum's granted you as corridor not altar.

Therefore picking the snowclots from between
the pup's black pads (her eyes wince-white
in tempo with each furred and blurred extraction)

remember: Do not ask too much of the land.

The land can only do . . . so much.
Wonder does not dispel obligation
more substantial than weather, longer than the season,
intrinsic to the human as feather to the bird.
You must serve your time
in a realm of differing and conscientious epiphany

though wonder vibrates the gulls of its stratosphere
or mills a spectrum in the drifts mixing
Beauty in the tears the wind jerks from your eyes
like an ice-fisher
along with Remorse so hardy, and barely extricable
  Perplexity.

Dorothy Wells

A Rose Grows in Whylah Falls

Transplanted Traditions in George Elliott Clarke's "Africadia"

George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls* is a collection of poems, prose paragraphs, letters, photographs and fictionalized newspaper clippings focusing on life in the fictional Black Nova Scotian community of Whylah Falls in the nineteen-thirties. Although it employs many literary modes, Clarke's work is thematically and narratively cohesive, being organized into seven separately titled sections. It is, in addition, firmly grounded in the tradition of the lyric sequence, a tradition that it both celebrates and extends. In particular, Clarke's collection transplants, expands, inverts, and thus liberates two important European literary traditions, the sonnet sequence and the pastoral—both of which were influential in the development of concepts of the self—and gives them a new outward direction, toward more social concerns. Just as the earliest sonnets expressed personal, private material which previously had no voice in the European tradition, Clarke's polyphonic text opens to social voices that have long been ignored or silenced—voices of a marginalized racial group.

Even though it contains only eight sonnets, *Whylah Falls* is very much like a contemporary sonnet sequence. Clarke translates themes and imagery from Petrarchan and Elizabethan sonnets into a Nova Scotian context, but these elements are not confined to his sonnets; they appear throughout the text. By using and expanding the sonnet sequence in this way, Clarke discovers ways to open up contemporary poetry to new material and new voices. Clarke also makes use of the scope offered by the sonnet sequence to explore a theme through its numerous variations, to look at it from several different angles. As Sandra Bermann writes in her history of the sonnet:

> Nowhere is the sonnet's ability to play upon difference as well as repetition so thoroughly marked as it is in the sonnet sequence or the lyric book. Here we find repetitions of similar but hardly identical texts, whose interlocking similarities and differences create the imaginative world so pronounced in these lyric collections . . . . (4)

An important aspect of this "play of repetition and difference" is that it focuses the reader's attention on the fiction of an individual voice:

> In the lyric, with its concentration of first person pronouns and deictics that together gesture toward a moment and source of the utterance, the element the reader fictionalizes most powerfully is generally the poetic persona, the voice of the text. (Bermann 5)

The sonnet sequence, then, becomes for Clarke the root of a new literary form which is particularly suitable for the creation of the characters and stories behind his archival photographs. Clarke takes the essential elements of the sonnet sequence—the "new way of thinking about mankind" (Oppenheimer 3), the voicing of what has been previously silent in human culture, the focus on the reader's fictionalizing of the poetic persona—and liberates them from *form*. His text makes the collection of various lyric and non-lyric forms do the work of the sonnet sequence. It powerfully engages crucial new discourses in contemporary society in a way reminiscent of the sonnet's impact on thirteenth-century Europe (on this latter topic, see, for example, Oppenheimer).

The other influential tradition for the shaping of Clarke's text is the pastoral, and it appears in his work in two different guises. The first is the celebratory attitude toward the natural world, and human social life in touch with that world; the second is the figure who dwells in a borderland setting, mediating between two distinct "worlds" or ways of life. Clarke's interest in the daily lives of simple country folk, and especially in the courtship of young lovers; in the idealization of a timeless rural setting; in the apparent easy-going languorous life of characters whose world is filled with music, beauty and love, is essentially an interest in the concerns of the pastoral. But just as Clarke undermines the sonnet tradition as he invokes it, he also complicates the pastoral by expanding and questioning it. The rural Nova Scotian setting is both hostile and welcoming. It is idealized, in the sense that it seems to be infused with a golden light, and it is also seen realistically, in all of its bleak harshness. The characters seem to exist in a timeless space encouraging idleness, while simultaneously being surrounded by reminders of the hard work required for survival in the harsh environment.

The most essential element of traditional pastoralism, according to Leo Marx, is the herdsman as "liminal figure," an "efficacious mediator between the realm of organized society and the realm of nature" who quite literally helps "to resolve the root tension between civilization and nature by living in the borderland between them" (43). The English literary tradition, as William Empson notes, removed the liminal figure as mediator further and further from the pasture; it is no longer necessary that he or she be a herdsman. In *Whylah Falls* this figure is the poet, a role shared by three men: X, Pablo, and Othello.

In transposing the pastoral mode to the location of a rural Nova Scotian Black community in the nineteen-thirties, Clarke writes of loggers, farmers, miners and housewives. Setting the work in the nineteen-thirties allows for an element of idleness to be apparent in the lives of some of the characters, for unemployment was high. Yet Clarke's characters are not unduly disturbed by world events and seem to go about their lives relatively untouched, perhaps because they have always been so poor in material possessions that they are not greatly affected by the Depression, or perhaps because they have learned to be self-reliant during their generations of settlement in Nova Scotia. Whylah Falls, even though it is described in the Preface as a "snowy, northern Mississippi" and associated with blues, tears and blood, seems to be imbued, especially in the first section of the work, with a golden light and relaxed atmosphere reminiscent of the mythical Golden Age of the pastoral mode: "Outside, Whylah shimmers" (13).

Yet it is actually Shelley, X's beloved, who is most often associated with golden light, and it is his focus on her which seems to spread the light into all of his poetry: ". . . the sun pours gold / Upon Shelley" (18), "Shelley awakes to sunlight. . . . Her skin is gold leaf. . . . Her face shimmers with a light as diffuse as that glimpsed through bees' wings" (19). There are gold daisies, gold dandelions, the Sixhiboux River's roar "shines" (29). Clarke invokes the tradition of a Golden Age in order to question it. He does not really idealize Whylah Falls, and X's statement to Shelley that "we wrest diamonds from coal, / Scrounge pearls from grubs and stones" (22) is a good metaphor for Clarke's method. He gives us the community and physical presence of Whylah Falls in all of its contradictions; he refuses to edit out the images which negate the pastoral, but uses them, allowing readers to discover elements of the pastoral mode embedded in a larger realism. Reading this work can give us an understanding of how earlier writers of

pastoral poems had to distil their images in order to create a "pure"-enough world. The pastoral is usually thought of today as an idealized and highly stylized view of a world in the distant past which has disappeared or perhaps has never existed. Clarke shows us a pastoral which has not disappeared, which is still available if we learn how to mine reality for it, or even better, how to accept it in the context in which it naturally occurs.

Early sonnet sequences shared with the pastoral the interest in human romantic love, although most often the lovers were not shepherds and shepherdesses but nobility. In either case, though, the characters depicted did not seem to have to work hard, and the interest in song and poetry grew out of a boundless leisure. Most of the main characters in *Whylah Falls* fit this mold, and only minor characters are defined by their work: Rafael Rivers drives a mill truck, Biter Honey is a journalist, Saul Clemence mines gypsum. The theme of human love is developed throughout the book, with separate sections focusing on the experiences of specific pairs of lovers and the problems they face: X and Shelley, X and Selah, Amarantha and Pablo, and even Cora and Saul.

We understand the character "X" to be the speaker in most of the poems, and the author of others. Although he is named in the "Dramatis Personae" as "Xavier Zachary," he appears throughout as "X," paradoxically the sign of anonymity and illiteracy. Significantly, the sequence of texts in *Whylah Falls* does not belong exclusively to him. Others' writings, in the form of songs, letters, journalism and even poetry, also make up parts of the work. We cannot even grant X editorship over the volume. The question of who includes these texts is unanswerable within the context of the work. X exists as the main figure of *Whylah Falls*, and reminds us of the traditional role of poets who wrote sonnet sequences, but the role of the poet as the hegemonic voice behind the text as a whole is questioned by Clarke's invoking of other voices and views.

The persona "X" represents Clarke the author, at least in part. X's dilemma about the role of poetry in his courtship of Shelley parallels Clarke's dilemma about the role of poetry in contemporary society. Both poets are aware of society's feedback which tells them that their language is irrelevant, even untrustworthy. Both poets must seek to develop new languages and strategies for making their art. Clarke uses strategies derived from the sonnet and pastoral traditions in order to question those traditions, expand them, and renew their vitality by reworking what serves his needs. In creating a poetic

persona who cannot have complete control over the text; in including portions of text which are not sonnets, or even poems; in allowing a part of the population which traditionally has been repressed by the mainstream to have a voice; and in creating a new cultural context for ancient tropes that literary pastoralism provides, Clarke has renewed the very traditions he also critiques. He has given people like Shelley a reason to read poetry.

The first section of *Whylah Falls* focuses on X's unrequited love for Shelley. Although this section contains only one sonnet, "Blank Sonnet," and although there are only eight sonnets in the entire volume, the *idea* of the sonnet sequence is central to the work. Just as important as the theme of unrequited love is that of the immortalizing power of poetry, a traditional theme developed earlier in Shakespeare's sonnets. In "The Argument" for Section I, we learn that Shelley's family, and Shelley herself as well, do not trust X's poetry:

> They suspect that X will arrive shortly, after five years of exile, to court Shelley with words that she will know have been pilfered from literature. Smooth lines come from Castiglione. Shelley vows she'll not be tricked. She be wisdom. (13)

For the people of Whylah Falls, X's poetry seems to be an artificial language, and no doubt within the context of this settlement, it *is* artificial. Contrasting poetry to "the chastity of numbers," Shelley writes in a letter to X, "Words always have something to hide" (15). X is both courter and courtier, educated and literate, and also literary, and his language does not always ring true in the context of Whylah Falls' idiom.

In X's first appearance as poet, his language meets the community's expectations. His "The River Pilgrim: A Letter" is an unabashed plagiarism from Ezra Pound. Ironically, of course, Pound himself "pilfered" this poem from a much earlier Chinese poet, Li Po, and it is only his English translation which is original. Clarke is obviously poking fun at the idea that *any* literature could be entirely original, and his own work borrows unapologetically from the tradition as much as does X's poem. The translation of this poem to a rural Nova Scotian setting is well done and does not diminish the poem's beauty. The situation described in the poem fits the plot of Clarke's work beautifully, except that he gives the poem the twist that here the speaker is the young male lover returning from his long journey rather than the young wife left behind and longing for his (unknown) return.

X writes that "This April, pale / Apple blossoms blizzard" (14). Shelley's

reply to this poem, in letter form, partially echoes X's words when she says "Apple blossoms petal the snow" (15). The verb "blizzard" had indicated anxiety on X's part, but Shelley's reply is gentle and reassuring. Most of the rest of her letter asserts her strength and difference from his preconceptions of her: she prefers the magic of numbers and the "woman wisdom hidden in letters, diaries, and songs" to his poetry; she is dating someone else; she does not plan to be there during the summer: in other words, she cannot easily be courted. Their mutual reference to apple blossoms and snow hints that there is a possible resonance between Shelley and X, a possible basis for a romance; however, at this point it is only a potential, and Shelley is noncommittal.

In the fashion of the typical Petrarchan lover, X veers wildly between the soaring ecstasies of love and the crashing depressions of rejection. "May 19—" is the first poem in the sequence in which the uglier aspects of reality, of Shelley's and her family's rejection, become real to X. X's memory of this violent realization—"the liquid shock / Of lightning"—is depicted in intense images and sounds: "Othello staggered in the yard, he lurched, / Squared his fists in my face, and spat. . . . The river crashed like timber" (16).

The rose, a traditional symbol of beauty, is an important image in this section and throughout the volume. "In his indefatigable delirium of love, Xavier wires rugosa rose blossoms to Shelley" (17). Shelley's somewhat acid response to X is aptly described metaphorically, as she turns the rose blossoms into vinegar while at the same time preserving their essence. She values their beauty but at the same time sees through society's emphasis on superficial forms of beauty. Shelley views X's romanticism as immature, but she "trusts in reason" and therefore turns an ornament into an "investment"—another hint of a possible relationship in the future.

The rose has accumulated multiple symbolic meanings in western art, from its representation in the courtly love tradition of "all that one loved a woman for: idleness, gladness, courtesy, wealth, youth" (de Vries 391), to spiritual love and virtuous beauty, to "intellectual beauty" and perfection. The rose as symbol of a woman of virtuous beauty or excellence appears frequently in Elizabethan literature, as for example in Shakespeare's first sonnet: "From faintest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die." In Dante the rose becomes the symbol for "the fulfilment in eternity of temporal things, since spiritualized courtly love . . . had made him understand divine love" (de Vries 392). Clarke achieves a layering of all of these symbolic meanings in his use of the rose symbol in *Whylah Falls.* The spiritualizing

potential of human romantic love is explored more fully in Section VI, "The Gospel of Reverend F. R. Langford," which I will discuss below.

One of the most important tropes taken from the courtly lyric tradition is that of poetry-as-song. Pablo, another poet, plays guitar, as does Othello. Everyone sings the blues and plays and listens to jazz. X thinks of himself as a singer and musician as much as a poet, and hilariously depicts some of the great figures of the English literary tradition as blues singers: "Howlin' Will Shakespeare, Blind Jack Milton and Missouri Tom Eliot" (53). Linked to the theme of poetry-as-song is the more important question of the problem of poetry in the modern world, and this is introduced in the poem "Bees' Wings": "without notes / There's nothing" (18). In the context of this poem, these words refer to the immortalizing power of poetry, here seen in Othello's songs

> Of sad, anonymous heroes who hooked
> Mackerel and slept in love-pried-open thighs
> And gave out booze in vain crusades to end
> Twenty centuries of Christianity. (18)

The phrase also echoes the foreshadowing of Othello's death: "His unknown, imminent death / . . . / Will also be nothing." Othello's romantic heroes are ordinary rural Nova Scotians of his own time; like them, he is anonymous because he is Black, lives in a rural settlement, and thus is marginalized by the dominant white urban society. His death will be "nothing" because he, too, is anonymous.

Taking another meaning, the phrase "without notes / There's nothing" foreshadows the theme of "Blank Sonnet." Poetry has no immortalizing power if no one reads it, and Shelley's lack of interest in X's poetry, indeed, lack of trust in *any* poetry, raises the possibility that poetry has become irrelevant and that people will no longer read it. X laments, "I have no use for measured, cadenced verse / If you won't read" (27). The writing of poetry can be an uncertain enterprise at the best of times, as X suggests of the terrain of writing:

> I step through snow as thin as script,
> Watch white stars spin dizzy as drunks, and yearn
> To sleep beneath a patchwork quilt of rum. (27)

The thin snow, the dizzying white stars are the blank page, the space surrounding the written word. X is tempted to choose the oblivion of drunkenness to

the confrontation with what writing poetry means: "I want the slow, sure collapse of language / Washed out by alcohol." This desire is fulfilled in "III: The Witness of Selah," in which X pursues a romance with Shelley's sister. Paradoxically, X also wishes for a freeing up of his tongue (which alcohol can sometimes help with), and a freeing up of poetry's forms. Shelley's suspicion of traditional poetry forces X to seek new ways of making poetry, which for him includes learning from the local idioms of jazz, blues, and rural Nova Scotian life, in order to win Shelley's love. X is finally successful—as Clarke himself is in fusing many elements from Euro-American literary traditions with local Black idioms.

In the first section of *Whylah Falls*, Clarke explores X's romantic illusions about love. The second section, "The Trial of Saul," illuminates a darker side to human relationships, including physical abuse and infidelity, and culminating in Saul's suicide. The incidents are framed in the "Argument" for this section, which records Saul's physical and spiritual degradation during decades of working in the mines: "fifty years is too long to spend, a hunchback, stooped in a damp, vicious cave, dark with smoke and tuberculosis, shovelling gypsum just for the pennies to fix one's shoes" (35). The text elicits sympathy for Saul but at the same time depicts his life as so morally abhorrent—"he makes his stepdaughter his lover and his wife his foe"—that it is difficult to feel that sympathy. Indeed, the book's readers are implicated in the creation of the oppressive socio-economic conditions which have shaped Saul's life: "So folks, our hands are dirty. As surely as iodine or gypsum dust, we've helped to poison him." But "it's too late for our tears," of sympathy or of guilt. Saul "is tired of hope." The text is troubling. It makes problematic and provisional any desire on the reader's part for order (whether deriving from a sense of sympathy and reparation, or from a sense of moral judgement against Saul), or even any desire for the "truth" of the matter.

X discovers these thorny problems of "bad love" as he peruses Shelley's letters in her absence. The trope of romantic love as a flower (though not specifically the rose) is continued here in the speaker's description of this section as a "florilegium" (35), the Latin term for an anthology, or a "gathering of flowers," and in the prose passage "How to Live in the Garden," which evokes the Golden Age as the Garden of Eden. The symbol of the rose transmutes into the vegetable, fish, condiment—Cora is presented as "the concrete poet of food" (36). Cooking is Cora's way of making love, her art, her poetry. Her dandelion wine "tastes like Russian literature" (37).

For Cora, the kind of romantic love sought by X is simply non-existent. She married Saul when she was very young, not out of love but to escape the unwanted attentions of an uncle, and to provide a father for her child born out of wedlock, yet in doing so she unwittingly moved from one abusive situation to another. The only sonnet in this section, spoken in Cora's voice, tells of the years of violence she endured, and shows that she confuses fear with fidelity: "Why he always beat me? / I was too jolly scared to run around. / I was true to him like stars in the sky" (42). This poem's litany of ugly images, mirrored in sharp, coarse diction, subverts the earliest sonnet tradition of depicting love in terms of beauty and grace, while at the same time reminding us that the sonnet sequence was capable of expressing, and even discovering resolutions for, problematic emotions:

> Mean-minded Saul Clemence, ugly as sin,
> Once pounded, punched, and kicked me 'cross the floor;
> Once flung me through the second-storey glass:
> My back ain't been right for clear, twenty year.
> But I bore it, stuck it out, stood his fists.
> He be worms now. (42)

This sonnet speaks of the pain of love, a traditional theme, but undermines the tradition by depicting *this* pain as physical rather than emotional, and also by revealing that there is no real love here, only fear. The sonnet communicates Cora's perverse sense of pride that Saul could inflict so much pain (a perversion of caring) and that she could endure it. Paradoxically, "Cora's Testament" *is* her vision of love.

In "The Symposium" (whose title recalls Plato's famous discourse on love) Cora speaks again. This time she has a specific audience: her daughter Missy, who, ironically, is or will become Saul's mistress. This prose monologue is the vehicle for Cora's expression of the practical side to her romantic vision. As she instructs Missy in how to handle a man—instructions which playfully echo Ovid's poems of erotic instruction as well as being a perverse modern inversion of Castiglione's instructions in courtiership, alluded to in section I—the reader understands that these are all the actions she herself should have taken against Saul, but did not. She is paradoxically wise but powerless, cowed by years of abuse.

Traditional notions about romantic love are further undermined in "A Perspective of Saul," which takes up the theme of the eternal nature of true love, again associating flowers with love. The point of view is Missy's, as she

says of Saul, "He don't seem to 'preciate that fields / can't bloom with blossoms / forever and forever and forever" (44). The repetition of "forever" echoes once again Pound's "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter," but here it mimics and trivializes traditional lovers' vows.

The shifting voices and points of view in the different texts of Section II work to destabilize any fixed point of view in the work. Traditional sonnet sequences were usually written from the point of view of the lover/poet, as are most of the texts of *Whylah Falls*' first section. Here, in contrast, it is not clear that X imagines the voices and situations of a variety of characters. The omniscient speaker of the "Arguments" tells us that "X discovered this florilegium of bad love encoded in five years' worth of Shelley's elegant epistles" (35), but we have no access to the original texts. Just how much of this story is X's perspective, and how much is Shelley's or, for that matter, Cora's, Missy's, or Saul's, is impossible to determine. Readers have only X's decoding to rely on.

The Black idioms of Nova Scotia's South Shore are more apparent in "II: The Trial of Saul" than in the first section of the work, but only in the voices of Whylah Falls residents: Cora, Missy, the "grey folks" who wag their heads, crying "All that for a black girl!" (45) when Saul poisons himself. Even the adjective "black," when used by these Black people, carries with it layers of meaning, but it is usually self-deprecatory, as when Cora instructs Missy to "sit back, relax, and be black" (38), by which she means that Missy should be quiet and docile.

X's role in these texts is possibly that of composer; but if not, he is at least their anthologizer/editor. In either case, he is listening carefully to the people of Whylah Falls, but the local vernacular does not appear in his own voice until "III: The Witness of Selah." Having seen what "bad love" has done to Cora and Missy, X, in Shelley's absence, begins a different kind of love affair, one focused on sensual pleasure. The object of his affections is Selah, Shelley's sister. The "Argument" for this section tells us that Selah "places pine branches in her dresser to perfume her clothes that otherwise would smell of roses" (48). Selah cannot be associated with the rose, symbol of perfection, because although she is beautiful and loving, she is incapable of experiencing the higher, spiritualizing power of love. She (and by implication any lover who makes her his beloved) is limited by her sensuality. Instead of the rose, she chooses exotic and sweet scents of "*chypre*, coconut, and honey" to express her extravagance, voluptuousness, and sense of

drama. She represents a love which is essentially narcissistic, in which every gesture is calculated to return the focus to herself. There is another reason why Selah rejects the rose as her flower. The traditional symbol of perfection is inappropriate for her, as we learn later, because she is lacking a uterus: "my womb is gone, / hallowed by scalpels / and Casanova cancer" (67). She says, "how can any poem / picture my beauty?" (67).

Significantly, there is no sonnet in this section. In its place is a blues lyric in which X sees himself as the ultimate sensual lover, using the metaphor of "king bee." The focus in "King Bee Blues" is not on the qualities of beauty, perfection, and the possibility of spiritual realization represented by the beloved, but on the virility of the lover, who promiscuously flies from "flower to flower" (50). The symbolic rose of the first section becomes here merely a woman's name, one among many flowers—"Lily" and "black-eyed Susan"—that are available to the king bee. In this poem we see an X for whom the traditional values of courtly love are now nowhere to be seen. Instead of offering his fidelity and the elevation of the beloved, perhaps even her "adoration," X is now content to use his lover for his own pleasure, and trust and honor are no longer important:

> You don't have to trust
> A single, black word I say.
> But don't be surprised
> If I sting your flower today. (50)

X, however, pays for his betrayal of the values of courtly love by having to join Selah in her voluminous drinking. He is

> slapped
> to and fro like a black
> bastard by alcohol's white,
> wide hand. (65)

From being the exploiter of "honeysuckle Rose" and "Lily in the valley" in "King Bee Blues," X has become the slave of "Bloody Mary" and "Miss Rum" (65)—an ironic parody of the courtly lover as servant.

The jaded X eventually tires of a life of unmitigated sensuality: "I am tired of gold sunflowers with jade leaves" (66). Selah's inability to understand his passion for poetry is described in a haiku using the same flower metaphor which had originally hinted at an understanding between X and Shelley, the apple blossom: "Selah glares at me / impatiently, not seeing / the apple blossoms" (64). This, and X's recognition of his own mortality—

"wisdom is late and death is soon" (66)—cause him finally to leave Selah.

"IV: The Passion of Pablo and Amarantha" explores the beauty of emotional love. Most people in Whylah Falls recognize that Pablo and Amarantha are perfectly matched, their love harmonious. Only Pablo's would-be rival, Jack Thomson, creates a disharmonious note with his continual pursuit of Amarantha, which leads eventually to Othello's murder. Here the strong sensuality of X's description of his affair with Selah is repeated, notably in the rich sensuous imagery of poems like "Amarantha/Maranatha," in which Pablo celebrates their love:

> Now this barbed-wire is a vine of dark grapes; the moon, a great bowl. . . .
> Am's words have become plums and chrysanthemums, and her pronunciation, gold butterflies.
> I'm gonna drink the moon's milky ouzo and then sip a gold glass of the sun's scotch. (77)

As the speaker here, Pablo employs the traditional *blazon* of early sonnets, but now translated into a Black Nova Scotian context:

> Her long, ebony hair glistens in writhing vines; her wrist's liquid curve tumbles darkly in clouds. The stream rushes over her voice . . . . Am's hair . . . cascades and wild rose petals storm. . . . (77)

> Red leaks from the roses, pours onto Am's full, Negro lips. (83)

Metaphors comprising the Renaissance *blazon*, such as golden wires for hair and alabaster or ivory for skin, are replaced here by images of ebony and indigo, a "night-smooth face" (81). Clarke uses this strategy to question traditional tropes for feminine beauty which focus exclusively on white women, and to expand this tradition to make it more racially inclusive.

Here flowers, and the love and beauty they represent, are seen as providing a necessary haven or escape from the world's violence. Amarantha expresses this need in a strong female voice that relies on imagery from the traditional women's occupations of gardening and needlework: "I quilt, planting sunflower patches in a pleasance of thick cotton. / We need a blanket against this world's cold cruelty" (85). The poem "Quilt" alludes to the disturbing events taking place in Europe at this time—Mussolini's presence in Africa, the Spanish Civil War. Yet the effect of framing Whylah Falls within these historical events is to foreground the sense of peace and security in the Nova Scotia settlement, contributing to the sense of timelessness associated with the "Golden Age." However, the sense of delight which permeates

the lives of Pablo and Amarantha at this time will soon be broken as Whylah Falls experiences its own violent events. This disturbance of the garden is foreshadowed in the last two poems of this section, "Unnatural Disaster," which reveals the motive for Othello's murder to be Jack Thomson's sexual jealousy, and "Two Dreams," in which Amarantha, like a seer, dreams the coming murder of her brother.

In "V: The Martyrdom of Othello Clemence," suffering attains a new dimension in Whylah Falls. No longer simply a function of the lover's longing for an unattainable beloved, nor of the masquerading of fear and violence as love, nor of the physical degradation that accompanies concupiscence, nor of the emotional turmoil of a maturing love which values the other as much as the self, suffering appears here as martyrdom. The theme of this section is best expressed in the poem "On June 6th": "It is our fate / to become beautiful / only after tremendous pain" (95). Here reference to the pastoral tradition appears mainly in the emphasis on music and music imagery, and in the trope of music for poetry/beauty/love. Othello is Whylah Falls' consummate musician. When Pablo joins Othello in music-making, Pablo evokes flower images (94), but Othello's artistic search for beauty is depicted in terms of music: "O follows, remembering the lost music of sub-Saharan Africa and trying to perfect the blues" (94).

This section contains two sonnets. The first one, "A Vision of Icarus," like the sonnets of the previous sections, is pivotal. It describes in lush imagery of precious jewels just *how* Othello will be valued as beautiful after death: "His eyes, amethyst isled in ambergris. / We'll comb periwinkles from his bleached hair, / And pick early pearls from his bared ribs" (91). The second sonnet (and the second of two poems with this title) is "The Lonesome Death of Othello Clemence." Like the previous sonnets, this poem has no rhyme pattern, although it contains numerous slant rhymes like "lynched / branch," "news / yellows" and "history / truly." It is a variation on the traditional theme of the immortalizing power of poetry. Here it paradoxically claims that the written text (of the journalists) cannot immortalize Othello. Rather, the production of their kind of text is disturbing to the natural order of death: it will not let Othello die. Only when the "banging" of the typewriters is finally silenced will Othello be "truly dead" (111). In contrast to tabloid journalism, poetry is seen implicitly as having the power to preserve Othello's beauty. This sonnet itself, and the text of *Whylah Falls* as a whole, *does* immortalize Othello.

Othello's murder has brought the people of Whylah Falls to the breaking point. All sense that "[t]here's a change that's gonna have to come" (108). The death of Othello's aged babysitter Cassiopeia Israfel during his funeral introduces the theme that death can be welcomed as well as feared, "'cos it brings the peace of God and you get to go home and lay your head on Christ's soft bosom" (110). As we progress through the volume's seven sections, we encounter beauty in increasingly spiritualized forms. The association of beauty with holiness and death is further explored in the section following Othello's murder, "VI: The Gospel of Reverend F. R. Langford." Here the pastoral tradition is evoked again in Langford's belief that Whylah Falls is a "New Eden, the lost colony of the Cotton Belt" (114). The rose becomes the image for spiritual passion, such as that experienced by St. Theresa of the Roses, a sublimation of physical and emotional desire. Othello's earthy blues and the jazz radio cadences that permeate the Clemence home become in this section Negro spirituals.

In the sonnet "This Given Day," Rev. Langford speaks of his vision: he resolutely sees a separation between the earthly and spiritual realms:

> All we can prove is the sun and the bay
> And the baying hunter that is the train,
> All joined in a beautiful loneliness—
> Separated from our pure world of wounds. . . . (117)

For him, love is linked to holiness, but through the agency of Christ's suffering ("sharp nails hammered through palms")—hence "our pure world of *wounds*." Langford preaches all the right things about love: "Love satisfies. Love is the only thing that can't be oppressed. . . . You gotta feel love, live it, and make it true" (118); yet he is blinded to real love by his own rhetoric, as Liana correctly sees in the sonnet "The Sermon of Liana": "The brilliant sun centres, brands him with light. / Yet, he's blinded by words, can't see that love / Is all that created and keeps our world" (120). This sonnet thus provides a twist on the traditional theme of the immortalizing power of the word: whereas poetry can preserve love, its rhetoric can be an obstacle to knowing love. The pastoral as symbol for the Golden Age / New Eden survives in this poem in "the other names for heaven— / Daisy, lily, the River Sixhiboux," but Langford has forgotten them. This is his error, but he does not see it yet. He is as passionate as Dante in seeking to know God, but the sonnet is imbued with his resulting isolation and loneliness. Rev. Langford, too, yearns for the "change that's gonna have to come" that was foreshadowed in "The

Ballad of Othello Clemence," but this change is understood by him in religious terms. In the early poems of *Whylah Falls*, we understood the people there to be living in a version of the Golden Age; the pastoral was a present reality, albeit embedded in a larger context which contained pain and injustice. In Langford's religious view, however, the Golden Age or New Eden is forever just around the corner, out of reach, and something to be remembered as a birthright: "Remember gold streets, sweet pastures, and doves by the river of waters" (119). Drunk with the prophetic sound of his own voice, he exhorts his congregation: "Come home, little children, to that land of milk and honey. . . . Praise God! None of us will be the same!"

Before we experience that necessary transformation foreseen by Langford, we must encounter the basest version of religious faith in "The Ladies Auxiliary." These "ladies," with their "impossible hats" and "funeral parlour fans," represent all that is most self-righteous, humorless and judgemental in religious attitudes: "Gotta prove respect. That's what faith is all about" (123). Fortunately Rev. Langford begins to have his world turned upside down: "I hardly think I tread on solid earth" (124). He begins to question his certainties. The sonnet "Mutability" asks "Is the world now ending or beginning?" (124). This is both the sonnet's first and last lines, a repetition which mimics the problem the sonnet poses and makes the poem cyclical. Langford is unsure about the boundaries of self and other, and Clarke depicts this in pastoral imagery invading Langford's subjectivity: "We are mere waving grass, momentary / Lightning. . . ."

Before Langford's transformation is complete, he must confront the inevitability of death: "Roses open / To worms and dust" (131). Finally, just as Dante had found unity with his God through Beatrice, Langford finds spiritual transcendence through his beloved Liana. Now it is not only roses that open to worms, but "The text is open" (133), the secret is revealed. Langford discovers that "We turn to love before turning to dust so that the grave will not compress our lives entirely to insects, humus, ash" (134). The spiritualizing power of love, symbolized by the rose, is here fulfilled.

By this point in the text, the problem of X and his role has become unimportant. X cannot possibly be responsible for these poems of spiritual intimacy in others' voices; he cannot possibly have any but a very second-hand knowledge of these experiences. There is no longer a question of these being his poems, his poem sequence, as the anonymity suggested by his nickname comes into full play. But in its final section, *Whylah Falls* returns to its orig-

inal innocent lovers, X and Shelley. This section ironically repeats the title of Section I, "The Adoration of Shelley."

In this section the sonnet and pastoral allusions reach their highest importance. The scene is again a pastoral setting, the fresh, green spring of another April in Whylah Falls. This time it is not only X but also Shelley who returns from "exile," suggesting that their relationship is now one of equal partners. X no longer has any advantage over Shelley because of his education and wide travels; and Shelley's voice, always a strong antidote to X's tendency to over-romanticize, is even stronger than before. In "Absolution" she affirms, "X, we are responsible / for Beauty" (150). She has the last word in the text, summarizing the transformations that have taken place and recognizing the value of beauty's power at last:

> X and I ramble in the wet
> To return home, smelling of rain.
>
> We understand death and life now—
> How Beauty honeys bitter pain. (153)

Significantly, X does not exclusively occupy the position of liminal figure in the text; here it is shared with Shelley, the other "exile" who returns to repossess her heritage.

Clarke again uses pastoral imagery of sunshine, green fields and flowers in this final section to evoke a sense of a Golden Age, but the imagery is richer and more sensual than before. The principal flower images of apple blossoms, roses and sunflowers are present, but extended by the rich variety of "Swiss pansies, sweet peas, carpet-of-snow alyssum, Iceland poppies, sunflowers, mardi gras snapdragons, dwarf jewel nasturtiums, calypso portulaca, squash, marigolds, mayflowers, leaf lettuce, cabbage, and carrots" (138). It is delightful that Clarke mixes Cora's prosaic vegetables into this exotic garden.

In transplanting these traditional images, Clarke creates a new geography, a site rich in history from which new voices speak, which he defines in *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile* as "Africadia" (6), an alternative to the view of Canada as "bush garden":

> In the Canadian "Orient," that is, the eastern provinces, the pastoral is valued. Indeed, Northrop Frye's venerable cliche of the "bush garden," a phrase that conjures Canada as a barren land, barely applies to the long-settled and often lush ruralities of Nova Scotia. . . . ("Orienting" 52)

Clarke is speaking of the pastoral in this context as a mode through which Maritime poets communicate a celebration of the Maritime natural environment. It matters little that this environment is harsh and rugged: its settlers have often seen it as a land of promise and opportunity, and sometimes as a safe haven from oppression. When Clarke tells us that Jarvis County is "a snowy, northern Mississippi," he alludes to the fact that the reason for many Blacks' migration from the American South to Nova Scotia was to escape slavery; ironically the image also suggests that rural Nova Scotia *is* a version of Mississippi because racism and discrimination are as rampant and ultimately as destructive there as in the American South.

Both the Renaissance lyric sequence and the pastoral traditions, then, provide Clarke with themes, formal structures, and sources of imagery which he translates, transforms, and transplants into a Nova Scotian setting, evoking a celebratory attitude toward the natural world and toward the rural lifestyle of Nova Scotian Blacks in the nineteen-thirties. Clarke's extended lyric sequence, his "elegy for the epic" ("Discovering" 83), is interested in retrieving from the margins Black Nova Scotian voices which might otherwise have been lost or silenced, but the lives of these people do not translate easily into the pastoral or sonnet traditions. The experience of the Whylah Falls community includes accidental violent death, adultery, jealous murder, the unresponsiveness of a corrupt judicial system, and repetitive exhausting labor. Although the people of Whylah Falls do not define themselves primarily as victims of racism, readers understand racism to be the ground for the corruption of the justice system and for the status of Othello, important as a community figure but paradoxically anonymous in death when his murder is made known to the wider society: his "unknown death . . . will also be nothing" (18). In this face of this harsh reality (Othello's murder is based on recent historical events), Clarke's allusions to the Arcadia of pastoral tradition invoke but also expose the contradictions of a universalizing humanism which paradoxically marginalizes the racial "other."

Clarke's "Africadian" pastoral vision questions and expands the role of the traditional liminal figure, the borderland dweller who mediates between two worlds. Here the Black Nova Scotian poet inhabits and traverses territory divided along economic and, especially, racial lines. X and Shelley, as such liminal figures, refuse marginalization and return from their different exiles to reclaim their cultural, romantic and spiritual home. They tentatively reaffirm a vision which believes that justice and freedom, combined

with the power of beauty and love, provide the basis for building true communities, but they have also learned that "It is our fate / to become beautiful / only after tremendous pain" (95).

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Bruce Whiteman

From *The Forger's Notebook*

"Where the forger tries to invent, his work becomes at once unconvincing." —OTTO KURZ

3

My attraction to forgery began early, though I was not an art-school failure like Van Meegeren or an adolescent littérateur like Chatterton. In part, I simply recognized the extent to which all success is an illusion. Not in the obvious sense of a cheap romance, in which the rich and beautiful villain of a woman ends up alone and the modest and plain but honest heroine gets the man who will predictibly be played by a handsome and gentle star in the movie. And not in the less obvious but still contemptible way in which a successful work of art must co-opt illusion to be successful at all, making *Guernica* and *Madame Bovary* and *Les Noces* just grand trompe-l'oeil from one point of view. No, I was far more obsessed with the illusionary nature of the emotions and cleverness which we, the viewers of Picasso and readers of Flaubert and auditors of Stravinsky, create in order that these masterpieces have an audience and be masterpieces at all. The great canonized works of art depend on their ability to go on provoking certain bits of feeling, of intellection, of human identity over the years and centuries, and it was that *provocation* which from the beginning has fascinated me and which I have wanted to be able to simulate perfectly. I recognized, again early, that I would never myself be able to create an original work of art, but that I could, as it were, lie about it so intelligently and elegantly as always to get away with the lie.

I gave up sex when it struck me that this is exactly how women behaved in my company.

Julie Beddoes

Mastering the Mother Tongue

Reading Frank Davey Reading Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*

. . . the critique of essentialism is understood not as an exposure of error, our own or others', but as an acknowledgment of the dangerousness of something one cannot not use.
—GAYATRI SPIVAK *OTM* 5

In his book *Canadian Literary Power*, Frank Davey appoints as one of the powerful the poet Daphne Marlatt, "with readers throughout Europe and North America, whose texts 'matter' to women because of the potential influence they can have in debates and dialogues among them" (*CLP* 193). He uses a close reading of her prose poem *How Hug a Stone* to support his claim that her work has "strong essentialist implications which, despite the strategic value feminists like [Diana] Fuss have perceived in essentialism, do little on their own to assist socially and linguistically based feminisms" (*CLP* 193). My position on the strategic value of essentialism is that it has none, and my theoretical and critical position is nearly always identical with that expressed in this collection of essays. Given this basic agreement, I am able, most of the time, to dismiss as unimportant the occasions where we differ on particularities of interpretation. My argument, however, with Davey's expansion of an earlier critique of Marlatt's poem[1] is more than a disagreement about the reading of this or that line, though it is that too, especially in the context of a discussion of literary power. It seems to me that Davey's chapter itself commits the crime of which it accuses Marlatt's work, that of being "prescriptive, idealizing, authorizing, or identity-focused" (*CLP* 192); by reducing to secondary, or supplementary, status, the elements of the text that disturb his thesis, he also does what he accuses other Marlatt critics of doing.

First, Davey describes the poem as structured by a binary opposition which privileges one of the pair; I claim that it is Davey's reading which constructs this binary which the poem itself reveals as unstable, a textual effect. Second, his construction of an implied author for *How Hug* raises issues both of the self-identical subject and the attribution of generic categories. Third, his claim that the poem posits the existence of a pre-social mothertongue ignores all the ways in which it shows this assertion to be a nostalgia for the non-existent. Davey, as much as the female critics he attacks, reduces the polyvalence of Marlatt's text to a statement in support of a project of his own.

A small issue points to the larger one. In its first edition, published by Turnstone Press in 1983, the book contains reproductions of sections of a road map of southwest England. Someone, presumably the narrator, has marked her routes and pencilled in places visited that do not appear on the original map. For Davey, this is evidence of a belief that here language points to a reality outside itself; he claims that "Pencilled additions act both to insert the narrator into this factuality and to document that somebody was actually 'there'" (CLP 167). But these additions can also be read as an example of the inadequacy of any attempt to represent "factuality." Language is a map of what it pretends to represent and thus is always incomplete, like the printed map; the pencil marks are both marks of the occasions of their production and traces of all that is not mapped. The book thus operates at the crux of the dilemma of all discursive activity and of the conventions of reading; while we live in a world constructed by language we also know that all representations are partial and inadequate. Like Davey, we operate within the conventions of the discourse in which we participate. Davey might be willing to modify his opinion of the maps; the contested territory, however, is the area that is unmapped and what *How Hug a Stone* says about it. I claim the poem searches for this surplus that escapes representation, contains passages that suggest it is found, but also shows that representations in language—the names—of what we think of as unrepresentable are examples of what Gayatri Spivak calls catachresis, a "sort of proximate naming [that] can be called catachrestic" (OTM 26).

Catachresis, in Spivak's use of the term, is a "concept-metaphor," "a metaphor without a literal referent standing in for a concept that is the condition of conceptuality" (OTM 127). The word "woman" can, as a catachresis, be made to stand for all that is not "man," in which case it is "without a

literal referent," but rather the supplementary term that is the precondition of existence of the privileged one. This supplement, however, like the pencilled additions to *How Hug*'s maps, can be read only as de-privileging its opposite by showing the mutual dependence of the supposedly incompatible opposites.

How Hug a Stone, Davey claims, is structured by an opposition between a "sentence by sentence . . . text [which] is complex and plurisignative" (CLP 169) and "the simplicity and visiblity of its structural elements" (CLP 169). He finds as well that the text constructs "a male-female dichotomy in which the male is active and positivist . . . and the female passive . . . subject to male gaze and activity" (CLP 170). In spite of the book's employing, "at the sentence level . . . its own textuality to subvert and contradict the positivism of the step-brother"(CLP 170), he does not find that its binary structure is similarly subverted. I argue that this opposition within an opposition, together with the opposition between the textual/material and the transcendent, are the structuring elements of Davey's essay, not Marlatt's poem; in *How Hug a Stone* these oppositions are shown to be textual/social constructs which coalesce to become effects of language. Each one of the pair is the condition of the other's existence but their opposition is conceptual, not actual; the "plurisignative" language, in its gaps and backtrackings which defy linear logic and narrative chronology, is not secondary, not merely supplemental to, the journey narrative, itself full of gaps and backtrackings. In emphasizing a non-textually based opposition of the male and the female with which, he asserts, *How Hug* ultimately privileges a "transcendent feminine" over "a categorizing, collecting, and scripting masculine" (CLP 177), Davey adopts the role he believes the poem creates for him, the stern male voice who devalues and represses the evidence of what is surplus to his logic; he re-enacts the process described by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*: "a feared writing must be cancelled because it erases the presence of the self-same" (OG 139). He becomes the printed map, the linear narrative, that pays no attention to all the other possibilities that the added pencil markings hint at.

To read the elements in the text which Davey privileges, that is, its binary structure and the process of its narrative, as also "plurisignative" rather than "overdetermined" is to show the risk he takes in relegating "sentence-by-sentence language" to supplementary status; the logic of the supplement is that it, too, like *How Hug*'s quest narrative, is marked by a longing for some

originary fullness and presence, the hope for which is dashed when that which is supplementary is found to have as strong a claim to be originary as that which is privileged. Again I borrow from Spivak: "We are obliged to assume a pre-originary wholly other space without differences in the interest of suppressing that 'graphematic' structure [the plurisignative language] at the inauguration of our texts" (OTM 132).

Lianne Moyes, one of the critics of Marlatt whom Davey accuses of working "hard to modify or conceal" the "theory of stable, unitary textual meaning" (CLP 192) which he attributes to his construction of "Marlatt," locates the narrating voice entirely within the text by using only the term "speaker." Davey, by which I mean the implied critic in this text, justifies identifying its author, Daphne Marlatt, with the "i-narrator" by reading *How Hug* as "autobiography, that is, a construction of its signator rather than of a persona or character" (CLP 167). Leaving aside the question of whether or not the conventions of reading autobiography do in all cases authorize such a construction, the signator-narrator discussed by Davey is constructed by him in this essay from only two acknowledged sources, *How Hug a Stone* and one interview published eight years later. From these he is able to say that "Marlatt" has a

> strikingly different agenda from those of any of her commentators. She *does not wish* the elaborate defenses from charges of 'essentialism' and didacticism that Moyes constructs for her, or the defense from phenomenology that Lorraine Weir constructs . . . she *does not care* whether her work is perceived as prescriptive, idealizing, authorising, or identity-focused. Throughout her remarks, she stays firmly with a theory of stable, unitary textual meaning. (*CLP* 192; emphasis added)

Some of these comments apply equally to Davey's essay and comments on Marlatt elsewhere in the book as they depart from the ways in which other author/subjects are constructed. In another of the collection of essays unified by the signature "Frank Davey," Davey writes:

> "Not a bad end," Daphne Marlatt writes of the turn to lesbianism her novel *Ana Historic* takes in its concluding pages—not necessarily implying that this is a 'good' end but that moral evaluation has little relevance to it. (*CLP* 77)

Such a certainty of knowledge that the narrator's voice is identical with that of the author and that the topic is the morality of lesbianism to the exclusion of the multiplicity of other possibilities when the passage is read in its context is surprising in a discussion of the work of an author who is described

on another page as presenting "unsettling epistemological challenges" (CLP 94).

The coexistence of such apparently conflicting statements raises several questions. First, the identity of the "I" that speaks and the "I" that is spoken of. Davey's book's position in regard to its signator is that, even in the presence of textual indicators that suggest an identity between these two subject positions, we should not find such identity. He says, "The 'I' and 'Frank Davey' who deployed the term are both text and constructions of memory to the 'I' etc. that writes this chapter" (CLP 246). In his discussion of another sometimes autobiographical female poet he says, "All the 'Phyllis Webbs', even the 'Phyllis Webb' of the person or 'writer' are textual constructions" (CLP 235). Marlatt, however, whether proper name or pronoun, is not in quotation marks; she is read as a construction of another text, a text perhaps personal to Davey, rather than the one Davey claims to examine in his chapter. He scorns as "ironic" the claim by the editors of an issue of *West Coast Line* on Phyllis Webb that "the selves presented in literature 'are constructed of and in language'" when the collection "collages critical essays with personal letters, interviews, the reminiscences of friends, tributes, and photographs of Webb with her mother . . ." (CLP 232). Surely his reading of the narrator of *How Hug* as identical with the Marlatt to whom he does not award warning quotation marks is no less "ironic."

The second issue is epistemological. How much does one have to know, or how much textual evidence is necessary, to speak confidently of a text as manifesting an authorial intention, especially a text which, as has been acknowledged, offers epistemological "challenge"? Many different "Marlatts" could be constructed from combinations of other publications from the same "signator." While the materialist criticism Davey calls for seeks to locate any text in its historical situation, which includes of course the situation of its writer, it also must acknowledge the arbitrariness—and interestedness—of any construction of the author-figure, or signator. We all more-or-less invent authors as a function of our critical positions; we cannot avoid doing that. In constructing, however, an author who "does not wish," "does not care" and who "stays firmly within a theory," a critic is obliged both to explicate the materials from which this author is constructed and to justify the reduction of the meaning of the text to the intentions of such a construct. Otherwise, that critic is implying that it is axiomatic that the text represents adequately a subject that transcends it, that its meaning is stabilized in the intentions of its author.

This leads to the central issue in Davey's book, the question of power. The post-structuralist understanding of the non-self-identity of the speaking subject has important political consequences in that it makes us aware of the power conferred on those in a position to stabilize and unify by defining such a non-self-identical subject. Davey takes such power on himself both in denying to Marlatt's texts the multiplicity and plurisignification he would award to others and in constructing a Marlatt who "would not wish" such a reading. (Did she "wish" that the language of *How Hug* at the sentence level be "plurisignative"?) Two kinds of power are operating here, the power to determine both the reader's response and that of "feminist" critics. Davey's construct of an intending Marlatt is a power-play against the reader who, not knowing the author personally as he does, is ordered to jettison a reading based solely on the evidence of this text, and, perhaps, an understanding of contemporary theory. "The text as a whole is *to be read* as in no sense 'framed' or relativized by irony," he says, and "a reader *should* construct no significant distance or 'disagreement' between the third 'Daphne Marlatt', signator of the text, and the earnestness of the i-narrator" (CLP 168). What, except the privileged knowledge of the master critic, authorizes these imperatives?

Davey acknowledges his project in intervening in what he calls "the 'Webb' struggle" and in keeping "'Phyllis Webb' alive as a contest of multiple constructions . . . . A politically active, postmodernist 'Phyllis Webb' remains of interest to me" (CLP 241). This non-self-identical Davey, however, accuses critics who perform the same gesture in reading "Marlatt" of what amounts to bad faith by "translat[ing Marlatt's texts] into a large, fluctuating, differential semi-homogenous feminist project" (CLP 193). This becomes a power-play against those critics when juxtaposed with a modest disclaimer:

> The only useful power that rests with men in such a scene of gender politics is to shape their own lives and social actions in such ways that women continue to find it possible to interact with them politically. (*CLP* 194)

Davey thus concludes his chapter by pretending he has not written what he has written. No such fall-back position is permitted to Marlatt and her other critics.

The reading of the author and narrator as identical is justified, Davey claims, by the "generic convention" (167) of autobiography. The poem might also be read as belonging to a genre which has many examples in

Canadian literature, the elegiac-pastoral journey home in search of some originary place or parent which is ultimately not so much found as invented; examples are Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* and Eli Mandel's *Out of Place*. The male speakers of these poems find origins of a kind but in forebears who themselves had origins elsewhere, in a place that was invented in the stories, memories and fragments of documents left by those non-originary ancestors and then reinvented in the poem. These poems operate at the boundaries of fiction and autobiography, revealing both to be conventional categories, and those conventions as residing in the reading as much as in the writing. (*How Hug*, moreover, also challenges the distinction between poetry and prose.) Perhaps Davey chooses not to read it in this generically plurisignative context because the pair son/father is often interpreted differently from that of daughter/mother.

The gender categories which operate in *How Hug* are neither as rigid nor as conventional as Davey claims. The story is a quest, its expedition leader a woman of thirty-nine, a parent not an ingenue, crone or picaro; her companion is her son. Our heroine has trials and setbacks like male heroes; in one incident she is dependent on a rescuer, a British Rail official, but this can be read as a function of the genre rather than, as Davey claims, a "re-enactment of her mother's incompetence" (CLP 174). The description of the narrator's uncle as "furious and driven" (HHS 33), rather than marking him as male, shows his resemblance to his mother, described on the same page as "the wild grey *mere*," "lashing out, hooves flashing." He has earlier been identified with the women in the family by "the full feminine mouth I see in my sister, the moods of my mother, charming and furious at once" (HHS 24).

What Davey sees as oppositions can be as easily be placed among the poem's many doublings, doublings which both determine and destabilize the meaning of the i-narrator's experience. The narrator's journey is continually paralleled with that of her mother, often in ways that emphasize differences and deny that their similarities are effects of the eternal feminine. Both wear social identities constructed by clothing; the mother in her party gown, however, has less freedom to resist her own mother's construction of her than does her Canadian daughter. The daughter's rebellion and the mother's conformity are situated in the prevailing cultural conventions of places, British Columbia and Penang, defined by their very different situations in the British Empire. The mother eventually conforms to imperial type; the daughter enacts colonial resistance.

As girls, both were unfemininely boisterous and noisy. Edrys, the mother, was a rebel in school, "the resistor, antagonizer, the one who never 'fitted in' . . . noncompliance Jean admired, being the dutiful daughter" (*HHS* 66). Her three daughters are remembered as "badly behaved" (*HHS* 17); they risk the wrath of their seaside landlady by playing dangerous games with the furniture. By this time, however, Edrys plays the traditional woman's role by sending for the patriarch, the grandfather who, the i-narrator says, "fed me vocabulary" (46).

In this textual space, the women's world is full of travel; mothers, with only occasional male help, steer children around strange places. There is generically and referentially appropriate fear of disaster in both quests, a fear, however, not marked as female. On a steep climb through a wood, the narrator notices "anxious" signs, "Hold small children by the hand" (*HHS* 52), which one assumes were put there by equally anxious male authorities. While the narrator remembers her mother's fears, the male world fears too: "the man next door predicts the collapse of the money system, visions of pre-war Germany" (*HHS* 76). Fear and boldness are functions of circumstance, not essential nature. The book is set in summer 1981 at the time of wars in Lebanon and the Falkland Islands.

Another text with the signator Marlatt opens somewhat biblically with the statement "the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth" (*MWM* 45). This ironically ambiguous statement is not incompatible with the materialist position that we enter a history we did not make; the phrase "living body" can be read as catachresis: mother tongue is entered as mother's body is left. The position Davey claims that *How Hug* asserts but I would argue it questions is that we should understand this language, in our case English, as bearing traces of some originary pre-symbolic mother language. The poem's quest is for assurance that this is true, but it finds only its own writing as the nostalgic evocation of an imaginary Ur-condition, as do its generic cousins by Kroetsch and Mandel.

In *Seed Catalogue* the speaker finds stories at the origin, in *Out of Place* he finds scraps of paper, gravestones, abandoned homesteads. In *How Hug a Stone*, she finds no geographic origin. The places she visits have become the homes of her relatives but are no more the places from which they originate than were the colonial cities in which they were born. The medium, in the epigraph, says "she'll go home with you" but the word home has no stable referent. The narrator's son is "allergic to the nearest thing we have to a

hereditary home" (*HHS* 24). England, when she was a child, was "what my parents still thought of as home" (Introduction), but both mother and grandparents had been born in colonial Asia and the mother, at school in England, "never 'fitted in'" (*HHS* 66). When the mother and her children are en route for another outpost the grandparents are no longer in India; rather than staying where "my grandparents lived" (*HHS* 45), they lodge in "a guesthouse perched like gulls on the rocks for a few weeks before we leave" (*HHS* 45). The returning adult narrator is not home-safe in England. Fearful for her sick son, she says, "i only want to fly home with him . . . where does this feeling come from that i have put him at risk?" (*HHS* 54).

Davey's claim that *How Hug a Stone* "offers meanings that are heavily systematized and, through repeated foregrounding, overdetermined" (*CLP* 170) loses force beside a reading which chooses to pay attention to the elements in the text—relegated by him to a supplementary status—that challenge his reading. I do not deny, however, that what he finds exists and to support my reading I have to account for the passages which seem most strongly to suggest a belief in an originary something, mother earth, mother tongue, mother goddess, that pre-exists language itself.

What Gayatri Spivak has said about mother tongue is worth quoting here:

> a mother tongue is something that has a history before we are born. We are inserted into it; it has the possibility of being activated by what can be colloquially called motives. Therefore, although it's unmotivated it's not capricious. We are inserted into it, and, without intent, we "make it our own." We intend within it; we critique intentions within it; we play with it through signification as well as reference; and then we leave it, as much without intent, for the use of others after our deaths. To an extent, the way in which one conceives of oneself as representative or as an example of something is this awareness that what is one's own, one's identity, what is proper to one, is also a biography, and has a history. That history is unmotivated but not capricious and is larger in outline than we are. This is different from the idea of talking about oneself. (*OTM* 6)

The language the narrator is born into is English and she uses it and plays with it "through signification as well as reference" in her quest for a mother tongue "larger in outline than" she is, but she finds an English "proper" to no one. None of the mothers in this book leaves the English she was born into to her children at her death. "Mothertongue" here, like the word mother itself, is the surplus, the supplement, the pencil mark on the map. It functions as a catachresis, "a metaphor without a literal referent standing in for a concept that is the condition of conceptuality" (*OTM* 127). Where there

is no mother language that predates one's own existence, there may be a longing—and a mourning—for an originary pre-linguistic language; such a language, when discovered, is found to have been preceded by the codes which are necessary for its interpretation. "Without narrative how can we see where we've been?"(*HHS* 19), the i-narrator asks.

The speaker/narrator of *How Hug a Stone* encounters the varieties of English spoken by her relatives; her grandmother's is marked by its history as the language of colonial power in Penang:

> & underneath, that dark vein in her voice, that music, is it Welsh? i ask her son, my son whooping it up in the background, C-3PO version of British butler tones. *my dear, she speaks like all colonials deprived of an English education. it's what we call Anglo-Indian*—singsong he means. (28)

The irony here is that the two other "colonials deprived of an English education," the speaker and her son, speak a quite different version of the "mother" tongue, the son's especially marked by the mass-culture of neo-colonialism. The speaker's mother had arrived in British Columbia speaking the language of an English education, a language of alienation and difference in Canada, which her daughter had to reject, as she rejected her "frocks" (17), in order to be at home: "you don't understand, *everybody* wears jeans here" (29). The sought-after mothertongue is one nobody speaks; the term is a concept-metaphor without literal referent.

The word mother operates in a similar way. The narrator's uncle remembers her grandmother as a woman "who never should have had children" (33); he was "age three in the arms of his Indian ayah" (34). Her mother, one in a chain of mothers all speaking differently, is found to exist only as a function of this text. Very few of her words are reproduced in the book and then only as examples of the unfamiliar: "sweetshop, pillarbox" (19). The i-narrator finds many versions of her mother, remembered as "changeable as the weather" (22), in stories written by others; she and the people she encounters, despite family resemblances, inhabit no single originary story but play roles in many. Her "newly-acquired step-brother" (14) (an untold story there) behaves "as if he held the script everyone wants to be in" (17), though the scene indicates that no such script exists. A similarly scientifically-minded uncle lives in a less certain world. His sister's daughter sees through his universal explanation, "at His doorstep I lay certain unexplained events" (33); she comments, "who writes the text? who directs the masque?" (33). The question—"who gets to write the text?" (66)—recurs

when the narrator remembers her homeless mother "left for seven years in boarding school" (66). Edrys (or is it Tino?) goes "against the script" (45) when she defies her father's prediction that she will crack under the strain of travelling alone to a new country with three young children. "Perched" in an English guesthouse "like gulls" (45), she learns "how to fly" (45). But flight too is a story with many versions, some "with elderly English lady plots" (15) written by Agatha Christie.

This mother is recalled directly by her daughter only as a scold, "tyrannical" (46), policing her language; she had driven her mother "wild" with her Canadian colloquialisms: "flaunting *real fine* with *me' n her*" (19). Others remember a different woman. A school friend remembers the "resister, antagonizer"(66). The grandmother remembers both the girl who wanted to go to England and have a career, tired of colonial futility, and the compliant daughter looking "a dream" in her garden-party dress (28).

In a passage with the title "close to the edge," the narrator remembers her mother's fear for her children at risk from the rising tide; the episode closes with a memory of "a different sea-coast off a different rock"(55) where, after her mother's death, she had scattered "bits of porous bone, fine ash. words were not enough," she continues, "& the sea took her" (55). Sixteen pages later, though it is not clear how the incidents are related in the chronology of the narrative, she is terrified by the seriousness of her son's condition. Being a mother is a relationship in language with no power to heal; she says "the mother-things to him" (*HHS* 71) and asks "who mothers me?" (*HHS* 71). The two pages that follow depart altogether from narrative continuity, except that we knew she had been advised to visit the stone circle at Avebury rather than Stonehenge. The reader may, however, impose such continuity and read them as the answer to the question—"who mothers me?"—that precedes them. What form that answer is read as taking will depend on whether one chooses to read like Davey or like critics such as Lorraine Weir, Lianne Moyes and me.

The two pages permit this undecidability by being composed in the language which Davey calls "ambiguous and apparently plurisignative" (*CLP* 171) while at the same time connecting in many ways with other passages in the book. The word Avebury, which is not included in these two pages, nonetheless connects, through its Latin root, *avis* , bird, to both mother and daughter and the repeated allusions to birds and flying in connection with them. The contents of the barrows at Avebury evoke the bone and ash

which the narrator had scattered in the Pacific Ocean, most particularly at the end of this passage:

> Bride who comes unsung in the muse-ship shared with Mary Gypsy, Mary of Egypt, Miriam, Marianne suppressed, become/Mary of the Blue Veil, Sea Lamb sifting sand & dust, dust & bone, whose Son . . . (72)

Here the narrator's mother is linked with a list of mother goddesses who dissolve into ash, the collective ur-mother of all sacrificed sons. But this is neither the end of the quest nor its beginning. The hallucinatory, more than usually plurisignative, passage which presents *How Hug*'s encounter with something or other at Avebury has the punning title "long after The Brown Day of Bride." What is longed for, however, is merely a gap in the text, no more than a product of the force of that longing. It is followed by a passage titled "continued" which discourages the interpretation that the narrator's question, "who mothers me?" has been answered by the finding of a mother beyond the saying of "mother-things." She is "left with a script that continues to write our parts in the passion we find ourselves enacting" and the "struggle to redeem . . . our 'selves' our inheritance of words" is "endless" (HHS 73).

The gesture of offering and then taking away the pre-linguistic origin is performed again. The second paragraph of "continued" says, "she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source," but this is followed by "her" reinscription into language: she is "the space after the colon," in a *double entendre* that suggests both womb and the graphic sign that indicates that language both precedes and follows. If she is "the pause . . . of all possible relation" it is a pause "between the words" (HHS 73), a pause created by the relations between words.

In the four pages that remain, the woman and her son travel to London and encounter more birds which produces another story about the elusive, unfound mother who worries about losing her children when in fact, the narrator says, it is "her i lost" (HHS 78). Her dance in Trafalgar Square is a return to her identity as a tourist, her liberation from Englishness beneath Nelson's phallic column, sign of imperial glory, "at the heart of where we are lost" (HHS 78).

The search for a mother who is both ghost and muse is a search for identity in language. The narrator's language, however, marks her as alien. She and her son are not at home in the language of her uncle and grandmother

and her mother was not at home in the language of Vancouver. She is her mother's daughter not by finding an originary language but by repeating the experience of finding herself speaking the wrong language.

While the speaker's experience at Avebury raises the possibility of the fulfilment of her quest, the text has by this time shown repeatedly that language and identity are products of social relations; just as the narrator's historical mother was not born and did not die in England, there is no English mothertongue (*langue*) that transcends all the different englishes (*paroles*) and no primeval mother who transcends the many versions of her in stories written by others. She exists only in the story of the speaker's desire for her.

By foregrounding the codes and conventions that construct the meanings we give to the same words in different contexts, the book refuses its own desire for a pre-social mothertongue. The politics of English, this work says, are never independent of the occasions of its speaking, writing and reading. *How Hug a Stone* evades reductive interpretations like that in Frank Davey's book which claims that it "offers meanings that are heavily systematized and, through repeated foregrounding, overdetermined"(*CLP* 170). To claim that such meanings are not destabilized by the "plurisignative" language in which they are presented is to claim for the critic the power to erase all that is not written on his personal map of Marlatt's text.

NOTE

1 "Words and Stones in *How Hug a Stone*," *Line* 13 (Spring 1989): 40-46.

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Like a round, yellow bird dangling fighting for her tiny, tiny life

Like a telephone ring
ing and ringing in an empty room

Spinning with nothing to grip

That everything looks the same but has been replaced by
something meaningless

a small child choking

a fire starting in the wastepaper basket

a vein silently bulging in your head

it's over just say it—you don't need to hear it to say it.

The end of the world is accumulating.

For Anne

Lightest twins: Anne Faith Sarah and John Alexander, weighing 420 grams (14.45 oz.) and 440 grams (15.5 oz.) respectively, born to Wendy Kay Morrison in Ottawa General Hospital, Canada, 1994. *The Guinness Book of World Records, 1997.*

You there. Huddled flesh
in glassy skin. A see-
through chrysalis attached
to life by slender wires
reveals you   elsewhere—
voyaging.

Barely embodied.
Yanked   untimely out.
The amniotic sea turned
toxic   sundered you,
prized cargo, from the mother
hold.

Now borne   on waves,
your vacillation charted on
the screen. Her body failed
and faith   is weakening,
but love scrolls on, unbidden,
unreceived.

Translucent tracerie of veins,
your skull lists   heavily.
A secret ocean swells
inside your brain   withholds
you, sleeping.

We outside the cell can't
help but will you into being.
Daughter, sister— niece.
How to persuade you, curled
at the cusp between start
and surcease?

We open up your porthole,
breathe your name: a wish
one-sided as a prayer. You
shrink from light's harsh
glare. Our fingers ache
to stroke

Your wizened skin.
As if you knew, your tiny
face contorts and fists
like humming birds fly to
your eyes where wetness
beads . . .

Your flesh too new
to feel our touch
as anything but pain—

Your cry comes
from so far away it's
soundless.

Brian Bartlett

For Sure the Kittiwake
Naming, Nature, and P. K. Page

Who am I, then, that language can so change me? . . . Where could wordlessness lead?
—PAGE, "Questions and Images"

. . . the whole business of naming is curious.
—PAGE, *Brazilian Journal*

1

Can poets take too much pleasure in words? How much should our language frustrate and shame us? How much excite, tickle, and teach? Is taxonomy the hand of death, murdering to dissect? Do you feel that your own name—Patricia, Arthur, Eve, Adam—pigeonholes you? "Why should three phrases alter the colour of the sky. . . ?" (Page, "After Reading *Albino Pheasants*"). Is a name a cage, a crown, a straitjacket, a coat, a shell, a nail, a halo, a brand, a bridge, a prison cell, a pointer, a window, a cross?

2

In P. K. Page's early poetry, children and adolescents are often rambunctious creatures. Look at those in "Young Girls"—porpoise-like, giggling, lolloping, very prone to smiling and crying. In contrast, the title figure of "Only Child" seems quiet, solitary, overshadowed by his mother, torn between his need for her and his hunger for escape. This poem—one of Page's most full-fledged, suggestive narratives—begins:

> The early conflict made him pale
> and when he woke from those long weeping slumbers she
> was there
> and the air about him—hers and his—
> sometimes a comfort to him, like a quilt, but more
> often than not a fear.

There were times he went away—he knew not where—
over the fields or scuffing to the shore;
suffering her eagerness on his return
for news of him—where had be been, what done?
He hardly knew, nor did he wish to know
or think about it vocally or share
his private world with her.

Then they would plan another walk, a long
adventure in the country, for her sake—
in search of birds. Perhaps they'd find the blue
heron today, for sure the kittiwake . . . .

In other poems Page sees girls thrilling to "a phrase / that leaps like a smaller fish from a sea of words" or talking "as if each word had just been born— / a butterfly, and soft from its cocoon" ("Young Girls," "Sisters"). The boy in "Only Child," rejecting his mother's example, has little taste for words and language, as becomes still clearer later in the poem. He seems to resent questions and discussions; he even prefers not to "think . . . vocally." Many of us can sympathize with his reluctance to speak, recalling childhood times when our backs stiffened to parental questioning, even of a kind-hearted, undemanding sort. We can sense false pretences behind the supposed family bonding of the walk (surely "they would plan" is ironic, the mother laying down the plan, and "for her sake" hinting who gained the most from the jaunts). Yet in the poem's second stanza the boy can frustrate us just as he frustrates his mother. For the moment, we might get a grasp on her position, as the boy's evasiveness deprives *us* of a clear idea of his walks alone. Not only is he evasive with her; he seems oddly out of touch with his own experience ("he knew not where," "He hardly knew, nor did he wish to know"). It's as if he wants a world too "private" for words, or for self-knowledge of any sort.

3

For weeks, "Only Child" has been running river-like—sometimes subterranean, sometimes bursting into the surface—through my other reading. To chart that river, I'm also surveying the surrounding landscape, which is crisscrossed with various writings by Page and by many others. A personal history of reading a poem can include reading reminiscences prompted by the poem, unexpected detours and digressions, through a region of thickly interconnected moments like the jungle lines in one of P. K. Irwin's more intricate paintings.

4

In a Writer and Nature course I just finished teaching for the first time, I was struck again by how often our species in its Western variants has been suspicious of its urges to name and categorise. While in European cultures and their descendent cultures in North America there have been innumerable "nature as book" metaphors, nature has also been defined as beyond or outside language. Take a look at Dickinson's poem 811. In other poems Dickinson is perfectly adept at finding riddles, scriptures, and languages in the woods and fields, but in 811 "we" systematize what nature does spontaneously and unwittingly: "We conjugate [Nature's] skill / While she creates and federates / Without a syllable."

Taxonomy is a special villain of the conjugation. Some writers have agonized over its cramping, shrinking effects. In *The Tree,* John Fowles—once a natural-history curator in Dorset as well as a novelist—tells of visiting the eighteenth-century garden of Linnaeus, who did more than anyone else to solidify botanical taxonomy. While Fowles doesn't deny that Linnaeus shaped an extremely useful tool for science, he admits he finds "nothing less strange, and more poetically just, than that he should have gone mad at the end of his life." For Fowles, taxonomy aggravates our tendency to being "a sharply isolating creature," overemphasizes "clearly defined boundaries, unique identities," and "acts mentally as the equivalent of the camera viewfinder. Already it destroys or curtails certain possibilities of seeing, apprehending and experiencing."

For all its perceptive moments, there's lots to argue about here and elsewhere in Fowles's book. For instance, didn't Linnaeus help create cultural features through which visceral, emotional, and poetic responses to nature—not just rigorously scientific ones—could arise? Can't the use of a camera encourage and enhance certain ways of seeing? Would Fowles complain that reading one poem keeps us for the meantime from reading another, or that taking one walk keeps us from taking another? From one angle, can't Linnaeus be seen as a *non*-isolationist, one who wanted not to focus on a few select species but to see and appreciate flora in all its mind-bewildering-and-charming variety?

5

It's no secret that acts of naming and categorizing have been considered more male than female, hooked in with male desires to exploit and domi-

nate. That may be a cliché with all too much historical truth behind it. But in "Only Child" Page reverses the stereotypical difference. The boy is the one who hates labels, the one apparently attracted to sympathetic experience and identification, while the mother is the pointing taxonomist, the person keen with words. The gap between mother and son grows increasingly clear in the poem's middle stanzas:

> Birds were familiar to him now, he knew
> them by their feathers and a shyness like his own
> soft in the silence.
> Of the ducks she said, "Observe,
> the canvas-back's a diver," and her words
> stuccoed the slaty water of the lake.
>
> He had no wish to separate them in groups
> or learn the latin,
> or, waking early to their song remark, "The thrush,"
> or say at evening when the air is streaked
> with certain swerving flying,
> "Ah, the swifts."
>
> Birds were his element like air and not
> her words for them—making them statues
> setting them apart,
> nor were they facts and details like a book.
> When she said, "Look!"
> he let his eyeballs harden
> and when the two came and nested in his garden
> he felt their softness, gentle, never his heart.
>
> She gave him pictures which he avoided, showed
> strange species flat against a foreign land.
> Rather would he lie in the grass, the deep grass of the island
> close to the gulls' nests knowing
> these things he loved and needed near his hand,
> untouched and hardly seen but deeply understood.
> Or sailed among them through a wet wind feeling
> their wings within his blood . . . .

On a first, too-hasty reading, I figured Page was creating an easily disliked cardboard figure of a mother to help us empathize with the lonely, sensitive boy. Soon I started to wonder if a more complex mother hid behind the son's caricature, and to see that Page hardly presents the boy's bond with nature as a perfectly healthy contrast to his mother's. What the mother is, beyond her protectiveness, curiosity, and memory for bird names, we can't

say; by and large the poem is much closer to the boy's point of view. Yet the poem sees him critically as well as sympathetically. Of what is his relationship to nature made? Not much. He returns from his solitary walks as if blank-minded. Just as he has no interest in names, books or pictures, he apparently doesn't have much in observing behaviour either. He's so absorbed in his personal experience that images of distant species mean nothing to him. Would the "strange" and the "foreign" leave a more curious, imaginative boy so cold? It's as if this boy won't imagine nature beyond his own small sphere, as if to him "nature" doesn't exist beyond what he can see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears.

For the young character in Page's poem seeing and hearing don't seem nearly as important as feeling. What does he feel? Mostly, a strong sense of self-identification with the birds—"a shyness like his own / soft in their silence," "his element like the air," "their softness, gentle, near his heart." I'll leave to others the psychological implications of nature as mother substitute, surrogate nest or womb, haven from harsher realities. Rather than exploring, the boy seems content just lying passively in deep grass. His view of nature is a narrowed one indeed, even sentimental—little like that of Heaney's boy figure in "Death of a Naturalist." Even the gulls seem uncharacteristically silent, especially for gulls around their nests. (One morning a few years ago I stepped cautiously among dozens of egg-pillowing gull nests and had my ears filled with outraged cries, with the warning, feathery shudder of swooping bodies.) Where are brambles cutting arms, flies biting legs, rain chilling feet, owls swallowing mice?

Halfway through the poem, it seems clear that the boy is interested less in the birds per se than in arousing certain sensations within himself, a feeling of "their wings within his blood." Self-identification reaches its peak, and some kind of "setting them apart" might not be such a bad idea after all. Among the trickiest lines in the poem are: "these things he loved and needed near his hand, / untouched and hardly seen but deeply understood." What is it to deeply understand what's hardly seen? Does the boy love the birds he would not name, or is he more in love with his own feelings of being blissfully one with it all?

6

The boy's fondness for the gentle, the soft, and the passive connects to a kind of dreaminess questioned by other Page poems. Sometimes in her

work, peacefulness, rest, and inactivity are needed before a release into a dream world of truth and revelation. Other times, they're signs of lethargy, directionlessness, or timidity. The lost, wandering anti-hero of "Cullen" becomes "content to rest within his personal shade" and—in lines very reminiscent of "Only Child"—"felt the gulls / trace the tributaries of his heart. . . ." Before his uncommitted and desperate volunteering when war breaks out in 1939, Cullen's weakness of character is laid bare: "Nor could his hammock bear him for it hung / limp from a single nail. . . ." The dangers of "gentleness" take an extreme form in "Stories of Snow": "gentle" snow tempts lost woodsmen to "dream their way to death."

It would be going too far to say that the boy of "Only Child" is drawn to a death-like state. But compared to, say, the title figure of "Blowing Boy"—who is very active, kite-like, and associated with language ("In the liquid dark / all his words are released and new words find him")—this boy seems withdrawn, almost listless. Did he ever grow tired of lying dreamily in the deep grass, ever leap into the water to swim and feel surges of energy far from his misty identification with gentle birds and his suspicion of naming?

7

Contrast the boy's indifference to phrases like "The thrush," "Ah, the swifts," "Observe, the canvas-back" with Page's own naming of birds in other poems:

—red-eyed vireos ("Short Spring Poem for the Short-Sighted")

—a hoopoe "weightless upon my wrist, / trembling brilliant there" ("At Sea")

—mallards "unmoving as wood"; and a ruby-throated hummingbird, "a glowing coal / with the noise of a jet" ("Domestic Poem for a Summer Afternoon")

—finches that "stir such feelings up— / such yearnings for weightlessness, for hollowing bones, / rapider heartbeat, east/west eyes" ("Finches Feeding")

And contrast the boy's apparent lack of close observation with all the uses of binoculars in Page's poems (and in *Brazilian Journal*). Page's satirical poem on travel, "Round Trip," mentions binoculars in a traveller's luggage, but the man in the poem is too caught up in fantasies, fears, and foolish dreams to ever use them. In "Visitants," pigeons' brashness and beauties are appreciated through binoculars. In other poems, magnifying devices even become compatible with inner worlds: a scene is examined by "the valvular heart's / field glasses" ("Personal Landscape"), "My telephoto lens makes

visible / time future and time past" (the glosa "Inebriate"), and there is a "dream through binoculars / seen sharp and clear" ("Cry Ararat!"). The last poem says "the bird / has vanished so often / before the sharp lens / could deliver it," which expresses skepticism about the device in the face of elusiveness. However, imperfect as they are, binoculars appear too often in Page's work to be merely invasive tools of the devil; they can be useful without being clinical, they can inspire attentiveness without aggression.

8

It seemed under a smile of good fortune and good timing that last week just after finishing Page's *Brazilian Journal* I saw Canadian jazz flautist and soprano-sax player Jane Bunnett perform with her friends from Brazil and Cuba. For three hours, with untrammelled energy and layered sound-textures, the six musicians evoked Brazilian colours and rhythms as Page did in her prose of 1957-59. When Bunnett first heard Celso Machado imitate bird and animal sounds with his assorted whistles and tiny percussion instruments, maybe she felt something like Page did when she was first surrounded by the calls of Brazilian birds.

The *Journal* rings and echoes with inquisitive, witty, sometimes almost ecstatic, observations of natural scenes. At times Page doesn't know the names of things but describes them with voluptuous, vivid detail. A "finch-like bird of a clear cerulean blue with a black eye-mask and throat" was "so neatly feathered he looked carved and polished from some mysterious blue stone, his wife dull green and blue." A bird "like a ballerina—tiny, black, dressed in a white tutu—flew out onto mid-stage, did a fabulous *tour en l'air*, and disappeared before I could further observe it." Of course, not knowing the name of something can prompt an observer to describe it more precisely than otherwise. But it wouldn't be fair to say that Page's ignorance of the names determines her precise descriptions. Knowing names for animals hardly keeps her from describing them with close attention. A toucan is seen "with an electric blue eye, a bill like an idealized banana, a body of sculpted soot set off by a white onyx collar and gorgeous red drawers," and shrimps are unforgettably seen "with their wide-ranging antennae, looking half like a caricature of a guardsman, half like a nervous pianist, their anxious white front legs like fingers uncertainly playing the same music over and over." (And what of this description of *homo sapiens*? The curator of a natural-history museum has "dog's eyes—pale eyes, honey-coloured—and I

thought, 'Nonsense, look at his nose,' and his nose too was a dog's. And so I switched to his teeth—pointed, white, dog's teeth. Uncanny. But such a polite dog. Wouldn't cock his leg just anywhere.")

One day after visiting a museum Page admits a dislike of stuffed birds, and another day she feels sad at the sight of thirty-some bird-whistles used by hunters to attract birds ("Are there really so many birds worth shooting?"). Yet nowhere in the *Journal* does she suggest that names themselves are traps, cages, luring-to-death whistles, or that—in the terminology of "Only Child"—they turn birds into statues. Early on she even complains about having only "inadequate bird books," and a year later she's still saying "I'd give a great deal for a good bird book." At times her delight in names is obvious. She discovers that birds she'd known in Australia as bellbirds are called *ferreiros* (blacksmiths) in Brazil, "with good reason. Their song is exactly like the ring of metal." She learns that a variant of the mangrove cuckoo is known in Portuguese as *alma de gato*, "soul of a cat."

Contrast the boy of "Only Child" and his attraction to birds possessing "a shyness like his own / soft in the silence" with Page of the *Brazilian Journal* and her fascination with another kind of bird:

> we saw a small, blue-back bird apparently jumping for joy. He was sitting on a fence-post and on the count of five up he went, about a foot in the air, singing. He was not catching anything, as far as we could tell, nor was he showing off for a mate. He was just jumping for joy on a fence-post in the middle of Brazil—for longer than we had the patience to watch . . . . In all my amateur birding, I have never seen anything like it.

No instant reference to her heart or self, no preference for the gentle and the comforting. Just astonishment at a bird's buoyant energy, at its apparent pleasure and humour. When Page came to write her series of prose meditations "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman," she described her own sense of art in terms that echo the Brazilian bird's hopping: "Play, perhaps . . . . spontaneous involvement which is its own reward: done for the sheer joy of doing it; for the discovery, invention, sensuous pleasure. 'Taking a line for a walk', manipulating sounds, rhythms."

9

"Only Child" is here in the background, like the theme forever present in an improviser's mind. It's song and message and object, but also catalyst, spur, hub, home plate, mind seed.

10

Go farther afield for contrasts: Thomas, the adolescent hero of Czeslaw Milosz's novel *The Issa Valley*:

> . . . the Latin names appealing to him because of their sonority: *Emberiza citrinella* for yellow-hammer, *Turdus pilaris* for fieldlare, *Garrulus glandarius* for jay, and so on. Some of the names were conspicuous for their proliferation of letters, forcing the eyes to jump continuously from his notebook to the antiquated ornithology at his elbow. Even the longer names, if repeated often enough, acquired a pleasant lift, one of them, that of the common nutcracker, being absolutely magical: *Nucifraga caryocatactes*.

This expresses a love of language itself as nourishing, sensuous like the tang of cooked rhubarb, blackberries bursting in the mouth. I think of Page's lines "the word / quick with the sap and the bud and the moving bird" ("Virgin"). Nevertheless, Milosz shows that a fondness for names isn't a simple matter. Young Thomas cares so intensely about his knowledge of nature that when his Aunt Helen uses his bird book as a substitute for a missing bedpost foot he's exasperated by her ignorance. In that scene, Milosz has enough ironic distance to suggest a streak of pride in Thomas's hugging of his knowledge.

Despite qualms and questions about hunting, Thomas values guns and shoots at birds. We hardly have to read the several passages about the thrill of hunting to realize that his approach to nature isn't simply reverential. Naming itself, for all it's celebrated, is also suspect:

> The notebook proved that Thomas had the gift of concentrating on things that excited him. To name a bird, to cage it in letters, was tantamount to owning it forever. . . . Turning the pages, he had them all before him, at his command, affecting and ordering the plentitude of things that were. In reality, everything about birds gave rise to unease. Was it enough, he wondered, to verify their existence? The way the light modulated their feathers in flight, the warm, yellow flesh lining the bills of the young feeding in deeply sequestered nests, suffused him with a feeling of communion. Yet, for many, they were little more than a mobile decoration, scarcely worthy of scrutiny. . . .

Like the boy in Page's poem, Thomas is "suffused . . . with a feeling of communion" near bird nests, but otherwise his responses to nature are far more jumbled, and complicated by self-consciousness. It's hard to imagine the boy of "Only Child" even knowing how to hold a gun, let alone using gulls and herons for target practice. Are his unnaming, harmless detachment and his deep-in-the-grass reveries, then, more praiseworthy than what Thomas

does? Why do they still seem to me sadly half-hearted alternatives to the pleasure Thomas finds in power?

11

Naming, or what naming symbolizes, *can* hurt. Think of Page's finely woven tapestry-of-words "Portrait of Marina," in which a domineering father names his "pale spinster daughter" Marina in hopes that the name will "make her a water woman, rich with bells." Instead, for her "the name Marina meant / he held his furious needle for her thin / fingers to thread again with more blue wool / to sew the ocean of his memory." The father discourages the daughter from having an independent life, and her name itself becomes like a straitjacket, confining her to the roles he chooses for her.

12

In her glosa "A Bagatelle," Page enumerates species in a garden, including "Camellia: curiously, named for George J. Kamel, / Moravian, a Jesuit missioner." If Page is amused by such naming, A.S. Byatt is too, but more satirically. In her novella *Morpho Eugenia*, an English naturalist of lower-class background returns to his native country after a decade exploring the Amazon. While one character is thankful to names for freeing her imagination to write a book of fantasy—she finds herself "dragged along willy-nilly—by the *language*, you know—through Sphinx and Morpheus . . . —I suppose my *Hermes* was Linnaeus"—Byatt also pokes fun at a particularly proud sort of naming. The aging patriarch Harald Alabaster hopes in vain that "some monstrous toad or savage-seeming beetle in the jungle floor might immortalize me—Bufo amazoniensis haraldii—Cheops nigrissimum alabastri—." Before leaving for the Amazon, the lower-class Adamson had a dream of rising in the world: "There would be a new species of ants, to be named perhaps adamsonii, there would be space for a butcher's son to achieve greatness." But once he starts to live in that distant foreign land, Adamson finds himself overwhelmed in "this green world of vast waste, murderous growth, and lazily aimless mere existence," and he records "his determination to survive, whilst comparing himself to a dancing midge in a collecting bottle."

Touché. The naturalist has become a bit of nature, the explorer an object, the bottler a bottled specimen.

13

Sometimes in Page's poems the radically transforming and transfigured are supreme, and the inner worlds we create are set higher than the sensuous worlds we're given.

"Chinese Boxes" imagines a set of boxes diminishing in size until one reaches "an all-ways turning eye," an "inner eye / which sees the absolute / in emptiness." In her remarkable sestina "After Reading *Albino Pheasants*," Page is tugged between the beauties of the given physical world and the powers of a super-transforming eye. She wonders "Why would I wish to escape this world?" and acknowledges the shaping effects of heritage and environment, but near the end she speaks of "my truth" and "its own world / which is one part matter, nine parts imagination." She goes on: "I fear flesh which blocks imagination." In "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman" she writes: "At times I seem to be attempting to copy exactly something which exists in a dimension where worldly senses are inadequate. . . . Without magic the world is not to be borne."

An especially clear example: "After Donne" expresses frustration at the attractions and temptations of worldly senses. "For the least moving speck / I neglect God and all his angels," the poet complains. She is "subject to every tic and toc." Like a fervently otherworldly monk intent on the inner life and cautious of nature's superficialities, the poet there seems uneasy with the distractions of nature outside the life of the imagination.

In contrast to the flesh-and-blood birds of "Finches Feeding" or *Brazilian Journals* are the spiritual birds, horses, and indefinable beings of "Invisible Presences Fill the Air." And yet—a winning twist—for all their mysteriousness, these invisible presences too need names: "O who can name me their secret names? / Anael, opener of gates. / Phorlakh, Nisroc, Heiglot, / Zlar."

14

Why can't I rest easy with the line "one part matter, nine parts imagination"? Is it because I'd make the balance much more equal, or even tip it in favour of "matter," the raw material without which nothing would exist, our cradle and our continuing lifeblood and ground? Though Wordsworth's *The Prelude* sometimes seems to fill my consciousness with light as few other poems do, I have special qualms about these lines from its ending: "the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells." The debate over the primacy of "Imagination or

Nature" in Wordsworth remains dizzying and torturous. But, at least in isolation, lines like the above make me feel incomplete and in shock, as if I were abruptly cut adrift from much that I love. *A thousand times more beautiful?*

Our arrogant, short-sighted habits of desecrating the earth also make it hard for me to respond to the metaphors in Page's glosa "Planet Earth." While the poem seems written out of a desire to treat the earth carefully and reverently, Page doesn't question the metaphors from the four key lines of Neruda—the earth as something to be "spread out" and lovingly "ironed"—and her own lines compare the earth to a laundress's linens, a mother's child, a tapestry, gold leaf, a brass object in need of polishing. In the 1991 NFB documentary about her, Page spoke of the environmental crisis as "bigger than any war we've ever thought about." "Planet Earth" is more a poem of praise than a poem of polemics. Still, is making metaphors of the earth as our laundry and our child the way to change our thinking *or* the way to praise (or would it make more sense to see *ourselves* as laundry and children?).

Page's "Leather Jacket," on the other hand, protests with a purity that is bound to overwhelm any commentary on it. Its epigram comes from a medieval writer, Suhrawardi: "One day the King laid hold of one of the peacocks and gave orders that he should be sewn up in a leather jacket." Four stanzas into the poem, hard-to-bear sorrow and lament intensify:

> Cry, cry for the peacock
> hidden in heavy leather
> . . . .
> The peacock sees nothing
> smells nothing
> hears nothing at all
> remembers nothing
> but a terrible yearning
> a hurt beyond bearing
> an almost memory
> of a fan of feathers
> a growing garden
>
> and sunshine falling
> as light as pollen.

This peacock can be interpreted more as a symbol of self and beauty than as a species of bird; one critic (Constance Rooke), noting the role of the peacock in Sufiism, has read its fate in Page's poem as "a metaphor for human

entrapment," and Page herself has spoken of it as "a creative force blocked, arrested in some way." Thinking of the later poem "Planet Earth," I can also experience "Leather Jacket" as a sharply focussed yet multi-faceted poem partly about our vicious uses of other species, a poem that goes on haunting like an appalling and guilt-exposing dream risen from the unconscious.

15

No, Page doesn't stay with conjured creatures, magical supra-senses, invisible presences, or secret names. Within her work, *Brazilian Journal* is the most overflowing and detailed contrast to her poems of inner vision. If her Brazilian experiences presented Page with phantasmagoric possibilities, the phantasmagoria was usually that of intensified everyday reality. In her poetry, too, the earthly often appears alongside the "visionary"; and sometimes the borders between the two seem to dissolve, and the distinction is very imperfect. In *The Glass Air: Selected Poems* next to the invisible presences poem, Page placed "Visitants," a poem about that most familiar bird, the pigeon. The poem doesn't change the pigeons into doves of peace or spirits; in the oaks they "stamp about like policemen," they are "voracious, gang-despoilers of the tree-tops." In the last line, after the birds vanish, the human witnesses are "left hungry in this wingless hush," and in retrospect the appearance of the pigeons seems more magical than banal. Still, "Visitants" remains a poem obviously different from "Invisible Presences," and a dialogue between the two creates a denser field of meanings than either could create on its own.

Imagine another dialogue, between "After Reading *Albino Pheasants*" and the much simpler, shorter poem following it in *The Glass Air*. "Star-Gazer" sees the "galaxy / italicized," and says "I have proof-read / and proof-read / the beautiful script." The final conclusion is: "There are no / errors." After the uncertainty, questioning, and efforts to defend imagination in "After Reading," this short poem may appear to be little but a declaration of the inherent rightness of nature, its unimprovable integrity as 100% matter. But Page's poem doesn't follow Dickinson's "811" in insisting that nature lies beyond language; it uses the convention of a "script" out there, and calls the poet a proof-reader. Complexities around the poem arise from questions like *Who is the poet to "proof-read" nature? How is she to declare it's error-free? Is the "script" perfect gibberish, or a perfect message, or something in between?*

16

"The Names of the Hare" is an anonymous Middle English poem modernized by Seamus Heaney. It includes what must be one of the most explosively adventurous lists in all poetry, a list composed of names for only one creature. If the author of the poem is anonymous, the hare is hardly that: Heaney's translation gives seventy-three names, including

> The stubble-stag, the long lugs,
> the stook-deer, the frisky legs,
> the wild one, the skipper,
> the hug-the-ground, the lurker,
> the race-the-wind, the skiver,
> the shag-the-hare, the hedge-squatter,
> the dew-hammer, the dew-hopper,
> the sit-tight, the grass-bounder,
> the jig-foot, the earth-sitter. . . .

Such varied naming hardly belongs only to Middle English poetry. Outside of poetry, just as species have regional variants, so do their names. In some cases, different names are used even in one area. For as long as I can remember I've heard the same bird referred to as Canada jay, grey jay, whiskey jack, and moose-bird. Such choices are healthy reminders that a name may be tentative, local, or random, and remains a far cry from identity.

My grandmother was a birdwatcher who encouraged my first birdwatching, but I don't recall ever feeling a need to pit her identification of species against an emotional appreciation of avian beauties and energies. She owned a copy of the 1917 magnum opus *Birds of America*, general editor T. Gilbert Pearson and consulting editor John Burroughs. One of the most engrossing, entertaining aspects of that book is its listing of "Other names," which reaches a comic plentitude that might've pleased the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*. The surf scoter, for instance, has been known as spectacle coot, blossom-billed coot, horse-head, patch-head, skunk-head, plaster-bill, morocco-jaw, goggle-nose, and snuff-taker; the woodcock, as blind snipe, big-eyes, night partridge, night peck, timber doodle, hookum pake, labrador twister, and bogsucker. And Pearson lists an astonishing *sixty-one* alternative names for the ruddy duck, including dumpling duck, deaf duck, fool duck, sleepy duck, tough-head, hickory-head, stiff-tail, stick-tail, sprig-tail, leather-back, lightwood-knot, paddy-whack, shot-pouch, stub-and-twist, and blatherskite.

" . . . for sure the kittiwake."
kittiwake=tarrock, pick-me-up, coddy-moddy.

17

The names in "The Names of the Hare" conclude with "the creature no one dares to name"—this, after seventy-two alternative names! The poem appeals partly to a hunter's perspective. It begins by stating that a man "will never be the better" of the hare unless he first lay down his staff or bow and "with this litany / with devotion and sincerity / . . . sing the praises of the hare." At the end, the hare itself is addressed with the wish that it "come to me dead / in either onion broth or bread," so it may seem that all the naming has only served as a hunter's ploy, even if the overall effect of the naming has been to celebrate the animal. There's no denying the facts of death and carnivorous hunger in the poem's final lines, and thus the poem keeps from being *simply* a song of praise. Anon. has brought together into one rich broth the glory and harmfulness of naming, its potential for description and blessing and its involvement in destruction and death.

18

"Birds were his element like air and not / her words for them—making them statues / setting them apart. . . ." Do words lose some of their Gorgon nature, have less ability to turn things into statues, when they vie with many other names to refer to the same thing? Is a label less a label when it's only one of many labels for the same thing? In one sense, yes, because the variety reminds us how ephemeral and local a name can be. But in another sense, no.

The mention of *Finnegans Wake* was a dead giveaway. I revel in the names listed in the Pearson book like a kid rolling in a pile of leaves or a Canadian tourist partying in the streets of Rio at Carnival time. Then I shouldn't forget that, admiring and amused by a human facility, I've experienced intoxication by names much more than appreciation of whatever avian details helped inspire the linguistic carnival. The names are then like gigantic signposts next to a nesting sparrow.

19

After the carnival, time for a more skeptical period . . .

A deep distrust of naming, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, has often been linked to idolatry. God gets defined as beyond definition and naming,

his name sometimes forbidden on human tongues or written out deliberately incomplete, as "G-d" or some such form. In our country, nobody has offered a more intelligent and generous-spirited amplification of this attitude than Tim Lilburn. In his essays and in his poetry collection *Moosewood Sandhills*, ex-Jesuit Lilburn dramatizes the need to swing constantly between adopting names and cancelling them. In his eyes, claims of knowing another species, of having the deer live "under its name," are forever false. In a TV documentary about him, Lilburn has said that the quality of "infinitude" traditionally applied to God actually belongs to all natural phenomena, each blade of grass, things complex far beyond our possible comprehension. As Lilburn writes in one of his essays: "behind these names, this veneer of intelligibility . . . that's where things live." In that light, we have to admit that a name—though sometimes it's all we have to start with—is a paltry thing compared to the unfathomable, never-half-perceived richness of what it points to.

20

Another danger of distinguishing and naming is that when they're pursued excessively the forest is lost for the trees, the ocean for the fish, the bird for its feathers. Page says in "This Frieze of Birds":

> . . . Rigidity supplies
> a just delineation
> of separates, divides
> crest, pinions, claws and eyes.
> No whole divides such rout.

In *The Tree*, Fowles warns of excessive hairsplitting that distracts us "from the total experience and total meaning of nature." He mentions a Victorian naturalist who studied twenty specimens of Dorset ferns that experts since have decided belong to only three species. The Victorian gent gave "each specimen some new sub-specific or varietal rank, as if they were unbaptized children and might all go to hell if they were not given individual names." (And yet, comically dogged and misled as the fern man may have been, I suspect there could be something oddly touching in him *if* his naming grew from an alertness to uniqueness, a desire to recognize what was individual about each specimen, not just each species.)

This road leads to the final stanza of Page's "After Rain":

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size

larger than seeing, unseduced by each
bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
so that the whole may toll,
its meaning shine
clear of the myriad images that still—
do what I will—encumber its pure line.

While these lines speak mostly in defence of the whole, they see the glimpses as bright, beautiful, seductive, not dull, cold, unattractive. At the end of the poem, for all the celebration of the "whole," I can't forget the many attractions described in the poem's earlier stanzas, including "glorious chlorophyll" and after-rain snails making "broderie anglaise from the cabbages, / chantilly from the choux-fleurs, tiny veils." The poet herself admits that, whatever she does to keep the whole pure, the reckless impurities of "myriad images" remain in her mind.

21

In *Brazilian Journal*, Page writes one day in February 1959:

> I am working on a very large canvas which will probably be called *Woman's Room*. Funny how some works demand titles—in fact, the whole business of naming is curious. A person you don't know—one you see on the street, for instance—is quite complete without a name. Looking at him I may register his beauty or lack of it, his manner of dressing, his possible employment. . . . But once you know a person, he has to have a name. He is incomplete without it.

Here Page suggests a commonsensically *practical* aspect to naming, our need for it if we want to go beyond fleeting encounters and passing glances.

When parents name their child, are they only trying to "own" it, or also trying to find an easy way of referring to it beyond "our child"? I could accept Fowles's statement that "Naming things is always implicitly categorizing them and therefore collecting them, attempting to own them" only with one large qualification: that a name can also be a sign of interest, a form of recognition, an element of respect. In my experience, people who don't know names for things in nature or care to learn them often simply don't see, hear, or otherwise notice the thing. When I hear a dark throaty rough-edged call in the woods and think "raven," the experience of hearing is vivified by having the name with which to picture the bird, from times when I *have* seen it. Sometimes I've found myself involuntarily saying "song sparrow," "nuthatch," or "raven" and surprised friends who then say they've heard nothing. If recalling a name can be a sort of possessive act, or a

flaunting of knowledge—some birders savour lists and statistics as much as some baseball fans—it can be much more than that. When a bird is heard but not seen, knowing the name helps bring an image of the bird to mind and lets you feel piercingly the proximity of another being, or even silently send off a kind of mental greeting to it, a feeling of gratitude simply that it is there.

When I hear a faint blurry nasal honk and think "nuthatch," I find it hard to agree with Hegel that by naming the animals in the Garden of Eden Adam "annihilated them in their existence as beings." A Robert Hass poem speaks of this notion that "a word is elegy to what it signifies." If words can be bombs, erasers, or subtractors, can't they also be pencils, pointers, gestures? Here's an alternative Eden myth: Adam named the beasts only when he began to see them, hear them, feel curious about them, and recognize them as fellow species. While exploitation would follow, that initial naming was a way of bringing images of animals into human consciousness, while recognizing the animals' existence beyond it.

22

But sometimes isn't "pointer" or "gesture" too neutral and innocuous to be accurate? We read of the explorer James Cook without thinking of kitchens, stoves, and cooking, but Page's poem "Cook's Mountains" is one of the clearest poems anywhere to show how a name for a thing can get inextricably balled up in our ways of perceiving it. Cook named a range in Australia "the Glass House Mountains." The poet relates how when a driver told her the name her view of the mountains was forever changed:

> And instantly they altered to become
> the sum of shape and name.
> Two strangenesses united into one
> more strange than either.
> Neither of us now
> remembers how they looked before they broke
> the light to fragments as the driver spoke.

In these lines Page doesn't seem to bemoan the effects of naming upon perception; Cook's naming isn't obviously seen as destructive or regrettable. She accepts the "Two strangenesses united into one," or even admires them.

But earlier and later in the poem, there's a subtly unsettling emphasis on the human vision of the landscape. The poem begins:

> By naming them he made them.
> They were there
> before he came
> but they were not the same.
> It was his gaze
> that glazed each one.
> He saw
> the Glass House Mountains in his glass.
> They shone.

The very first line can be read as startlingly abrupt, suggesting a violent overthrow of what the mountains were in themselves before Cook arrived. Then right away the poem undercuts too strict a belief in its first line by admitting that the mountains were there before their English observer, even if his naming would change later English viewers' experience of them (Aboriginal names for the mountains lie outside the scope of the poem; if the poem or one like it were written today, it might implicitly acknowledge the politics of disparate naming, the question of which and whose names prevail.) Page herself later continues the act of seeking out metaphors for the landscape—"Like mounds of mica, / hive-shaped hothouses, / mountains of mirrors glimmering"—and ends not with further views of the mountains but with an image of Cook "upon a deck / his tongue / silvered with paradox and metaphor." The mention of "Queensland" reminds us of the title; both it and "Cook's Mountains" are terms of ownership, like flags stuck in a landscape. Page's poem is hardly a poem of condemnation or protest, but with illuminating delicacy it encompasses both our marvelling over a union of place and name, and our questioning about what's lost in the process of naming.

23

So what happens to the unnamed son, the boy indifferent to naming and prone to dreamy reveries and feelings of kinship with birds, when he grows up? The poem concludes:

> Like every mother's boy he loved and hated
> smudging the future photograph she had,
> yet struggled within the frames of her eyes and then
> froze for her, the noted naturalist—
> her very affectionate and famous son.
> But when most surely in her grasp, his smile
> darting and enfolding her, his words:
> "Without my mother's help . . . " the dream occurred.

Dozens of flying things surrounded him
on a green terrace in the sun
and one by one
as if he held caresses in his palm
he caught them all and snapped and wrung their necks
brittle as little sticks.
Then through the bald, unfeathered air
and coldly as a man could walk
against a metal backdrop, he
bore down on her
and placed them in her wide maternal lap
and accurately said their names aloud:
woodpecker, sparrow, meadowlark, nuthatch.

In the brutal clarity of these lines, there's some sharp psychological sketching. Below its surface, the poem is ambiguous about how much active, domineering control the mother actually wielded over the boy. It's possible that he's driven less by her manipulations than by the guilt nagging inside himself; her "grasp" may be a grasp he feels more than she exerts. In one of the hardest ironies of the poem, he "froze for her," as if he suffered the same fate he imagined the birds suffering when her names threatened to turn them into statues.

The concluding nightmare brings back, in the famous adult, all the child's resentment. It would be wrong, I think, to say that in the dream the mother gets her just desserts and is shown the error of her ways, the murderous neck-wringing implicit in naming. We can hardly escape thoughts of a neurotic reliance of the son on his mother, a weakness in him that thwarts him from a deeper selfhood, his inability or unwillingness to realize something between the extremes of dry, spiritless taxonomy and a dreamy experience of nature that may show more detachment than engagement. Rather than presenting an anti-scientific view that naming merely kills, Page has written a packed-with-implication narrative that dramatizes two questionable approaches to nature, and leaves a more genuinely caring and enthusiastic approach in the wings. Such an approach emerges in other poems, and in *Brazilian Journal* with all the brilliance of a peacock's tail or a toucan's feathers.

24

Write a poem called "The Names of the Ruddy Duck," but with no hunter's soup at the end. Or write a glosa based on these four lines from "Cook's Mountains":

> And instantly they altered to become
> the sum of shape and name.
> Two strangenesses united into one
> more strange than either.

But "united into one" trips you up, because what is named keeps its separateness, its intransigence, its uncapturable "it"-ness. The debate goes on. A name is a hand, a cage, a bridge, a brand, a window . . . .

A Note on Sources: Some of the impetus for this essay came from discussion at a "Poetry and Ecology" symposium organized by Don McKay and Jan Zwicky at the University of New Brunswick in February 1996.

Most of the quotations from Page's poetry are from *The Glass Air: Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1985). Her glosas are found in *Hologram* (London, Ont.: Brick, 1994), "This Frieze of Birds" in *Cry Ararat! Poems New and Selected* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), and "Round Trip" in *As Ten, As Twenty* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948). Her prose is quoted from *Brazilian Journal* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987) and from the two prose pieces in *The Glass Air*. The critical comment on "Leather Jacket" is from Constance Rooke, "P. K. Page: The Chameleon and the Centre" (*The Malahat Review* 45, 1978). Page's own comment on that poem was heard on part II of *The White Glass*, a CBC *Ideas* documentary (by Ann Pollock) first broadcast in May 1996, later transcribed as part of "The White Glass III," *The Malahat Review* 177, 1996.

Dickinson's "811" can be found in Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little Brown, 1960); and the lines from Wordsworth, in J.C. Maxwell's parallel-text edition of *The Prelude* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981). "The Names of the Hare" is anthologized in Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, eds., *The Rattle Bag* (London: Faber, 1982), and the Robert Hass poem quoted is "Meditation at Lagunitas" from *Praise* (New York: Ecco, 1979). The sources of the quotations from Tim Lilburn are his poem "Learning a Deeper Courtesy of the Eye" in *Moosewood Sandhills* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994), his essay "Writing as a Ghostly Activity" (*The New Quarterly*, spring 1996), and the Vision TV documentary *How To Be Here*, first broadcast in January 1994.

For more "Other names," see T. Gilbert Pearson, ed., *Birds of America* (Garden City: Garden City Books, 1936). The sentence from Hegel appears in Gerald L. Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language* (New York: Yale UP, 1974). Other prose was drawn from A. S. Byatt, *Angels & Insects* (London: Vintage, 1992); John Fowles, *The Tree* (St. Albans: Sumach, 1979); and Czeslaw Milosz, *The Issa Valley*, trans. Louis Iribarne (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981).

Flight

dissolved
in ultramarine
dissolved in cobalt
thalo cerulean
thinned
with water or milk

my flesh
blue watered silk
my red blood blue
and blue my green
and utterly astonished
eyes

from "bird songs"

hummingbird song

there is a hummingbird
caught in my throat
waiting to taste
the sweet nectar
of your body
in full bloom

partridge song

come to me
my love
i am calling

hear my song
sweet one
i am drumming

in the reeds
dear one
i am waiting

come to me
my love
i am calling

Robert Bringhurst

Singing with the Frogs

1

In September 1996, a small group of poets, students and scholars met at Trent University, in Peterborough, Ontario, for what I think was the first colloquium ever held to address the practice of literary polyphony. Our hosts were Sean Kane and Stephen Brown. Our moderator was Stan Dragland. Our guest of honor was Dennis Lee. The other invited speakers and performers were Roo Borson, Kim Maltman, Don McKay, Jan Zwicky and Clare Goulet. Nine months later, I am still repeating some of the things I said there, still recanting others, and still learning what I learned.

The basic terms here—polyphony, monophony, homophony—are all names for musical phenomena, and music more than anything will teach us what they mean. All the arts are specialties, but all the arts are one. No branch will fruit for long when it is severed from the tree.

Polyphonic music is music in which two or more interrelated but independent statements are made at the same time, creating a statement that none of these statements makes on its own. The statements that are made may imitate each other (as they do in a canon or a fugue), or they may go their separate ways with one eye on each other (as they usually do in a motet). But they retain their independence either way. Their relation is that of coequals, not of musical servant and lord. That coequality is *why* what they say can exceed the sum of the parts.

Polyphony, in short, is singing more than one song, playing more than one tune, telling more than one story, at once. It is music that insists on multiplicity—instead of uniformity on the one side or chaos on the other.

Listening to two or three or four interrelated but independent melodies at once has an immediate effect. "You can see their minds expand!" Jan

Zwicky says—speaking as poet, violinist, teacher and philosopher all at once. Polyphony creates a kind of musical and intellectual space absent from music of all other kinds.

Playing separate melodies in sequence does not create polyphony. Playing one melody supported by accompaniment, no matter how complex, doesn't create polyphony either. Music that consists of one melody at once with its accompaniment—one statement at a time, with harmonic supports and defenses—is not polyphonic nor monophonic either. It is *homophonic* music.

There are polyphonic scores for modern dance and for ballet, but in the dance hall and ballroom sense, polyphony is not the stuff to dance to. Its multiplicity of statement interferes with the two stock themes of loneliness and fusion and with most of the other stock emotions pop music now conveys.

In fact, though it surrounds us all, many people living now have evidently never listened to polyphony. Much present music seems designed to drown it out instead of making it more audible. Most of what pours out of tape decks and radios now in every corner of the world—pop music, rock music, country music, twentieth-century folk music, opera, and most of the classical hit parade—is homophonic music. One melody sounds at a time, and is varied or developed or repeated over time, while all the other voices shore it up or hold its coat or hold its hand.

Most of the polyphonic repertoire in the European tradition is written for small ensembles of skilled singers, for chamber groups, and finally for soloists skilled enough with lute or keyboard to play two tunes at once. The greater part of this repertoire was written during the Renaissance. Its heyday ends where many people's sense of European musical history begins: with the work of J.S. Bach.

Polyphonic music and homophonic music are different in design, different in construction, and different in effect, though the boundary between them is frequently a wide and fuzzy line. It can be difficult to say precisely at which point a secondary voice asserts its independence or gives it up again—and yet the difference overall is one no listener can miss.

I have heard very intelligent people suggest that every poem is polyphonic—because a poem is a simultaneity of syntax, breath rhythm, speech rhythm, rhetoric, metaphor, the interplay of phonemes against morphemes, and all that. This isn't wrong, but it misses the point. An aria played on a solo violin is likewise a simultaneity of rhythm, intonation, musical syntax, dynamics, and so on. But that one melodic line, no matter how richly

intoned or inflected, does not create the perceptual space and the sense of multiplicity that real polyphony does. Roland Barthes obscures the point as well when he defines theatricality as *une véritable polyphonie informationelle.* Polyphony does not mean merely information density or information overload. It does not mean *une épaisseur de signes*, "a thickness [or stupidity] of signs," to borrow Barthes's deliberate phrase (1964: 258). It means a space-creating dance of insistent and persistent multiplicities. The fuel of polyphony is time, from which it makes the space it needs.

Polyphony, like other borrowed words—*color, surface, shadow, tempo, frame* and even *voice*—is certain to acquire new and different *shades* or *hues* of meaning as a literary term. But if we use the word too loosely, we may find we only use it when it's not the word we need. Then we will have to coin another to mean what it once meant—unless we lose its meaning too.

2

What is a polyphonic poem? It is a poem that is kin in some substantial way to polyphonic music. It is a cohabitation of voices. A poem that (to borrow two good verbs from Dennis Lee) *enacts* and *embodies* plurality and space as well as (or instead of) timelessness and unity. A poem in which what-is cannot forget its multiplicity. A poem in which no one—not the poet, not the reader, not the leader, and not God—holds homophonic sway.

The concepts of homophony and polyphony, and their underlying principles of harmony and counterpoint, are taught in every school around the world that teaches the European musical canon. But there are many more polyphonies than that. In Indonesia, India and Africa there are rich and deep indigenous traditions of polyphonic music. Inuit *katajjaq* (throat-song) is polyphonic too. What native North American music was like before the Europeans came is now not easy to find out, but the earliest recordings prove that it was often polyrhythmic. Much of it, in other words, was polyphonic music in which every voice but one is restricted to percussion. (Rhythmic more than melodic independence of the parts, according to Simha Arom, is the structural foundation of Central African polyphony as well.)

3

The "invention" of polyphony can be a problematic turn of phrase, like the "discovery" of America. It simply isn't true that either music or polyphony is confined to the human realm. The assertion that it is—still often made—

is all too reminiscent of the once-familiar claims that art and poetry or culture and morality are exclusively the property of city-dwelling Christians with a certain shade of skin.

Songbirds sing. That is fact and not a metaphor. They sing, and in the forest every morning, when a dozen or a hundred or a thousand individuals of six or ten or twenty different species sing at once, that is polyphonic music. What city dwellers frequently call "silence" is the ebb and flow of birdsong and the calls of hawks and ravens, marmots, pikas, deermice, singing voles, the drone of gnats and bees and bee flies, and the sounds of wind and rain and running water. The world is a polyphonic place. The polyphonic music and the polyphonic poetry and fiction humans make is an answer to that world. It is mimicry of what-is, as much as it is statements of what might be.

I am a rank amateur musician, with only a little experience playing jazz, European chamber work, and Indonesian gamelan. But night after night in Indonesia I have walked between the village, where the humans boomed and chirped with their bogglingly complex polyphonic tuned percussion, and the rice fields, where the frogs, just as earnestly and skillfully, were polyphonically croaking. Nothing but human arrogance allows us to insist that these activities be given different names. Bird songs, like human songs, are learned. They are cultural traditions. If some parameters of birdsong and frogsong are genetically preprogrammed in ways the string quartet, sonata and gamelan are not, so what? Bird *flight* too is genetically preprogrammed in ways that human flight is not. Does that entitle us to say that only we can really fly, and birds cannot?

If I'm allowed three musical wishes, two of them are these: I hope to learn to sing one half of a few *katajjait* myself; I also hope to meet the thinker from Pond Inlet (quoted but, alas, not named by Saladin d'Anglure) who said that humans learned the *sounds* of these songs from wild geese but learned the *meanings* of the sounds from the aurora.

4

Music, dancing, storytelling, poetry are means by which we can and do embrace and participate in being, not tricks by which we prove our independence from or our superiority to it. Intrinsically, I think, the more power-hungry forms of homophonic music shut the polyphonic truth of the world out. This seems to me the case regardless whether the power comes from an amplifier, an orchestra pit or a military band. And intrinsically, I think,

polyphonic literature and music acknowledge and celebrate plurality, simultaneity, the continuing coexistence of independent melodies and rhythms, points of view and trains of thought.

In homophonic music, lovely though some of it is, and written by geniuses, as some of it certainly is, only the leader has any substantial freedom of action. Melodies may follow one another, but they cannot coexist. Where the leader's voice leads, the accompanist's must follow. The laws of harmony demand that every tone or note or body have its own space or its own time or both. If two notes want the same space at the same time, the two must fuse and lose their independence, or one must move harmonically aside.

Polyphonic space is non-Newtonian or non-Aristotelian or both. In polyphonic art, two bodies can indeed occupy the same space at the same time without ceasing to be two. Two melodies, or three, or eight, can live their separate lives, with equal pay for equal work, and still eat at the same table and sleep in the same bed.

There are in consequence no polyphonic fanfares. Music played to celebrate the glory of the state or the triumph of the hero is always homophonic. But the equation is not simple. It is plainly not the case that every piece of homophonic music is politically unhealthy, nor that polyphonic music will put an end to war, religious bigotry or sexual oppression.

Most of the repertoire of Renaissance polyphony consists of musical settings of Christian texts. Many of these works are meditations on the trinity and on other enduring conundrums of coexistence: carnal and spiritual, sacred and secular, grief and forgiveness, weakness and strength, the church and the state. I would prefer a pagan polyphony—but that, after all, I am free to create, and I find the example of Christian polyphony quite helpful to that end.

I also cannot shake the sense that polyphonic literature, for me at least, is somehow now more urgent than polyphonic music. There is, I suppose, a simple reason for that: I see much more to speak of than to sing of in the self-entranced and self-destructive culture by which we are engulfed. Polyphony, like poetry, exists in many forms. Not all of it is sung; not all of it is lyric.

5

Literature, say Socrates and Plato and Archibald MacLeish and Northrop Frye, is absolutely mute. I say so too. I say it speaks but doesn't talk. It is the gestural, or musical, not verbal, use of words. Music is to literature as poetry is to prose, and each is, in its own way, eloquent and mute.

The difference between polyphonic literature and polyphonic music is that literature in general—dumb and untalkative though it is—speaks louder than it sings. The languages of music, like the languages of literature, have grammars, but the languages of literature have dictionaries too. No lexicon or thesaurus will tell you the meaning of C-sharp. That seems to me the only crucial difference between literature and music. Music is what literature becomes when it escapes from under the dictionary; literature is music that must wear that web of reference and that weight of definition almost everywhere it goes.

We are taught, of course, to write with a single pencil, in one voice at a time, the same way we are taught to speak and sing, because one mouth is all we have. If writing were *instrumental* rather than *vocal*—if we spoke with our two hands, the way musicians play the lute or the piano—we could write as a good lutenist or pianist can play: in two, and on occasion even three or four distinct voices at once.

But could we read it? Could we hear it? Trained musicians read motets and fugues with ease, and even nonmusicians learn to hear and sometimes understand them.

We have, in fact, a lot of practice hearing polyphonic speech. It surrounds us in the woods, and it surrounds us in the street and the café. It's what we hear wherever we can listen to the world. It's also what we hear where people speak with neither fealty nor fear, and where their speech is not drowned out by their machines.

If we wrote poetry the way Josquin des Prez and Nicolas Gombert—two masters of polyphony—wrote music, we could write for four or eight. The mind is *capable* of that plurality. We are capable of polyphonic thought and polyphonic speech, as polyphonic music proves. We are capable, that is, of multiplicity of mind in a healthy form. Why is it that the only multiplicity of mind in fashion now is a crippling disease? Polyphony made audible is music. Schizophrenia made audible is noise.

6

Cantata, sonata and toccata, like villanelle and sonnet, have become the names of forms. Some artists (Beethoven, Rilke) find them useful to dismantle and rebuild, while others find them useful to ignore. But the names point first of all not to differences in structure but to distinctions of instrumentation: *cantatas* to be sung; *sonatas* to be sounded (with such things as bows and horns); *toccatas* to be played by touching keys or valves or plucking

strings. Compositions of this kind for speaking voice, I guess, should be *parlatas*, but that is not a word I want to coin. I am happier, most of the time, thinking of language in instrumental and gestural terms. Sonata and toccata are incongruous terms for works that are meant to be spoken, yet these names suit me fine. Something Don McKay said at the Polyphony Colloquium helped me understand why this is so. I quote here from the short working paper he sent around to other participants just before the colloquium convened:

> I take it to be obvious to anyone who raises nose from book: language is completely inadequate to the real. . . .
>
> Poetry is language used with an awareness of the poverty of language. . . . Poetry remembers that language is shaped air; it remembers ashes to ashes, dust to dust, wind to wind; it knows we don't own what we know. It knows the world is, after all, unnameable, so it listens hard before it speaks, and wraps that listening into the linguistic act.

Dennis Lee, who plays a mean piano when he isn't writing poems, says that when he writes he feels the poem, or the cadence out of which the poem comes, largely in his forearms. One might think that a poet with a tactile or somatic sense of poetry would feel the poem in his mouth or in the fingers that he wraps around the pen. Perhaps some do. I think, myself, that poetry is a *langue sans parole*, sometimes disguised as pure *parole*. I think that I do not *write* poems at all. I think that I gesticulate with beakless lips and wave my stunted limbs.

7

In the twentieth century Hermann Broch, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky, William Gass and no doubt many others have knowingly embodied musical forms in their prose and their poems. Some have been drawn to the structural principles and techniques of string quartets and piano sonatas. Others—Joyce, Pound and Zukofsky, for instance—were attracted to the polyphonic structures of the fugue. How well they succeeded at composing polyphonic literature is a question I will sidestep for the moment. It is important to me that they tried. And it is important to me that composers reached for literary forms at the same time. Samuel Barber's *Essays for Orchestra* and Charles Ives's *Four Transcriptions from Emerson* are of a piece with T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Hermann Broch's big prose sonatas.

Unknown to these writers, the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin had decided in the 1920s that polyphony in literature begins with Dostoevsky. Bakhtin's brief book arguing this thesis was published in St Petersburg (then Leningrad) in 1929. Soon after that, Bakhtin was arrested and imprisoned, as Dostoevsky had been eighty years before. His reputation and his ideas vanished with him. But Bakhtin, like Dostoevsky, was saved by a reprieve. He published his book again, after heavy revision, in Moscow in 1963. By then, unknown to Bakhtin, the literary use of polyphonic structures was on many European artists' minds, and on the minds of other theorists as well. Claude Lévi-Strauss, to take an interesting example, had begun to teach his students that the structures of myth and of music were fundamentally the same. He attempted in particular to show that Native American myth is structurally akin to the classical music of Europe. He taught that European classical music shows what happens when the structures inherent in myth are denied, by the authority of the church or the iron law of reason, every chance to express themselves in words. The four thick volumes in which Lévi-Strauss unfolded this idea were published between 1964 and 1971.

Literary polyphony as Bakhtin understands it does not mean simultaneous multiple texts in the literal sense of the phrase. It means the continuous independence of the voices and viewpoints of the characters. We read their speeches and their dialogues line by line and voice by voice in sequence, but their visions live together in our heads, and their theses do not fuse. No final synthesis is attained. What Bakhtin sees in Dostoevsky

> is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather *a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,* combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (1973: 6-7; 1984: 6)

Bakhtin insists that this plurality is strictly nondramatic. He speaks of Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Balzac as precursors of Dostoevsky, but only the latter, he claims, created truly polyphonic literature—and polyphonic theatre, he claims, cannot exist. The theatre, he says,

> is by its very nature alien to genuine polyphony; drama may be multileveled, but it cannot contain *multiple worlds*; it permits only one, not several, systems of measurement. (1973: 41 / 1984: 34)

It is true and significant that polyphony differs from dialogue. I think, however, that Elizabethan plays with two or more distinct simultaneous plots are among the clearest and most important examples we have of literary

polyphony. And I think that admitting the existence of polyphony in Shakespeare takes nothing away from the richness of Dostoevsky's fiction.

Sometime in the 1930s, Bakhtin wrote another lengthy essay known as *Slovo v romane*, "Speech in the Novel." This has been translated, pretentiously, as "Discourse in the Novel," but *slovo* is an unpretentious word. A better rendering would be "How People Talk in Novels." Not that the essay is untroubled in the original by pretension of other kinds—for here again, Bakhtin insists that only the novel can be truly polyphonic.

> The world of poetry, no matter how many contradictions and insoluble conflicts the poet develops within it, is always illumined by one unitary and indisputable discourse. Contradictions, conflicts and doubts remain in the object, in thoughts, in living experiences—in short, in the subject matter—but they do not enter into the language itself. In poetry, even discourse about doubts must be cast in a discourse that cannot be doubted. (1975: 286 / 1981: 286)

It is hard to understand, reading statements such as this, how Bakhtin has remained so long the darling of contemporary criticism. It is true that he had little opportunity to read the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and none at all to read the poetry of Dennis Lee. That does not entirely absolve him of his arrogance in claiming no such poetry could possibly exist.

Doubt is not, in any case, the issue. The polyphonic structure of a mass or a chanson or a motet by the poet and composer Guillaume de Machaut or Josquin or Gombert does not require us to doubt a single word in any of its voices. What it does is enable us to hear and accept these voices all at once—and to hear what their simultaneity says that they don't say.

Polyphony is possible in poetry, drama, fiction, and in literary criticism too, though Bakhtin is no example. Like many Russian critics, he stakes out his position and argues it in fervent and combative and exclusionary terms. *Monologic* terms, as he himself would say. Even when praising and preaching polyphony, his practice is intensely homophonic.

8

A few Canadian poets and critics—Jan Zwicky and Northrop Frye are important examples—are or have been trained musicians. They have learned the word polyphony first-hand, in a practical rather than theoretical sense, and in its original, musical context. But the term was rarely used by anyone discussing Canadian literature, so far as I'm aware, before the end of the 1970s. It was then that Dennis Lee began to speak about

polyphony with his own peculiar twist. Both the subject and the word appear in his mock interview "Enacting a Meditation" (1979), and they are central to his essay "Polyphony: Enacting a Meditation" (a different work, despite the similarity in titles) which was published in 1982.

Lee does not demarcate and defend a theoretical position in his essay on polyphony. He accounts as best he can, as a working poet, for his own gut-level and deeper decisions. The result is more a spiritual confession than a literary manifesto, and it is all the more valuable for that. Now that there is a danger of polyphony becoming just another skilled procedure or technique—the hallmark of a Polyphonic School—Lee's fifteen-year-old hunches serve as powerful reminders of why a multiplicity of voices mattered in the first place.

> The discursive voice embodies one narrow human strain, of editorializing urbanity, and excludes all other currents in the speaker's makeup.
>
> But it is not just the speaker's personal nature which is straitened by this voice. People and wars and trees and multifarious aspirations all go de-selved, within a vocal range that cannot embody their indigenous tonalities. The whole world is shrunk down to a single repertorial wave-length. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> Polyphony is the art of orchestrating more than one voice across a work.
>
> The polyphonic shift from inflection to inflection, the clash and resonance of vocal timbres from one moment to the next, is what traces out the trajectory of a meditation.
>
> . . .
>
> The plot of a meditation is enacted by the shifting inflections of the meditative voice.
>
> . . .
>
> To write polyphonically is to contest 'poetry' as it is now written. Perhaps even to repudiate it altogether; to walk off that field, and try to find the real one. (Lee 1982: §§3–7)

Lee's writings on polyphony owe nothing to Bakhtin. One may ask how they could if Canada is really a free country, not a Stalinist regime. But polyphony for Lee, as for Bakhtin, is a matter of huge political import. The reason is laid bare in an earlier essay, "Cadence, Country, Silence," published in 1973. That essay rests in part on Lee's close reading of George Grant.

> The prime fact about my country as a public space is that in the last 25 years it has become an American colony . . . [and] in a colony, the simple act of writing becomes a problem to itself. (Lee 1973: 38)

The answer to this problem, as Lee knows, is not a revolution in which one voice ousts another. The answer is not to shift the prisoners from one

cell to the next. But what about a space in which the doors are all unlocked and there is no controlling voice? The polyphonic poem for Lee, like the polyphonic novel for Bakhtin, is a space in which to breathe, not just a space in which to speak. Polyphony, he says, "permits an openness to the textures of being which is, for me, the *sine qua non* of writing at all" (1985: 191).

Poets are not the only creatures who think and talk this way. A century ago—before Bakhtin began to hear a real ecology of voices in the novels of Dostoevsky—the biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) taught that the relation between any living thing and its environment is always contrapuntal. Polyphony in Uexküll's terms is the quintessential form of the relation between species: life is polyphonic; death is not.

Still, and again, the equation is not simple. It is not that a dominant voice is always bad and a plurality of voices always good. And multiplicity of voice as a spiritual goal is quite a different thing from multiplicity of voice as a technical device. That is why Lee's writings on polyphony are haunted by the ghost of Ezra Pound—who is, in Lee's understanding of the term, a great polyphonist himself.

> It was as if [Ezra Pound] could go into a room, with a little hammer; strike each particular thing; pick up the frequency it emitted—and register that directly onto the page. (Lee 1985: 206)

The Cantos, Lee admits, is a treasure house of voices. What appalls him is its pointillist, imperative technique. The only way from one voice to the next is to close your eyes and cling to the demented poet's shoulders while he makes another leap.

Demented or not, that method of construction is one Pound shared with many other artists. The shifts of voice in Béla Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin (Sz. 117), and in countless other works of modern music, are equally abrupt. Few poets or composers leap from voice to voice as agilely as Pound; few have his range; but the jump-cut may be the twentieth century's favorite artistic device.

Polyphony for Lee is a trajectory of voices, intuiting the grain of meditative space. One voice speaks at once, but in finding its trajectory, that voice actually *becomes* other voices as it goes. The self enacts its many selves, or is possessed by many selves, sliding or gliding more often than jumping from one to the next.

But Lee is also a musician, and musicians are familiar with sequential shifts

of voice. They call them *modulation,* not polyphony. Dostoevsky, writing to his brother in 1864, described his own procedure in precisely the same terms: as modulation. Why did Lee choose Bakhtin's loaded (maybe overloaded) word instead of Dostoevsky's? There are, I think, two reasons. First, the essential end result of Lee's shifts from voice to voice is not the shift itself but the accumulating whole, an ecology of voices, and a silent voice that arises from the others, speaking on its own of the plurality of being. Second, Lee's kind of modulation is not the conventional musical kind. It is not modulation from established key to key along an equal-tempered path. It consists of unpredictable, often incremental shifts of tone or voice instead.

That kind of modulation is found in music too, but in music as in literature, it lacks a proper name. It is close to being standard procedure in certain kinds of jazz and in some of the classical music of India. Anyone who listens to John Coltrane or old Ben Webster playing horn can learn to hear it. But in that tradition, no one writes it down—and at the moment, evidently, no one can. Those incremental shifts of voice and tone are musical phenomena for which we have no musical notation.

9

Up to now, we've been discussing *metaphorical* polyphony in literature: polyphonic thought confined within the bounds of monophonic speaking. In the poetry of Ezra Pound and Dennis Lee, and (if we accept Bakhtin's evaluation) in the novels of Dostoevsky, voices may accumulate and finally coexist within the reader's mind, but one voice at once is what confronts us on the page, and one voice at once is what we hear when the work is read aloud. Even in the plays of Shakespeare, one voice at once is what we read and what we usually hear, and for the greater part of any given play, the several plots unfold by turns.

There are, however, literary works in which the polyphonic structure is as literal and real as in any work of polyphonic music. At the risk of sounding like a partisan—and therefore like Bakhtin—I must say that the finest examples I know of true polyphony in literature happen to be Canadian-made. They are, of course, not present in any anthologies, nor are they taught in any conventional course in Canadian literature, yet they are known and admired by students and composers of polyphonic literature in Canada and abroad.

Glenn Gould's three so-called "documentaries"—*The Idea of North* (1967), *The Latecomers* (1969) and *The Quiet in the Land* (1977)—are known

collectively as the *Solitude Trilogy.* All these works are polyphonic through and through, but they are works for polyphonic speaking voices, not compositions written to be sung. They do not, in fact, exist except in the form of acoustic recordings. There are no written scores nor was there ever a coherent live performance. Scores and staged performances could both be created after the fact, but overdubbed and spliced magnetic tape is the real original medium.

The texts of the *Solitude Trilogy* are partly composed by Gould himself, partly contrived (by Gould's asking leading questions or creating situations which his microphone records), and partly found. But the found, contrived and custom-made components are laced with immense precision into stable compositions.

Gould played Bach throughout his life, but the polyphonic textures of the *Solitude Trilogy* are not Bach's textures. They are closer by far to the textures in Gould's own densely polyphonic String Quartet, published in 1957.

I didn't live in North America in 1967 nor in 1969, when the first two parts of the trilogy were broadcast. And I was somewhere in the bush at the time of the third. So I not only missed them all; I heard nothing about them. Entirely by accident, I was in Toronto in 1982, on the night Gould died—but all I knew about him then was that he was a master at elucidating Bach with a piano. In 1986, when the CBC recorded *The Blue Roofs of Japan*—a poem of mine scored for two simultaneous voices—Dennis Lee brought Gould's much more accomplished work to my attention. The only way to hear the trilogy then was acoustic samizdat: pirated tapes of the radio broadcasts, but these were not very hard to obtain. In the three or four years between *The Blue Roofs of Japan* and *The New World Suites,* I did a lot of listening. I began, then, to understand that Gould was the most colossally improbable of all Canadian poets—and that he was, more improbably still, one of the greatest. To say this is also, perhaps, to contest what "poetry" means. I use the word as I must, and not as a name for the quaint little versified or verse-like bursts of verbal nostalgia, amusement and confusion that pass without remark in oral cultures but in literate cultures often get written and printed.

10

For people like me, convinced not of the evil but of the impermanence and finally the irrelevance of industrial technology, the thought that full-fledged polyphonic literature might be dependant on the microphone, the tape deck and the splicing bar is not completely welcome. I am told that no such

worries haunted Gould, but they haunt me. I use the fancy tools when they're here, but only on condition that I live at least part-time in the older world, where I do my work without them.

There is a lot of metaphorical polyphony in the works of preindustrial oral poets—mythtelling poets in particular. A mythology never consists of a series of stories told in a fixed and tidy sequence. A mythology consists, like a science, of potentially innumerable stories that are present to the mind *all at once.* But is there any real and literal polyphonic literature in the preindustrial world, or do we have to go all the way back to the frogs and the songbirds to hear it?

I first learned the answer to this question from Roy Franklin Barton, a gifted anthropologist who died in 1947, leaving on his desk several nearly finished manuscripts based on his life among the Ifugao of northern Luzon.

The culture of the Ifugao, like the culture of their uphill neighbours the Ilongot, survived five centuries of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and American colonization in the Philippines, and at least half a century of autocolonization by the Filipinos themselves. It was irrevocably altered by the Second World War: the invasion of Luzon by the Japanese, then the American counter-invasion, then Filipino independence and the increased missionization and forced modernization that rapidly followed. A similar story can be told, with local variations, for a hundred languages and cultures dotting the Pacific, from the Solomon Islands to the Aleutians.

Barton saw the older culture of the Ifugao in its final years. He worked in Ifugaoland first in the 1920s, learned the language well, was there again for eight years in the 1930s, and was, to his subsequent regret, still there when the Japanese landed in 1941. In those days, according to Barton, there were "at least 1500 deities known by name, . . . divided into about 40 classes." With that many spirit-beings to name and a similarly rich oral literature used to invoke them, the Ifugao had evolved a practical means for telling a number of stories at once.

> Before the myth recitation begins, there is an allotment of the myths among the priests. At a mock-headfeast I saw in Bitu in 1937 over forty myths were recited by 16 priests. Each priest recites his myth simultaneously with the rest and when he has finished one myth, he begins another. The result is a babble in which the words are indistinguishable. Boys or youths sometimes snuggle alongside a priest, turn their ear to him alone so as to listen only to his myth and in this way begin their education for the priesthood. The Ifugao man who is not a priest is an exception.
>
> The myth recitation consists of short phrases barked out by the priest in two

> or three musical intonations—those of the young priest probably in a falsetto, those of an elderly priest in a deep rumble. If you should approach one of the little villages in which a myth recitation is going on, you would first hear a faint hum like that of swarming bees. As you come nearer, the hum would grow into a murmur and the murmur would grow into a roar like that of an approaching mob on the stage. Arriving in the village you would note that, despite the fact that [to a foreign ear] the stories were all being lost in a general jumble, there would nevertheless be an audience of women and children sitting underneath neighboring houses, gathered to listen. (Barton 1955: 6–7)

In the days before a feast, Barton says, he sometimes met the mythtellers sitting by the streams, talking with the water. Talking with the water, not lecturing the waves, was the favored method for training the voice. And some became particularly proud of their mythtelling skills and their voices.

> I have often noted that as a myth-recitation draws to an end, so that voices begin to drop out, some priests are timid and bring their recitations to a hurried close while others, bolder, contrive to prolong their myths, delighting in the chance of making a solo display of their voices and of their energy of recitation. (1955: 7)

It is too late now to hear those stories told as richly as they were in 1937, or to know how they were told 400 years before, or to cross-examine Barton, but I wonder if everyone there found the words as indistinguishable as he did. I think about those feasts among the rice fields now when I am listening to Gould and Josquin, and to Thomas Tallis's motet *Spem in alium,* for forty separate voices. I think about them too when I am listening to Orlando di Lasso's polyphonic setting of the penitential psalms, written about 1560, when the European ships were still discovering the harbours of North and South America, New Guinea, Indonesia, the Philippines—and when those who sailed on the ships were still just beginning to give lessons in the fear of God and the horror of man to half the peoples of the world. I think about the feasts, and I wonder if the words weren't perfectly clear, to those who knew them best, when they were still allowed to hear them.

The equation is not simple, but it holds. All truths are true: the ones that were, the ones that are, the ones we hear, the ones we don't, the ones that will be.

11

It would clarify the nature of polyphony in literature if we knew more precisely what it is not. It is not, on the one hand, monophony or monody: it is not a single voice, whether lyric or narrative, melodic or prosaic, discursive

or dramatic. It is also not homophony. But is there such a thing as homophony in literature? Are there literary works in which one voice leads and others strum the chords or otherwise supply harmonic background? Most songs (using the term in the popular sense) are that exactly. The singer sings the melody; the piano or guitar or orchestra or chorus does the backup. But song in this sense is a hybrid: verbal text coupled with musical composition. Are there any purely literary works that do the same? *The Blue Roofs of Japan* is as much homophonic as polyphonic, in my opinion, but Stan Dragland has pointed out to me a clearer and plainer example. It is found in James Reaney's chapbook *Twelve Letters to a Small Town* (1962).

Not all of Reaney's letters have epistolary form. The eighth is cast as a dialogue between a piano student and teacher. An exercise is set. The student is to play a homophonic composition whose theme is the four seasons. The teacher tries a standard pedagogical technique. She asks the student first to play the lefthand part (the accompaniment), then the righthand part (the melody), and then the two together. All this is written out, or acted out, in words. The accompaniment, because it is just an accompaniment, includes no independent statements. It is written in nonsentences. A brief example will do:

Bud bud budling
Bud bud budling
. . .
Leafy leafy leafy
Leaf leaf leaf . . . (Reaney 1962; cf. Dragland 1991: 37)

The melody is equally mundane, but it does make statements of a kind. That is, it is written in sentences. Such as:

The spring winds up the town
The spring winds up the town.

After trying out the two parts separately, the student plays them both. Accompaniment and melody go marching in two columns down the page. Reading the text aloud would take two voices, just as playing it, if we could, would take two hands. But one voice speaks the melody, the other speaks the harmony. One voice follows where the other leads.

There is, then, I think, a simple test for polyphony in literature, analogous to the test for its musical counterpart. These are the usual conditions:

(1) There are two or more voices, which are *or are made to seem* simultaneous. (In imitative polyphony, the voices say more or less the same thing, though they say it out of frequency and phase with one another and may contradict each other in other ways. In independent polyphony, there is not only more than one *voice*; there is more than one *text*. These may be in different languages and move at different tempi or otherwise diverge.)

(2) At least two of the voices could stand on their own. They have something to say as well as a voice in which to say it. In literary polyphony, this normally means that the voices are *written in sentences*. They aren't saying things such as *oompah oompah oompah* or *me too yes me too*.

(3) One voice may have many more words than another, but no voice really steals the show. There is no soloist, no star.

(4) A space is created by these voices, and the space is claimed by a dance or pattern or form. That form does not exist in any of the voices by itself, but it emerges from their conjunction.

12

Polyphony is not a literary or musical technique; it is a complex property of reality which any work of art can emphasize or minimize, or notice or ignore. Palestrina's polyphony is different from Carlo Gesualdo's, and both of these are different from Josquin's. We needn't be surprised if there are equally large differences in polyphonic practice in the literary world. Some of these differences are highly individual, and some are linked to genre. A mass is not a fugue. The Polyphony Colloquium at Trent confined itself to poetry and music, but some of the best polyphonic writing I have seen in recent years is polyphonic fiction.

I have not seen a novel or short story in which the reader is really expected to read more than one prose text at once. So all the polyphonic fiction I'm familiar with is, if you like, metaphorical polyphony. Some of it is nonetheless convincingly polyphonic. This again needn't come as a surprise. Metaphorical polyphony exists in music too. It represents, in fact, an eminent and durable musical tradition.

Metaphorical polyphony means using one voice skillfully enough to suggest the continuous presence of two or more. By alternating voices, a ventriloquist gives the illusion of speaking for two. Metaphorical polyphony

functions by similar means. Music for piano doesn't normally involve metaphorical polyphony. Two hands really can play two tunes at once. So can the lutenist's five right fingers while the others stop the strings. But one voice at once is technically the limit for a bowed string instrument—a violin, a cello, a viola. There are, nevertheless, three fugues in Bach's three sonatas for solo violin, and three corresponding fugues in Britten's three suites for solo cello. Bartók's sonata for solo violin includes a fugue as well. Each fugue has two voices, but the instrument it's written for has one. Each voice has to interrupt the other to be heard. The player has to shuffle back and forth between the voices, articulating each with clarity and force and continuity enough that both are heard—and both retain their independence. The voices interact without depending on each other. Polyphony is not the same as dialogue.

This again is polyphonic *thinking* embodied within monophonic *speaking*. Something similar occurs in plays like *Twelfth Night,* where two related plots unfold in alternating scenes.

Many of the stories of Guy Davenport are richly polyphonic in this sense. Several plots, threads or voices interweave. They may or may not touch at any point in the story. And just as in a Renaissance motet, one voice may be focussed on the sacred and another on the secular.

"The Meadow" is the first of several linked stories forming Davenport's sixth book of fiction, *The Jules Verne Steam Balloon* (1987). Three voices speak by turns here, in addition to the voices of the characters. The tenor voice is gleefully attentive to the sex life of several adolescents on a camping trip, unchaperoned. The bass—the cantus firmus—is a botanist, every bit as ardent in his way, who is noting in meticulous detail everything he can about the lives of flowering plants. The third voice—alto or soprano, I suppose—reports the actions of three very brainy, young and hyperactive angels known as Quark, Tumble and Buckeye. They are travelling by steam balloon, scouting out the scene and now and then reporting to a listener whose name we never learn.

What *happens* in the story? Not much more than happens in a song. But this is three songs. That is what happens. This is three songs sung together so they fit to make a fourth song, unlike any song a monophonic ear has ever heard.

In the elevated floor around the altar in the Baptistery at Pisa, something similar occurs. Laid in the mosaic are repeating sets of geometric lattices.

Each is built from four sets of fivefold interlocking figures. The pattern they create—a long organic crystal, orthoclastic and hexagonal in symmetry, shimmering in its two-dimensional bed—does not exist in any of the figures, sets or lattices themselves. It exists in their conjunction: there alone. I do not know the name of the artist who created this mosaic. It was not evidently Deotisalvi, the Baptistery architect, nor Guido da Como, who built the font. The Baptistery's records suggest that the elevated floor was built around the time the roof was closed, toward the end of the fourteenth century. If so, the mosaic was laid about the time Guillaume de Machaut was writing his equally crystalline motets, polyphonic songs and hockets, and his intricately geometric four-voice mass.

The coincidence of music, crystallography and fiction is nothing strange to Davenport, who in one of his stories calls one of Mozart's quartets (K 575) "a polyhedral fragrance of light."

13

Forms, and therefore meanings, are achieved through the conjunction of other forms and meanings. That principle is basic to biology and chemistry and physics and the history of art. In polyphonic structures, the conjunction is *nondestructive*. The component forms and meanings survive—within and beside and beneath and on top of the meanings and forms their conjunction creates.

Some of the oldest known artworks on the planet were rediscovered in December 1994 in a cave in the Ardèche—between the Rhône and the Cévennes in southern France. The site has since been named for one of the speleologists who found it, Jean-Marie Chauvet. If the published radiocarbon dates are correct, the paintings at Chauvet are 30,000 years of age: twice as old as the oldest dated paintings in Lascaux and Altamira.

There are a number of large murals in the cave. One of the most impressive, to judge from the reproductions (Chauvet et al 1996: 106–114), is the Lion Panel. Several dozen figures—lions, mammoths, bison, rhinoceros and horses—are rendered with great clarity in black, white and red on the undulating tawny limestone wall. The figures are in clusters. Patterns form where the outlines overlap. The result is both emphatically pictorial and powerfully abstract.

This is visual polyphony. It is the oldest known method for doing static, two-dimensional justice to moving forms in three-dimensional space. It

was displaced, as a basic method, at a later date by geometrical perspective. But geometrical perspective has no working counterpart in music. Polyphony, therefore, remains the fundamental means in music of creating and elucidating space. (And visual polyphony persists, even within the realm of perspectival painting. It remains, I think, the quintessential means of representing or embodying a quintessential fact: that forms can coexist, creating space, and forms are born where others intersect.)

The mind, say good ethologists, including Konrad Lorenz, is just as biologically explicable—as *natural,* that is—as any other organ, like the liver or the forepaw or the fin, and its phylogeny can be just as clearly traced. We learn to think—not just as individuals but as species, and as genera and families of species—by accumulating sensory experience of three-dimensional space. That experience is achieved by several means, including echolocation, binocular vision and voluntary motion. (Involuntary motion yields far less feedback information.) The mind, in fact, consists of abstract patterns formed from concrete sensory perceptions. A work of polyphonic art—the Lion Panel, for example—has better things to do than represent a mental state; it represents the ground of mind itself.

These days, when I think about Glenn Gould fitting voices into voices in a basement in Toronto, I also often think about the hunter-painter-gatherers who made the murals of Chauvet. I think the painters might have liked to hear the pianist-turned-poet play some Bach, and that the painters in their turn might have shown us quite a bit about the subtleties of polyphonic speaking.

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Clint Burnham

from "Buddyland"

its apparent if
the volte-face of the
holes in the hostel are wholely holey
hiding hail maries filtered thru Filter
a spastic rap oil seive
severe every Ward portrait overdetonated
Wurst meandering every Ting
eh *silent* partner?
a funcy soft-shoe in his sweat socks Onion.
She called her husband at work
and learnt he quit. Loach on
Trainspotting repeats Hoggart
on boys slouching in
mild bars. Get a tank of
infancy. Mars bars, snicker
somber souls on prozac. The
only sop-city we're allowed is
family but what do you do
with people who believed
that with a mall display
of houses for sale in the
valley children in the
pictures as if unintentional
postmodernism could save us.
What's on what's more disturbing
a large crowd or a waterbed.
Change the answering machine as soon as
possible after a divorce or funeral and he
drove east on Broadway or Bloor weeping a
push me pull you vehicle for his
sentiments felt she'd been ambushed,
bushwhacked. The house was studded
with rejected men. We heart dole
verses we heart the dole.
Marxist shits Turkish slackers.

Jeff Derksen

from *Jobber*

it moves to
a them, america's problem
with islands, suddenly
secular, so doctor
good dad bad dad
diplomacy, ownership
responsibilities of the
it's yours but you
don't deserve it, was
there supposed to be
the corresponding
physical effect, hard really
to believe in yourself
a self like silt
or salmon on
a ladder, or new
laddishness, welcome
rotarians, there goes my
vocabulary playing tricks
with my liver again, forced
air, hello walls
hello polyurethane
coated floors, is it
vintage silver lining
lead casing within
industrial standards, adrenal
dump, target
small as an arm
or a leg like a light
swinging from a willow
branch, super store
ethnic aisle, the farmer
farmed, a latin

howdy, are my pants
ready, spoon thing
I think, "trade irritant"
of nonplaces, run
at the cougar which
was a nice car, orange
hunting and fishing
etiquette optional
binoculars, I could be where
anywhere, north america

[. . . .]

          no unjust
desires just
mainly marketed hailings
of some simperings
I never had the chance
to "voice" that verb, grueling
cloud cover, photocopy with a photo
of a kitten affixed to
a pole, smouldering
so that my repression
can be documented
career moves, car
pools, so much
stucco, hate me less
loan me more, extreme
cold weather alert
for the economic underclass, toronto
the former, at these
prices no wonder, extremely
oral sexual

poetry, my last
dud, may contain
peanuts, a hostile call
from the census people, ruse
to recall, it's *down* the
computer is *down,* thus they
were bad and deserved
financial ruin, would you
recognize the public
sphere, hired to chop
the carrots for the
social occasions, if you didn't
already notice
we are a collective, trunked
and truncated, where is Mao
now, Mrs. played bass, gang
of legions, the density
of hate reserved
for families, family
found house sold
signs, nervous
automobiles populate
my city like inhabitants
before profit
was history

Thomas O'Grady

Advice from Milton Acorn

I

I have forgotten the first time I saw Milton Acorn: perhaps a knowing friend pointed him out to me on Kent Street or University Avenue; perhaps his visit to town had been remarked in *The Guardian* and I recognized him in the Confederation Centre library from a photograph. Perhaps he had even been interviewed on the local television news like the Great Antonio, a Samsonesque strongman who came to the Exhibition Grounds periodically during the 1960s to perform remarkable feats of might like pulling railway cars along a stretch of disused track. (Years later, working on the freight dock of a Charlottetown trucking firm, I learned that several lesser men could perform that Herculean—or Sisyphean—exercise with only the slightest incline to their advantage; but I remained impressed by Antonio and his ilk until the summer's evening I saw the khaki-clad Cuban Assassins, a wrestling tag team whose annual tour of the Maritimes usually took them to the Sportsplex in Sherwood, roll into a Ponderosa steakhouse to replenish the inner man: mere mortals after all.)

Disheveled and bedraggled, Milton Acorn was—in visual effect, at least—as much a "character" as Antonio (or as the altogether tousled Cuban Assassins, for that matter); and if I fail to recollect the first time I saw him, I am certain that I saw him for the last time, in 1981 or '82, across the licensed lounge of the landmark Charlottetown Hotel. Whispering—though not, alas, out of the reverence which some people afforded the People's Poet—I observed his presence to my companions. At that time I had read little more of Acorn's verse than the much-anthologized "I've Tasted My Blood," and literalist that I was, I struggled futilely to discover the relevance of that

poem—presumably about the poet's boyhood in Charlottetown between the World Wars—to my relatively comfortable upbringing in the Brighton district of the city three decades later.[1] Even metaphorically, my schoolboy adventures in the "meaner" streets of east-end Charlottetown—King Street and Lower Prince Street and Hillsborough Square, territory inhabited by many of my friends and classmates at St. Jean Elementary School—failed to affirm the poet's evocation of: "Playmates? I remember where their skulls roll!" (*Dig Up My Heart* 130). (A dozen years later, though, hearing of the death of one of those old friends—Capt. Jim DeCoste, killed while serving with the Canadian Forces/United Nations peacekeeping troops in Croatia—I could shudder at the lines "many and many / come up atom by atom / in the worm-casts of Europe.")

Maybe I was not sufficiently versed in verse to appreciate Milton Acorn; even today I wince when I read that unguarded passage in Stephen Dedalus' diary: "Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much. Not true. Have read little and understood less" (Joyce 248). With more deliberate hindsight, though, I think mostly that where Acorn was concerned I intuitively agreed with Lord Henry's insight in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

> A great poet, a really great poet, is the most unpoetical of all creatures. But inferior poets are absolutely fascinating. The worse their rhymes are, the more picturesque they look. The mere fact of having published a book of second-rate sonnets makes a man quite irresistible. He lives the poetry that he cannot write. The others write the poetry that they dare not realize. (71)

Obviously, Oscar Wilde knew—from the inside out—what he was speaking of. But in all fairness, does that description fit Milton Acorn? Was he *merely* picturesque? *Merely* a "character"? Was he—*is* he—less deserving of serious critical notice than of the sort of tragi-comical notoriety that (to my mind, at least) surrounded him during his later years when he had resettled on Prince Edward Island? Or does the accounting proffered by Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh—by all reports a *character* (at times even a caricature) himself—make a better fit?

> The poet is a poet outside his writing as I have often argued. He creates an oral tradition. He does something to people. I am not sure that that something is always good, for it is a disruptive, anarchic mentality which he awakens—and if we pursue him far enough we will be inclined to agree with Plato that the poet is a menace. ("From Monaghan to the Grand Canal" 256)

Certainly Milton Acorn's verse has an anarchy-arousing aspect to it: its strident political overtones, for example—issuing from not just a card-carrying

but a card-*waving* brand of Marxist-Leninist ideology—tend not so much to provoke thought as merely to . . . *provoke.* He admits this much himself in a poem like "To a Goddam Boss":

> You proffered me soft compliments when my hand was out
> for cash . . .
> After all, the workers' due . . . We can't live on air.
> Then you looked at me with a musing stare
> Saying, "Milt, why be so rash?
> This world's not going to crash.
> Why not stick to your lovely love poems
> Which would be welcome in the proudest homes?
> The trouble with you's you don't just jibe—you slash."
>
> If your system was so secure, why were you afraid?
> Asking for a gentler social criticism?
> Today, as for essentials, I've got it made;
> Don't bother coming back with your sad wisdom.
> How can you buy me now in these times when it's sung
> How I ripped lyric fragments from the devil's bloody tongue?
> (*Jackpine Sonnets* 34)

But possibly that "disruptive" potential was always there, even "outside his writing." For even out of the immediate literary limelight, Milton Acorn seemed hard not to *notice*; in fact, I am sure that long before I knew the man to see him, I actually *had* seen him, perhaps as early as the early 1970s on one of his visits to the Island, reading *The Globe & Mail* (or so I now suppose) on one of my weekly pilgrimages to the library to devour *The Hockey News.* And I suspect that most anecdotal recollections of Acorn by nostalgic Charlottetonians would take the form of a vignette involving a streeling figure making its distinctive way past Rogers' Hardware or Holman's or the Old Spain—the poet out to cadge a ride somewhere from the good-hearted men at City Cabs (to whom he dedicated his volume *Dig Up My Heart*). I wonder, though, if I am the only graduate of UPEI's class of '77 who noticed that Acorn, on stage in flowing academic regalia to receive an honorary degree (former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker gave the actual Convocation Address), observed the dignity of the occasion by complementing with red high-top basketball sneakers the People's Poet medal hanging around his neck.

To my mind, then, the notion of Milton Acorn as writer of poems was—and to some significant extent still is—inevitably complicated by my perception (and, I think, the general public reception) of him not simply as a

person who wrote poems but as a *persona* of sorts. Yet, just as inevitably, I have found myself turning and returning to Acorn's poems in recent years as I have begun to make my own commitment to writing poems—and have thus begun to reflect on the implications and the complications of being a Prince Edward Island poet. Whatever that means.

II

Whatever that means, indeed. When I, Island-born and -bred, scan the literary landscape of the only place I will ever call "home," I feel almost as if that gravitational pull, that centripetal force that draws uprooted and transplanted Islanders back in droves every summer has turned centrifugal, leaving me not even in transit toward but in dizzying elliptical orbit (sometimes near, sometimes far) around a foreign-seeming world. I feel displaced—almost lost. Or, more accurately, I feel literally at a loss for words: that is, for the words and the forms and the euphony—for the *poetry* that must surely belong to that place. Whether walking my boyhood streets of Charlottetown, its motley of public building and coffee shop façades changed and changing yet still so much the same, or standing stock-still among statuesque great blue herons on the russet sandbars of the south shore, whether racing along the pot-holed TransCanada for the first boat (in the good old days . . . before the Fixed Link) or sluing along a graveled byway like the Brothers Road, named for my maternal grandfather's grandfather, I am aware of—and have indelibly imprinted—that sense of place specificity articulated so suggestively by D. H. Lawrence:

> Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. ("The Spirit of Place" 5-6)

Of course, as a translation of *genius loci*, "spirit of place" originally alluded not to the peculiar atmosphere, ambiance and associations related to longitude and latitude or any other coordinating identifier but to the tutelary spirit—the *guardian*—of that place (and *thus* of that place's "spirit" in the sense that it is popularly referred to); and not just metaphorically but perhaps literally the poets and the fiction writers and the dramatists of a particular place are its "guardians"—the observers and the preservers of its past or its present, and possibly (allowing for the ancient concept of poet—

vates—as synonymous with "prophet") the predictors or the projectors or even the predicators of its future.

Where, then, are the literary guardians of my place? Where—more specifically—are the *poets* whom aspiring Prince Edward Island poets might look to as precursors for their own desire to sit like W. B. Yeats's bird upon the bough of Island life and register "what is past, or passing, or to come" ("Sailing to Byzantium" 194)? For better or for worse (depending on who you ask), Lucy Maud Montgomery has inscribed a very specific version of "Island life" in her enduring (and I think endearing) novel *Anne of Green Gables* and its various sequels and spin-offs. As a poet, however, Montgomery hardly inspires emulation as even her best-known piece of verse—"The Island Hymn"—endures primarily as a result of Faith McKenney's rendering of it (in the tradition of "My Old Kentucky Home") before the Gold Cup & Saucer harness race every August:

> Fair island of the sea,
> We raise our song to thee,
> The bright and blest.
> Loyally now we stand,
> As brothers hand in hand,
> And sing "God Save the Land"
> We love the best.

I memorized those lines in grade school—along with the words to "Farewell to Nova Scotia" and the Newfoundland sea shanty "Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor": an obvious regional bias to our learning. But the only piece that I can recall which resembled an actual *poem* was John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields"—composed by a Canadian (we were reminded yearly as Remembrance Day approached) but still not in any way exemplary of poetry's capacity to speak both to us and about us.

That is not to say that there have been no poems written on or about PEI by Islanders: in fact, both *The Poets of Prince Edward Island*, an anthology published in 1980, and its sequel, *The New Poets of Prince Edward Island*, published eleven years later, testify amply to poetic activity on the Island. Yet one effect of surveying that exact activity underscores what may be the crucial dilemma for the latter-day Islander with a poetic bent. For, the inevitably uneven "quality" of the selections aside, these collections seem to emphasize how *very* few Islanders, including those with entire volumes to their individual credit, could (or would) claim the writing of poems as a *vocation*—as a true and primary *calling* in life, an *essential* part of their

identity—rather than as a purely pleasurable avocation. In fact, no doubt contrary to editorial intentions, anthologies like these document not so much the flourishing of poetry on the Island but rather the utter absence of a poetic "tradition"—the virtually negligible role that poetry has played in the Island cultural landscape over the past two hundred years.

The reasons for this absence are surely various and complicated. But I think that one simple explanation may be found in—or behind—a piece like Montgomery's "The Island Hymn": that is, in the "ethic" that it evidently emerges from. For as much as *Anne of Green Gables* may lament, as social historian David Weale has argued persuasively ("'No Scope'" 3-8), how the Presbyterian culture which prevails in Montgomery's Island experience allows "no scope for imagination," Montgomery's verse itself seems firmly rooted in the very conventions of the hard-working, hard-praying society which her red-headed heroine would so blithely subvert. And yet as even those songmaking farmers Larry Gorman and Lawrence Doyle—celebrated products of Irish Catholic culture on the Island[2]—reflect, the Presbyterian ethic of Montgomery's Cavendish may be only a pronounced version of the general temperament of a people whose way of life, historically premised on strenuous labor on the land and on the sea, has not generally invited the cultivating and the harvesting of subtle poetic sensibilities. Perhaps Oscar Wilde knew—once again—what he was speaking of after all when, during his visit to PEI in 1882, he held forth upon the importance of "Decorative Arts" in everyday life: "we should strive to make our own age a romantic age," he declared to the restless crowd gathered in Charlottetown's Market Hall, advocating by way of attention to architectural detail a valuing of "the joy and loveliness that should come daily on eye and ear from a beautiful external world" ("Decorative Arts" 156-57).

Indeed, as one newspaper account of his lecture intimates, Wilde might have guessed from "the redolent smells of stale butter, eggs and cabbage" that awaited him in the merely functional market building that his message would be delivered in vain; and the exasperated remark offered from the floor by one *attentive* member of the self-distracting (and ultimately unconverted) audience that "two thirds of the young men of Charlottetown were rogues" ("Oscar came last evening . . ." 3) may offer insight into yet another—and perhaps more distinctly intrinsic—reason that the "decorative art" of poetry has had virtually no foundation on the Island. Undoubtedly, the impatient reaction to Oscar Wilde related to his flaunting of "aestheticism"

in its own right; probably, though, it had even more to do with his unabashed banking (international banking, no less) on personal notoriety—his hardly caring to discriminate between message and messenger—which would have been so much at odds with the social phenomenon prevalent on PEI that David Weale devotes a chapter to in his wonderfully observant book of Island codes and customs, *Them Times*: that is, the communal stigmatizing of so-called "Big Feelin'" which (until recent years, at least) served as governor on the ego-fueled engine of social pretension . . . or even of modestly vaulting ambition. As Weale describes it, this "tyranny of egalitarianism . . . produced a powerful disincentive to exceptionality of any kind":

> If you showed any serious inclination to rise above your station or do things differently, you were liable to feel the cold hand of community disapproval pulling you back down to where you belonged. And, if you persisted in your presumption, there would be many just waiting to see you crash so that they could celebrate your fall. (*Them Times* 57)

Looking back not much more than a decade, I can see close-up the workings of that "governor" in my allowing my barber to believe, summer after summer *for five years*, that I was unemployed—"on the pogey"—rather than letting on that I was in graduate school; and heaven help us if my teammates on the Servicemaster fastpitch softball team ever got wind—then *or* now—of the "rarefied air" of my "other world" beyond the leftfield fence. Looking back much further and wider, I can also imagine how for generation upon generation the stigma of "big feelin'" has arrested the development of virtually *every* form of original artistic expression on the Island—not just poetry, but fiction and drama, painting, dance, music . . . with the possible exception of the craft of the local fiddler. Thinking of just one example of that singular breed—my mother's uncle "Pearl" Brothers, who so indulged his passion for fiddle-playing (and its attendant temptations and vices) that he lost the family farm—I am inevitably reminded of John Tanner's description in Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* of how "The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for his living at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art" (61). Even adjusting the lens for hyperbole, I find it hard to locate such sanguine *commitment* to the art of poetry on Prince Edward Island: and from my perspective, the self-evident paucity of "big feelin'" poetic artists to serve as imaginative forebears—models, exemplars, guides—represents the dilemma of the *aspiring* PEI poet today.

III

Even in steadfast Avonlea—Lucy Maud Montgomery's fictionalized Cavendish—the romantic orphan Anne Shirley finds in the person of Diana Barry a "kindred spirit" (a phrase immortalized in the long-running stage musical version of *Anne of Green Gables*) to validate her belief in her "poetically" re-imagined world: the White Way of Delight, the Lake of Shining Waters, Lover's Lane, Willowmere, Violet Vale, the Birch Path. . . . How, though, does the would-be Island poet, with no kindred spirits, no ready tradition to engage with—to speak to, to respond to (whether to embrace or to reject)—even begin to imagine Prince Edward Island as valid or viable poetic territory? What is the effect of this relative isolation? On the one hand, the poet need not worry on the local level about T. S. Eliot's corollary concerning tradition and the individual talent:

> It is true that every supreme poet, classic or not, tends to exhaust the ground he cultivates, so that it must, after yielding a diminishing crop, finally be left in fallow for some generations.
>
> . . . Not only every great poet, but every genuine, though lesser poet, fulfils once for all some possibility of the language, and so leaves one possibility less for his successors. ("What Is a Classic?" 125)

On the other hand, if immune to any such "anxiety of influence," the Island poet may yet suffer from a deficiency of healthy and helpful *influence* pure and simple—or perhaps of reassuring *confluence*, its collateral relative. In either case, the symptoms are the same and may be recognized in a refrain familiar to virtually anyone who came of age on PEI in the 1970s. Who could forget how night after night without fail at 9:30 (or was it 10 o'clock?) the rarely varying "Canadian Content" lineup on the Island Hit Parade on CFCY radio—The Stampeders, Edward Bear, April Wine, Bachman Turner Overdrive—gave way without apparent irony to the evangelizing strains of "Back to the Bible! Back to the Bible! Back to the Word of God!" heralding the start of *The Family Bible Hour*? Who could forget how night after night for year after year Pastor Perry F. Rockwood insisted that with our help he would build his new Family Bible Center (in Don Mills, Ontario, as I recall) "without style and without debt"?

Without style and without debt, indeed. Or, causally, vice versa—for how, without accumulated artistic debt, can a hopeful poet with a conspicuous regional identity confidently display a refined artistic style? When even Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney (as one example) acknowledges how the

self-assured lyricism of a poet like fellow rural Ulsterman Patrick Kavanagh "gave you permission to dwell without cultural anxiety among the usual landmarks of your life" ("Placeless Heaven" 9), where can the innately dubious Prince Edward Islander look for similar poetic license (as it were) to have faith in the familiar, in the local, in—*truly*—one's home and native land? What voice of authority—and of authenticity—might entitle the upwardly yearning Island poet to test newly-fledged wings over the virtually untilled fields and uncharted seas of life on PEI? As the opening lines of "I, Milton Acorn" suggest, the answer seems obvious—or obvious enough:

> I, Milton Acorn, not at first aware
> That was my name and what I knew was life,
> Come from an Island to which I've often returned. . . .
> *(Dig Up My Heart* 148)

Certainly, more than a decade after his death, Milton Acorn—as both People's Poet and Governor General's Award winner the only Islander to achieve significant national recognition for poetry—prevails as the very *symbol* of poetic expression on PEI, with both a yearly festival and an annual poetry prize named for him. Given the absence of a poetic *tradition*, Acorn's posthumous prominence in the contemporary literary scene (to the degree that such exists) on the Island might even be described in terms of one of his more intriguing Island-based poems: "The Figure in the Landscape Made the Landscape." In fact, while reflecting his literal engagement with Island history and especially with landlord-tenant tensions and friction during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this poem—set in "Pre-Confederation, pre / Any moment you might wish to be in or not"—may actually provide an apt metaphor for Acorn's own wary awareness of the poet's tenuous "tenancy" on PEI. Imagining a painting of a beleaguered but resolute farmer, he writes:

> . . . He's never worked long
> Anytime in his life with his head always down.
> Always straightened for thirty seconds every five minutes
> To scan the landscape for any strange object,
> And as a vacation for maybe five seconds
> Bathing in its beauty like it was his own sweat.
> Islanders to this day retain this habit.
> *(Dig Up My Heart* 152-53)

Echoing the sentiment not only of the ultimately suspicious and fractious "I, Milton Acorn" but also of "If You're Stronghearted," another poem first

collected in the same volume, the Governor General's Award-winning *The Island Means Minago* (1975)—"If you're stronghearted put your ear to the ground / to hear the lilt and cut of soft voices / discussing enemy moves without fear" (*Dig Up My Heart* 150)—"The Figure in the Landscape Made the Landscape" surely resonates as more than merely a Marxist-Leninist reading of social and economic history on PEI.

One way or the other, even as a single poem it clearly (or clearly enough) speaks proverbial volumes about the extent—the *limits* as well as the range—of Milton Acorn's legacy for Island poets. As for the former, Acorn undeniably commands respect for the passion of his convictions—social, economic, literary: all political in their own ways. Presumably, his unequivocally stated belief that "The Craft of Poetry's the Art of War" (*Jackpine Sonnets* 29), made manifest in the defensive-aggressive stance of so many of his poems, reflects the combative spirit of the poet as private *person*, and as such may have served as his invocation to the Muse, allowing him in his early manhood off-Island to break the code of poetic silence which (I expect) he internalized during his Island boyhood. ("When my look leaked out / thru the moisture of youth," he writes in "Autobiography," "afraid they'd discover / it was really me, / I threw out a confusion of words" [*Dig Up My Heart* 187].) But the anger—frequently righteous, occasionally self-righteous—thus associated with Acorn's public *persona* as poet-about-town actually seems somewhat at odds with the more temperate "humor" that I at least associate with the Island; and in this respect his polemical pronouncement of poetry's bellicose nature, illustrated throughout "The Figure in the Landscape Made the Landscape," but presented with particular emphasis in his heavy-handed interpreting in the final line of the very contour of the land—"every part of it was laid out for war" (*Dig Up My Heart* 153)—may fall short as a reasonable manifesto for present and future Island poets.[3]

Yet in its attention to *detail*—the topographical accuracy of "the landscape rolling like a quilt," for example, as well as the recognizable actuality of Islanders' in-bred furtiveness—"The Figure in the Landscape Made the Landscape" inevitably recalls "The Island," a poem from a decade-and-a-half earlier which, unlike many of Acorn's Island-specific poems, speaks not just *about* but also *for* PEI in a potentially exemplary way:

> Since I'm Island-born home's as precise
> as if a mumbly old carpenter,
> shoulder-straps crossed wrong,

laid it out,
refigured to the last three-eighths of a shingle.

Nowhere that plough-cut worms
heal themselves in red loam;
spruces squat, skirts in sand;
or the stones of a river rattle its dark
tunnel under the elms,
is there a spot not measured by hands;
no direction I couldn't walk
to the wave-lined edge of home.

In the fanged jaws of the Gulf,
a red tongue.
Indians say a musical God
took up His brush and painted it;
named it, in His own language,
"The Island."
(*Dig Up My Heart* 52)

Written not long after Acorn had sold the tools of his first trade—carpentry—to commit himself unconditionally to the craft of poetry, this poem shares with so much of his verse an unabashed lyrical impulse: both the need and the capacity of the poet to locate his subject in intimate relation to himself. In this respect, it is no less bona fide an example of Acorn's voice and vision than even a signature piece like "I've Tasted My Blood." Yet in inscribing the Island not as expedient background for the poet's politics but as the experiential foreground of the poet as native Islander, it also self-evidently differs from many of his later, more contentious Island-grounded poems. In fact, "The Island" seems to exemplify Seamus Heaney's analysis in *The Place of Writing* of how poets most persuasively engage with place. Deriving metaphors from the schoolbook definition of *work*—"to work is to move a certain mass through a certain distance" (36)—and from Archimedes' claim that "he could move the world if he could find the right place to position his lever" (19), Heaney observes:

> In the case of poetry, the distance moved through is that which separates the historically and topographically situated place from the written place, the mass moved is one aspect of the writer's historical/biographical experience, and each becomes a factor of the other in the achieved work of art. The work of art, in other words, involves raising the historical record to a different power. (36)

Unquestionably, Milton Acorn has found in "The Island" the right spot for his lever. Bringing into compatible focus the calculating eye of the carpenter-

turned-poet and the nostalgic eye of the Islander-in-exile writing *home* ("writing home," as it were), he not only evokes but provokes—*sets into motion*—the "spirit of place" with an effect that not even the Great Antonio could match.

IV

Still, that is not to suggest that in epitomizing Milton Acorn's accomplishment as a poet writing "about" PEI "The Island" somehow invalidates the "instructive" potential of his more characteristic less moderate poems for current Island poets-in-waiting. Indeed, while such a poem may alleviate "cultural anxiety" about the Island as poetic subject, and thus may affirm any confluent, like-tempered appreciation of the Island's "vital effluence, vibration, chemical exhalation, polarity," Acorn's greatest influence may actually and simply involve his commitment to the writing of poems—Island-centered or not. Whatever else might be said of Milton Acorn, he obviously recognized his vocation—his *calling* in life—and he responded literally wholeheartedly. "I shall be Heartman—all heartmuscle!" he writes in the closing, title poem of *Dig Up My Heart*: "Strongest and of longest endurance / I've acted" (212). Reading and re-reading those lines, and looking back over the years to the last time I saw Milton Acorn in that hotel lounge in Charlottetown, I feel more than a twinge of regret for my puerile irreverence: if only I had known then as I do now my own aspirations as a Prince Edward Island poet—again, whatever that means.

If only, instead of whispering to my companions across a table strewn with glasses and peanuts and bottles of Schooner beer, I had gotten up the nerve to approach the People's Poet and ask his guidance. I wonder how Milton Acorn might have responded: what encouragement, what words of wisdom—or just of common sense—might he have given me? Perhaps he would have held forth about how "The Craft of Poetry's the Art of War." Perhaps he would have kept his counsel simple: "Assorted mottos are 'I call 'em as I see 'em.' Another immortal Irish word is 'Irish poets learn your trade / Sing whatever is well-made. . .'" (Wright, n.p. [1]). Or perhaps that born-and-bred Islander who has written poems *after Auden*, *after Brecht*, *after Hikmet*, would have mused at greater length on the legacy of that "big feelin'" poetic exemplar from another island (one renowned for its poets) and offered this . . .

ADVICE FROM MILTON ACORN

after Yeats

Island poets, ply your trade,
Take the measure, test the grade
Of lumbering life beneath your feet,
Lower Queen or Grafton Street,
A journeyman's job without blueprint,
Still in need of a level squint
Or a plumb bob weight strung along
A jackpine stud shored-up strong.
Next look east across the bridge—
White blossoms on a blood-red ridge!—
And reckon what hard labor yields
To a heart-shaped spade in muddy fields;
Or to rope-burned hands, salt-encrusted,
Their daily catch of lines entrusted
With hope that we, inscribed in verse,
Remain inimitable Islanders.

One motto that Milton Acorn probably would not subscribe to is the official one scrolled beneath the Prince Edward Island coat of arms: *Parva sub Ingenti*—"the small under the great." Picturing that coat of arms, however, and its widely visible version on the Island flag—a trio of diminutive oaks representing the province's three counties sheltered by a larger, acorn-laden tree emblematic of the Mother Country—I can retrieve from my uncatalogued store of boyhood memories two other "mottos" that might inform his legacy. For certain, the commemorative medallions distributed during the Fathers of Confederation centenary celebration in 1964 imprinted on an entire generation of PEI schoolchildren the grammatical archaism "They builded better than they knew." Allowing that more than three decades later my mind may be more inventive than retentive, I also associate with that memorable year a verse from an obscure poem, "Lines Written for a School Declamation" by early New England belletrist David Everett, from which budding poets of that generation—the literary successors of Milton Acorn—may well take heart: "Tall oaks from little acorns grow."

NOTES

1 Apparently Milton Acorn spent some of his early years first around the corner and then just up the street from where I grew up. I thus assume he has my neighborhood in mind when he refers disparagingly to "Boughton" in his autobiographical prose narrative "My Life as a Co-Adventurer": "To this day I never use the name of the Boughton district of Charlottetown as a noun. I use it as an adjective; and the noun is 'vermin'" (*Jackpine Sonnets* 90).

2 Folklorist Edward D. Ives has provided thorough accounts of the life and the times of each of these men in his books *Larry Gorman: The Man Who Made the Songs* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964) and *Lawrence Doyle, the farmer poet of Prince Edward Island: A study in local songmaking* (Orono, ME: University of Maine, 1971).

3 Taking a cue from Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney makes a distinction between mere poetic "craft"—the learned "skill of making"—and poetic "technique" that may begin to illuminate both the authority and the liabilities of Milton Acorn's poetry in this regard:

> Technique . . . involves not only a poet's way with words, his management of metre, rhythm and verbal texture; it involves also a definition of his stance towards life, a definition of his own reality. It involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art. ("Feeling Into Words" 47)

At times Acorn's poems suffer from a surplus of "his stance towards life"—suffer from the poet's apparent disinterest in accommodating the "definition of his own reality" to the engaging artifice of a well-crafted poem. Obviously, though, this dimension of Acorn's poetry both demands and deserves more detailed discussion than the present occasion allows.

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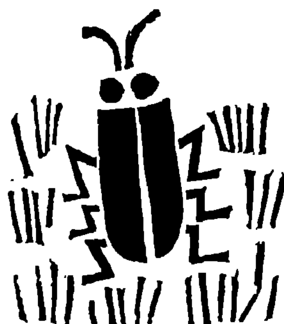

Be Safe
for Raymond Souster

First as thin shadows,
then silence,
the end of spring
joins our conversation.

In the halls of Ryerson
I ask about a visit,
you reply, saying no
in the sound of no students.

We go on, speaking of Toronto,
the one city I thought to ask
"How is Raymond? And the poems?"
Sun & dust cover the grey tiles.

In the halls of Ryerson
you talk about raking leaves
I see the gathering of an old year,
you in this city freeing new grass.

Our voices exchange a shift in volume:
Ralph Gustafson is dead.
You speak of illness, a wife not well,
the days when poetry was a cure.

Back in '43 with the wartime RCAF.
Back with Susi, at the Amusement Park.
Back with the $35 hand-operated mimeo.
You speak of the press heard in these halls.

In my hand I hold a quarter
like the one spent on this call,
a rare purchase of time, yours,
threatened by the incurable mystery.

There is what the doctors have said.
What they say when age is the virus.
I hear your boredom of this story
before the subject is changed to poets.

Acorn, well, the last time you two spoke,
he, like so often, drove the phone down.
And Layton, seems he's forgotten to call.
But Louis, good old Dudek, still writes.

What you pass on has become weight,
unsettling, heavy, like the pen in my pocket,
the silence in these lengthening halls
—we have made the most of a coin.

Terry Watada

Poetic *Karma*

Why do I write poetry? My father wrote *tanka* and was himself a great inspiration to me as he suffered his infirmities. After I lifted him into his wheelchair one day, he told me of a dream he had the night before. I turned it into the following poem:

> Last night I dreamed
> I was running, dragging the wind
> along with strong arms.[1]

My maternal grandfather, someone I had never met, also wrote poems throughout his life. Unfortunately, I only had five of them handed down to me. He had sent them to my mother in 1944 as a farewell gift to his youngest living daughter. He knew he was about to die.

Both these men, however, had little influence on my early efforts to write poetry. In the first place, I hadn't known they composed poems until I was in my thirties—a time when my mother thought it right that I should know something about the family. And secondly, I couldn't read their poems since they were written in Japanese, an ironic fact since it was the first language I learned.

Born to an immigrant family living in Toronto's east end, I was surrounded by love and working class concerns, all expressed in Japanese. Today, the "new" immigrant experience is common, but in the 1950s, I seemed to be a unique case, illustrated by the fact that I was the only one singled out to repeat kindergarten because of my lack of English.

Somehow I muddled through school, picking up English and discarding

Japanese, until I felt I was part of the "Canadian mainstream." I watched *The Flintstones* and ate Kellogg's *Frosted Flakes* to my heart's content. So it came as quite a shock when my grade twelve teacher took me aside to inquire about my family background. I was angry at his impertinence but I couldn't find the words or the courage to rebuff him. Instead, I told him about my parents. He paused and sighed a conclusion. Since English was not consistently spoken in the house, I could never hope to develop a competence in the language. I was shocked and felt more than a little disempowered.

At about the same time, I began to express myself creatively, mainly to find my place in a society in which I seemingly didn't belong. Because my teacher had shaken my confidence in my English skills, I decided to write verse. I mistakenly thought that poetry did not require complete control of spelling and syntax. I produced some pretty bad stuff, but I did find an effective outlet for my creative urges.

As time went on, I armed myself with grammar texts and writing courses on my way to an MA in English. I developed, as a result of my studies, an appreciation of poetics and so began to write poetry seriously.

Serious poetry but not good poetry. I became enthralled with the literary theories of Pound and Eliot. I admired the complexity of Wallace Stevens, the obscurity of James Joyce. I saw poetry as a collection of allusions, literary and historic, that was somehow to replicate poetically great movements of time and action. I appreciated the beauty of the language and the epiphanies created in the image, but I personally could not bring together the words to approach the erudite poetry of Pound, Eliot or Stevens, even though I must have convinced myself of how profound my work was.

It was not until I discovered my family heritage that I fully appreciated the role and purpose of poetry.

In 1980, my parents went to Japan as they did every twenty years or so. It was their last trip and they knew it. When they came back, my mother had an exciting story to tell me. She and dad had gone back to her village on the Sea of Japan side. Mom visited her older brother's wife, who was well into her eighties by that point. They sat for afternoon tea and, in the summer heat, my old aunt told my mother of Iwakichi Takehara, my grandfather.

Late in the nineteenth century, Japan was coming out of the feudal system with the rise of the middle class. Iwakichi was the second son of Bishop

Fujita, a prominent clergyman of a Shinto sect. Within a privileged and wealthy environment, he was taught literature and philosophy by the monks. He was apparently quite a good poet.

Japan was an agrarian society as well and families depended on having many sons to help with the planting and harvesting. If a family was "son poor," it was customary to adopt one from a "son rich" family. So it was that a rice farmer named Takehara approached the Bishop and asked to adopt his second son. He reasoned that the Bishop had his first son to be his successor and a third to carry on his name.

The Bishop was infuriated by the audacity of this peasant and dismissed him. Unbeknownst to him, however, Iwakichi had overheard the proposal. The young man of twenty was taken with the brashness of the peasant and surreptitiously met with him. He liked Takehara's irreverence and ambition for a better life. After the meeting, he made a life decision.

Iwakichi approached the Bishop and declared his intention of being adopted by the Takehara family. The Bishop must have been utterly dismayed. He warned his son of what he was giving up: his good name, any claim to inheritance, and most of all, a privileged life, full of study and luxury. He went on to tell of the hardship Iwakichi could expect in poverty. His son's hands were soft and not the hands of a labourer.

Iwakichi was undeterred. He said to his father that he wanted to work with his hands, to experience life. He boasted that he would make something of himself on his own: he would make the Takehara family rich.

What could the Bishop do? He allowed the adoption to take place.

Before he left, Iwakichi gathered together his books and went to a high point above the river next to the village. He shouted as if declaring to the Shinto gods that he no longer needed the books since he was to become a farmer. With an unceremonious heave, he tossed them into the river to be swept away to sea.

Iwakichi was as good as his word. He worked hard and expanded the farm to include lumbering and fishing. He in fact built up a fleet of boats. In the end, he was a wealthy man with a large estate, named *Genyo*, high above the village. Despite his repudiation of books, Iwakichi never forgot his upbringing; he remained a poet until his death.

One day in 1944, he gathered his family together and predicted that on a

certain day, at a certain time in February, he would die. No one believed him since he was in perfect health.

In the weeks remaining to him, he composed poems. He sent five to his youngest daughter who after moving from an internment camp in the interior of British Columbia was living with her own husband and son in a shack in Alberta. They were five poignant meditations on death. My mother said she knew after reading them her father was about to die.

> Death has no meaning for me,
> but when I give thought to the
> moment of death,
> I grow sad at the loss of
> warm family memories.[2]

According to my mother, Iwakichi Takehara died on the appointed day and hour.

The story was romantic and poetic, probably exaggerated for effect, but for me, everything fell into place. I recalled being in Japan in 1959 and everyone marvelling how I was the spitting image of my grandfather. It was my *karma* to be a poet, something which became painfully clear to me shortly after my mother died in 1984. In an outburst of grief, love and creativity, I expressed my mother's life in verse. It took about a week, and when I finished, I broke down in tears.

The long poem "A Thousand Homes" became the centrepiece of my first published collection.

Sometimes I dream of that 1959 trip to Japan. One incident in particular stays with me. On a busy day of aunts and relations preparing an evening feast, I wandered away from *Genyo* (it was still standing albeit worn down by time and lack of money) and came to a bridge above the river my grandfather had anointed with his books. Being eight years old, I began exploring it. I suddenly slipped and fell into the water ten feet below. The current immediately caught me and pushed me toward the sea with its dangerous undertow. Fortunately, an adult cousin walking beside the river on his way to his fishing boat saw me struggling and jumped in to rescue me. He wrapped me in his coat and took me to the house.

Back within the warmth of my family, I was scolded by my mother. An aunt then reminded her of the youngest sister. Back when they were all very

young, the household was busy preparing a welcome dinner for visiting *samurai* (tax collectors and minor government officials by this point in Japanese society). Iwakichi wanted to make a good show for them.

The youngest child, six years old, wandered away from *Genyo* and went to the same bridge over the river. It was after a prolonged rainstorm and so the river was angry with muddy water. The child began playing on the bridge and eventually fell to the depths below. She unfortunately had no cousin walking on the banks to save her. She disappeared without a trace.

The family was struck by the coincidence of circumstances. At the time, I didn't understand the significance of the events and, by extension, the writing, but I see now that the generational leaps in my family have brought me to what I am at present. I am my grandfather, my father, my aunts, my mother and it is my *karma* to live as they lived—as a poet.

A Simple Face

As I grow old
I look
        into the mirror
among the liquid images
to find my father's face
surfacing
from the silver depths

[moulded by a lumber
camp   survivor of the
internment   scarred by
a construction site
and instilled with father-
hood]

a simplicity fixed in love

november 1996

NOTES

1 Matsujiro Watada, "From a Wheelchair," *A Thousand Homes*, trans. T. Watada (Stratford: Mercury Press, 1995), p. 31.
2 Iwakichi Takehara, "Death has no meaning . . . ," *A Thousand Homes*, trans. T. Watada, p. 21.

Continuous Elegy
(An Introduction to Wang Wei)

Time's diction is a wave of self-immersion,
a declaration of the present in the hissing of the rain.
This statement, in a purely honorary time,
is neither meaningful, nor wholly meaningless,
and baffles my commentators,
so the point of that allusion, after all, is lost.
Shi shenme de yisi: "is-what's-meaning?"
as opposed to "meaning what?"
I envy that apparent clarity,
the brief transparent whiteness of a world
made visible by rain.
Now I see blossoms speeding in the woods,
the present as a sword.
Too late, I can only gesture at the moment's tomb.

Alexander Forbes

Warren Tallman

rumours reached us for years that
Ginsberg could be found in your house on
any afternoon, reading his poems to you while
Olson slept downstairs, projecting his breathlines

for you were a teacher good enough to be visited
by poets, and sometimes to be mistaken for one:

a reader of Whitman convincing enough to persuade a
listener ten feet away that you had a white beard,
though all the evidence was against it

and if you were peripheral to poetry you were no more distant than
an alcoholic father is to his children, for you drank with
poets long enough to become a necessary presence,
a thin face in the photographs of
Vancouver in the sixties

Tom Wayman

Why Profess What is Abhorred
The Rescue of Poetry

I

As I gathered up my papers at the end of class, a young man approached my desk. I was five weeks into teaching a freshman introduction to literature/composition course at a four-year college in the B.C. Interior. "Well, Tom," the student said. "You did the best you could."

His hand indicated my notes for the four-week-long unit on poetry we had just completed; we would begin a unit on short stories the next class. "But in spite of your efforts," the young man continued, "I haven't changed my mind. I still hate poetry."

How can anyone hate poetry? Do they hate sonnets, ballads, villanelles? Rhymed or unrhymed verse? Elizabethan, eighteenth-century, Victorian poets? Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Robert Creeley? Lyric, imagistic, conversational, language-centred techniques? Narrative or non-narrative strategies? Federico Garcia Lorca, Cesar Vallejo, Pablo Neruda? Sound poetry, concrete poetry, prose poetry? Gwendolyn MacEwen, Susan Musgrave, Erin Mouré? Aboriginal, South Asian, revolutionary, feminist, Rasta, work, black, Hispanic, Nuyorican (New York Puerto Rican) poems? Zbigniew Herbert, Tomas Tranströmer, Yehuda Amichai? Those Australian migrants: Thalia, Jeltje, π.O.?

The statement *I hate poetry,* which I hear in one form or another whenever I teach an introduction to literature class, is like claiming: "I hate music." Anybody can ferociously dislike Rap or Rachmaninoff, Country and Western or John Cage. But I've never heard someone completely dismiss any other form of cultural expression.

Nor are creative writing classes exempt. At the start of each post-secondary introductory creative writing class I teach I outline the genres we are going to cover. Inevitably in response I am informed: "Ugh. Not poetry. I hate poetry."

Why does this emotion arise? How is it perpetuated? In my collection of essays *A Country Not Considered: Canada, Culture, Work* I argue that one important origin for our attitudes to literature is our formal education "— since school is the only place most of us ever meet people whose job it is to try to show us the worth of literature" (30). What events occur in elementary, secondary and post-secondary classrooms to cause women and men to decide they detest an entire art form?

In my case, I was blessed with a few teachers who managed to communicate—at least to me—a deep affection for literature. This reinforced the enormous delight in poetry evinced by my father during my childhood. Although my father was a pulp mill chemist, he was passionate about reading, and reading aloud, English poets like A.E. Housman and Alfred Noyes, and Canadian poets like Wilfred Campbell and E. Pauline Johnson. Our house while I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s also contained well-worn editions of *contemporary* Canadian poets—F.R. Scott, Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney, Irving Layton, Miriam Waddington. The latest volumes by these and newer writers such as Eli Mandel, Al Purdy, and Leonard Cohen continually arrived.

The enthusiasm that my father and to a lesser extent my mother demonstrated for poetry convinced me that the art mattered, that it had a past, present and a future that held value. Constrasted to these beliefs was the dreary mechanistic attitude to poems taken by some teachers I encountered. In these classrooms, we were directed to closely examine lines for the sole purpose of ascertaining stress patterns and rhyme patterns in order to conclude whether a fragment of verse—irrespective of meaning or any other artistic consideration—was trochaic or anapestic, whether rhyme schemes were ABBA or ABAB or LSMFT. And even in university, many instructors insisted on one correct interpretation of ambiguous sections or whole poems: all other possible readings were decreed null and void. Studying poetry thus was like auto shop or the rifle disassembly/assembly drill in army cadets. Full marks were obtainable if you could name the parts correctly as you took the apparatus apart, and full marks were assigned if you could follow the approved method of reattaching the pieces speedily back into working order. The only difference was that a reassembled poem

could not fire a bullet, any more than the poem could be driven someplace. Instead, the lines of words squatted inertly on their white page, blanketed literally or metaphorically with comments superimposed in red pencil. A distorted, hideous thing.

My discussions with my current students lead me to conclude that for the *majority* my worst experiences match their recent interactions with poetry in institutions of learning. During early adolescence these students often sought to express their feelings about their emerging selves in a free-form style of writing they called poetry. At times the lyrics of certain popular songs, the words bolstered by effects generated by the accompanying music, speak to them with unusual force or meaning. Yet encounters like these that suggest the incipient power of words presented in a non-prose format are light-years distant from the way poetry was inflicted on them in school.

Exposure to poetry was used as a measure against which the student was pronounced stupid, unimaginative, a failure. Who would not hate an activity or artifact that authority utilizes to brand us with these labels? Formal schooling in many subjects frequently diminishes a student's self-respect in this manner. Mathematics, history, science classes can be taught so as to primarily instruct us that we are brainless, lazy, worthless. Yet at least in these subjects the teacher can indicate how our shortcomings in these fields will have direct and dire consequences in adult life: these areas of instruction are clearly necessary to succeed on many jobs, or to comprehend what is happening in the world in which we are supposed to be citizens. But poetry? Why are we made to feel badly about ourselves over a subject which no instructor bothers to even *try* to claim has the slightest use outside of school? We can grudgingly admit that we cannot escape the influence on our lives of biology, physics, geography—regardless of how badly taught in school, and of how our reaction to that pedagogy may have damaged our self-esteem. But if there is one subject in which we were pronounced incompetent on which we can *afford* afterwards to vent our anger and dismay at how school labelled us, that subject is poetry. Like any powerless minority lacking status in the larger world, poetry is the perfect receptacle for our rage and frustration, is safe to despise, loathe, abhor.

As a poet, I am not happy with the present situation. Can poetry be taught so that it is not detested, not asked to bear the sins of mass public education? After all, a hatred of poetry does not even restore the self-respect of the despiser. Rather, this abhorrence when expressed serves as a restatement or

reminder of the perceived inadequacies of the person uttering the emotion. So this venting reinforces the pattern that equates the art form with a poor self-image. And the expression of this dislike obviously does poetry no good.

I believe effective change proceeds from root causes of inappropriate or inadequate behavior. We have to ask, then, two radical questions. First: what do we teach poetry *for*? That is, what is our *aim* in including poetry as part of the English curriculum at any level? The second question is: what do we teach *poetry* for? In an era when poetry is a thoroughly marginalized art form, what positive contribution can a poem make to human existence? Whatever poetry's usefulness to society might have been in the past, why seek to encompass the art now in our educational system? My two main questions here are obviously interrelated, although I will consider them in sequence.

II

When I walk into a classroom to instruct people about poetry, what should my intention be? I am convinced that my achievement as an instructor must be judged by whether those who experience my pedagogy leave the class with a love of the art. According to this standard, the student I refer to at the start of this article represents a defeat on my part. But ideally any material I introduce to my students, or any artistic technique I draw to their attention or expect them to become proficient in understanding and describing, will contribute to initiating or affirming an *affection* on their part toward poetry.

I want the students to emerge from the class as enlightened amateur readers of poetry: amateur, where the word means "lover of." Even when we teach creative writing, educational administrators and others are often startled when I insist that our fundamental goal is to produce careful, knowledgeable *readers* rather than professional writers. How much more true is this for the instruction of poetry. Upwards of 98 per cent of those we teach will never become professional critics of poetry (or become poets). So our pedagogy must be shaped toward this reality.

Just as very few students in the fine arts will continue on to become professional painters or sculptors, and just as few people who take guitar lessons will become professional rock or classical guitarists, so the overwhelming majority of those we instruct in our poetry classes will not embark on a career as professional responders to—or writers of—poetry. The foremost objective of our teaching consequently must be to produce an interested and informed *audience* for poetry.

The foundation of any curriculum in poetry should be to provide students with a wide exposure to examples of the art—whatever the historical era or theme or other focus of the course. Students then need to be encouraged, in as open an atmosphere as possible, to articulate and defend their responses to these poems. This goal requires that the student have the tools with which to examine their own reaction to a poem. Students also need the tools to successfully communicate that response to others. The student has to be able to show—not just tell—others why she or he responds as she or he does to a poem (and thus defend her or his reaction). These same analytic skills allow students to thoroughly absorb lessons gathered from their reading, or from hearing the comments of classmates or the instructor about such poems. The student can then more readily adapt or incorporate these lessons into her or his appreciation of the art.

A poetry curriculum therefore must involve a safe, supportive, and informed environment in which students can critique the writing of contemporary or historical authors as well as the response of other class members to these poems. By so doing, the student excercises and refines skills in thinking, writing and reading.

At the very least, a course in poetry should not leave students with a dislike—or *increased* dislike—of the art form. What conceivable use can such a pedagogical outcome be? Yet at present this is the curriculum's net effect on most students. How does this result help the student? Help the art form? Help the arts or humanities or the community or any larger reality or abstraction? To me, a course of studies in poetry instead should improve the student's ability to recognize and enjoy the subtleties as well as the more evident achievements of the art. The student should discover or further augment within himself or herself an awareness of the power of the written word to describe and even to initiate ideas and emotions. The result of the course's accomplishments should be a feeling of pleasurable wonder at what the human race, via this art form—via *words*—has wrought.

I believe that the negative reaction to poetry created by pedagogies employed today arises from a different, unstated curriculum objective: to develop professional critics. My teaching experience convinces me that unless students understand why this or that critical method *enhances* their delight in an art form, the application of any critical theory becomes an exercise in drudgery, in irrelevant make-work. Inculcating and/or preserving a love of poetry must be the intent of any application of critical thought

to the art. The danger in proceeding otherwise is that as each new generation of teachers at any level is trained, these men and women are trained to dislike or despise poetry and poets.

I have certainly witnessed firsthand the consequence of the existing pedagogy not only as a student but as an instructor. B.C. Interior colleges during the past decade have suffered an inflow of new English PhDs produced in graduate seminars that appear to be steeped in either vicious competitiveness or competitive viciousness. Far from producing teachers with a love of the art or the artists in their chosen field, these graduate schools unleash new instructors who behave very much like abused children. Smarting from some series of crushing blows to their self-esteem, the new professors seek to vent their anger on any target they deem powerless—from their hapless students to any colleague they conclude is vulnerable to some form of academic scorn or punishment. Supersaturated themselves with the jargon of the critical stance favored at their alma mater—a jargon which will date the would-be scholars more rapidly than they imagine—these instructors attempt to drench any and all within their academic reach with a language comprehensible only to a highly specialized few. The effect of such behavior on anyone's appreciation of the art form they supposedly profess is no factor for consideration. I can recall one newly-minted colleague spluttering in opposition to a curriculum proposal, opining that the suggested approach was wrong because it "would privilege the writer over the critic." Multiply such comments by a thousand and you can imagine the atmosphere in which poetry continues to be studied in many classrooms.

So bitter is the environment generated by the latest generation of PhDs that it affects not only the future of poetry but that of the English departments in which these hurting and hurtful men and women find themselves employed. I know of one B.C. Interior department which as a last resort recently sought en masse professional counselling. Since the departmental vote to seek such help was 21 to 7, I am dubious about the ultimate results of this initiative.

Despite such developments, I retain my belief in a syllabus whose goal is to achieve and sustain a love for poetry. As I note above, central to this pedagogical approach is to familiarize students with the broadest possible scope of the art. Regardless of how a course is organized—historically, thematically, or concentrating on technique—the aim here is to ensure that a student does not conclude poetry inhabits only a narrow band of the art's actual

spectrum. The more expansive the student's exposure to poetry is, the more likely the work of some poet will engage the sensibilities of the student.

The women's movement, the new self-consciousness of various minorities, the increased attention to literary translation all have helped make available poetries supplementary to the established canon. A revelation of the full literary context—historical or modern—in which a poet plied her or his art also helps illustrate for the student poetry's immense range.

This need to impress upon students the multifariousness of poetry is subverted, however, by the standard teaching anthology. With rare exceptions, teaching anthologies are generated from existing anthologies rather than from primary source research. As a result, the same set pieces tend to appear over and over. This selection process shrinks poetry to a smaller presence than that required to improve the current circumstances of the art. Anthology editors would claim they are distilling the essence of poetry; I would propose they are desiccating poetry. The endlessly-taught "important" poems become the clichés of teaching: the original power of the poet's expression wears extremely thin after far-too-frequent repetition in classroom after classroom.

Finding alternatives or supplements to the teaching anthology of course involves skill and ingenuity. Technically, the photocopier is an instructor's chief ally in the rescue of poetry (although somewhat threatened by the federal government's new misguided copyright provisions). Also, where the syllabus permits, assigning as a text an entire book by a local writer, or by an author who will be reading in the community or school during the semester, is another means to boost students' awareness of poetry's rich texture and extent.

Discovering *what* to photocopy or assign remains a vital task for teachers wishing to adopt new materials. Obviously if an instructor hates poetry herself or himself, such professional development will be regarded with distaste. I fear in a great many cases this is another result of our existing pedagogy. And if a teacher has been persuaded by his or her own wretched experiences in school that she or he is unable to discern value in any poem not previously approved by others, such a teacher also is unlikely to choose material that will effectively inspire delight or affection in students.

For those with enough self-confidence in their enjoyment of the art to seek fresh poems, at present only a wide reading with an open mind can provide pedagogically useful examples of writing. I would like to see a more formal expansion of the informal sharing of teachable poems that exists among poetry-friendly colleagues who already know each other. Some form

of mandatory continuing education in the pedagogy of literature could serve in a more organized way to provide teachers at all levels with a source of poetries that work well in the classroom to ignite a love of the art in students. This requirement might reinforce the concept that instructors need to expand their pegagogical repertoire throughout their careers in order to continually improve their teaching. Or maybe upgrading should be mandatory only in subject areas where present teaching styles and syllabuses produce demonstrably negative results, as with poetry.

III

Yet, whatever our pedagogical goal, why bother teaching poetry at all? Given that time is at a premium in our educational process, why is poetry a fit subject when the art's current marginal status is attested to by various measurable standards? For instance, small press publishers have complained to me that whereas 30 years ago a new collection of poems by a Canadian author routinely sold a pitiful 1,200 copies, a similar book these days is lucky to sell 500. And this despite a surge in the size of the population, and three decades of phenomenal growth in post-secondary institutions—each of which makes literature courses a requirement for a degree. To the mystification and shame of my colleagues who teach creative writing, during this same period the number of graduates from our programs in imaginative writing also has escalated, without affecting these sad statistics. Even in the U.S., if books by contemporary poets sell more readily, the authors almost invariably are known to the public for having achieved celebrity in other fields: as novelists—Margaret Atwood, for example; or as musicians—Leonard Cohen; or as incarnations of cultural postures or concepts—Sylvia Plath as tormented genius/woman-as-victim, or Robert Bly as a founder of the men's movement.

One societal trend at the dawn of the new millennium is for us more frequently to be spectators instead of participants in our life—to be listeners to music, for instance, rather than singers or performers ourselves. In accordance with this development, I encounter less and less frequently people who enjoy the memorization and recitation of poems. The generation that delighted in knowing by heart Robert Burns or Robert W. Service is vanishing, and is not being replaced. Nor is verse by other poets committed to memory by such an extensive cross section of people as once could recite work by these two bards. Where attraction to types of poetry among a

larger population has recently surfaced—for example, cowboy poetry, or the poetry competitions known as "slams," or Rap with its insistent rhyming couplets—these forms of the art with greater appeal are primarily oral. Plus, the basis for the more widespread response to these manifestations of poetry is spectacle—consumption of a public performance. With rare exceptions, these versions of the art do not repay close reading; whenever the verse is considered outside of the spectacle (or in the case of popular music, when separated from the musical accompaniment), the words' emotional power weakens noticeably or disappears. Books by these poets, or by poetry performance artists, do not sell in significant numbers. This is not art one takes home in written form.

The Internet is sometimes lauded as the locale of a renaissance of interest in publishing poetry. As nearly as I can ascertain, though, the establishment of electronic magazines and the enormous opportunity for self-publishing that the 'Net offers remains a matter of "give" rather than "get." Staring into a cathode ray tube is a notoriously stressful way to receive information of any kind. I have never experienced and cannot imagine reading for pleasure from a monitor screen. Downloading writing from the 'Net, printing it off, and then attempting to read it offers more benign possibilities. But a sheaf of printer paper is in effect an unbound book: a loose collection of sheets, and of an awkward size with regard to portability or ease of perusal. Although I am in close contact with a number of fellow writers, teaching colleagues and students who are 'Net afficionados, I have never yet heard a single one recommend enthusiastically a *poem* they discovered on the 'Net. These 'Net surfers frequently are excited and fascinated by *information* they glean among the electrons. The literature posted at so many sites, though, seems to be scanned simply *as* information, in the 'Net users' characteristic coasting and skipping over the endlessly unscrolling acres of words in search of a jolt, a charge, some astonishment.

Body hunched forward, face inches from a screen, does not appear to be a posture conducive to a leisurely and careful reading of a literary text. The 'Net may well serve as the depository for poems which formerly the lonely and socially inept consigned to their desk drawer. But of all the literary arts, poetry least rewards the act of browsing, and browsing is the quintessential human interaction with the Internet.

So if poetry today is firmly marginalized, why involve it in our curriculums? My answer originates with the rapt expression of wonder and joy I

encounter each term when a student truly connects with a poem. "Wow," the student will effuse, "I didn't know a poem could be about this." Or: "This poem really touched me in a way I haven't felt before." A power exists in these words that completes an emotional circuit between author and reader.

Certain assemblages of words we call poems succeed beyond question at bridging the core solitude of human existence. Each of us is alive in a fleshly and perishable body, linked however tenuously to family and community, to a social past and present, and still each of us labors basically alone to experience and process our life. What *relief*—for surely that is the root of the exhilaration we feel when a work of art overwhelms us—to sense that another human voice possesses the ability to stir us, to reach the ear or eye of our innermost being. We are buried alive in our own personality, but from time to time a poem or sculpture or painting is able to speak reassuringly, wisely, disturbingly, lovingly about the human adventure we share.

Meaningful art is a profound act of solidarity: a declaration, via the artist's wish to communicate her or his vision to me, of my essential participation in the human story. Just as a tree heard to fall in the forest confirms the sound that event causes, so my acknowledgement of a specific poem's efficacy at engaging me validates the poet's imagination and toil. And where a literary artifact successfully achieves the transfer of an emotional or intellectual stimulation from the author to me, I have enriched my life. As long as a poem is able to enhance a man's or woman's perception of what it means to be human, the art form proves its worth. Each time I observe the face of a student shine with a radiance not evident before a poem was read and absorbed, my faith in the value of poetry and the teaching of poetry deepens.

The very definition of the art, though, poses problems as well as reasons for instruction in it. I consider poetry to be the most intense possible use of language. Traditional poems employ regular patterns of stress, sound and/or stanza in order to create linguistic intenseness, to call attention to the difference between what the poem wishes to communicate and everyday speech. But the very regularity of these patterns implies predictability, and predictability can lessen the reader's attention, can detract from intensity.

Regular patterns were largely abandoned by poets early in the twentieth century. Belief in set arrangements and hierarchies in social, religious, scientific and artistic life was crumbling around the poets. And any concept of predictible orderliness in these spheres continued to be challenged as the highly irregular century proceeded.

Yet when poets discard regular templates (whether for metre, rhyme or stanza) the problem of creating intensity increases. Poets have to draw attention to the difference between their discourse and everyday speech without resorting to predictable patterns. Language somehow must work harder than with conventional prose—or else why call what is written poetry?—and the reader's passage through the words must be slowed down enough that the reader becomes aware of the way language is working. Since the methods of solving the problem have to be unpredictable, however, a second difficulty arises: in effect, the poet invents the art form every time he or she writes. A reader is asked to enter unfamiliar ground each time she or he is invited to read a non-traditional poem.

This double challenge offers the greatest opportunity for poets to generate intensity, even while simultaneously the poem's fulfillment of this potential may enormously discomfit the intended audience. The strategies chosen to alert the reader that she or he must read the poem differently than prose can include playful, fractured and/or ambiguous use of sense, grammar, spelling, sound. The page can serve as a canvas: indents, typography, and stanza and line breaks may impart meaning visually. Extensive use of metaphors or similes, hyperbole, and image banks that draw on esoteric knowledge are other compositional devices contemporary poets may adopt.

Meanwhile, the experimental nature of many attempts to distinguish this discourse from conventional prose can alienate readers if the *purpose* of adopting a particular compositional technique is not understood, or is deliberately mystified in a defensive gesture on the part of the writer. When poetry is already disliked by the population for reasons discussed above, and then poetry is further cloaked in an aura of difficult access, the combination can only be bad news for the art. The B.C. poet and publisher Howard White describes an Amnesty-International-sponsored encounter between Canadian and foreign writers in Toronto:

> At a bull session later some CanLit prof asked why poetry was less marginalized in so many developing countries and about 17 third-worlders tried to answer at once. The general drift was, western poets have done it to themselves because all they do is write for each other. They consider it corruption of true art to write for common taste, but they're never done whining that the public fails to appreciate them. And even when poets from developing countries show how well the public responds to poets who write for common taste with serious purpose, western writers fail to get the message. Somebody tried to make a case that western writers didn't have the kind of big social challenges poets in developing worlds did,

> but gave up when somebody else yelled, "Try taking your culture back from Hollywood and Madison Avenue!" (10-11)

A variety of approaches to creating an intense use of language are *bound* to produce artistic disagreements, though. Intensity, after all, is not an quality capable of objective measurement. The Chilean poet Nicanor Parra cautions against claims that one specific technique will be the salvation of poetry, or that any such strategy is the only correct one for whatever reason. His poem "Young Poets" is here translated by Miller Williams:

> Write as you will
> In whatever style you like
> Too much blood has run under the bridge
> To go on believing
> That only one road is right.
>
> In poetry everything is permitted.
>
> With only this condition, of course:
> You have to improve on the blank page. (143)

I regard the uncertainty swirling around the corpus of contemporary poetry—and, by extension, historical poetries—as a marvellous and unique opportunity for learning. This situation constitutes for me a further justification of poetry's inclusion in our schools. Poetry raises an abundance of questions about linguistic expression, about the purpose and function of art, about the formation of personal judgment, about the skills necessary to form and defend in words an opinion or idea. Revealing the craft of poetry can initiate students into the craft of other artistic media—music, cinema, clay, fibre arts. Issues of marginality and the mainstream, of the role of cultural gatekeepers, of speech and silence are inherent in any study of poetry. Where students are shown poems that successfully enlarge their sense of the world, of the myriad possibilities of human life, of other ways of envisioning the challenge of being human, the art has unquestionably earned its place in any curriculum designed to educate minds rather than merely train them. Indeed, an inquiry into the very basis of much of the educational process—labelling, categorizing—is subsumed by an examination of poetry. How can there be both prose poems and poetic prose? In the latter case, if poetry is writing at its most intense, is the "small dream about time" (140) in Annie Dillard's non-fiction *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*—the riveting sequence where the book's narrator views all the temporal content of the Earth at a single glance (140-43)—not poetry? Or what about the splendidly

evocative image that closes Sid Marty's non-fiction *Men for the Mountains*, where the narrator listens to the shade of legendary Jasper Park warden George Busby?

> He leaned forward then and held his gnarled hands out to the firelight, and the flames threw his shadow, magnified, onto the thick logs of the cabin wall. Then he began to weave a tale of high mountains and of proud men that rode among them, like princes surveying their estates, like lords high up in their strongholds, where only the wind could touch them, and where the world was free of pain and sorrow, and we were always young. (270)

If such prose can be termed poetry, what is the purpose of nomenclature? What does it mean to exist at a time when boundaries between the various arts are collapsing, when even some sciences are apparently converging?

In our culture at present, the most widely accepted means of determining value is cash: anything that cannot attract dollars is judged worthless. Yet poetry exists entirely outside the money economy. Almost no book of poetry makes a profit; virtually no poets can live on sales of their art. To continue to honor poetry—to deem the art culturally significant—is to instruct students that some things on this planet have value even if those things cannot be assigned a monetary equivalent. Few people would attend a church that lacked a building, that was so poor the congregation met in the open air. Few sports or games—even among children—are now played without prior purchase of expensive equipment. But poetry insists that there *is* a worth beyond dollars, that some human activities and creations are literally priceless.

Not that poetry lacks a defense even in terms of its usefulness to commerce, to the pursuit of money. For instance communications consultant Cheryl Reimold, in a four-part series published in the magazine of the U.S. Technical Association of the Pulp and Paper Industry, explains why reading poetry would be helpful to business people. In introducing her first article, she urges:

> To your regular diet of technical or business material, add a little poetry. Wait, please—don't stop reading this yet! I'm not suggesting this only to offer you the aesthetic and spiritual gifts of poetry. Poetry will help you write better memos, letters, and reports.
>
> Great poetry releases the power in ordinary words and makes them resonate. The poets take all the principles of writing—persuasion, clarity, organization, force—and exploit them to the maximum. In a few words, they can tell the story of the world. To discover the possiblities in language and use it to transmit your message with real clarity and power—you must read poetry. (97)

I locate poetry's merit as a subject for study at considerable remove from Reimold's claim that exposure to some poems will spice up a corporate executive's memos. But I certainly endorse her praise for the best poets: "In a few words, they can tell the story of the world." Whatever small amount most of us know about the Elizabethans or Victorians, we know from poems that have lasted. The mighty armies, fleets, battles, social unrest have faded with the kings, the queens, the wealthy, the desperately poor. Some words were scratched on paper by one particular human, on a Thursday afternoon when a rainstorm seemed imminent and a couple of domestic responsibilities—involving a rip in a coat and a diminished household fuel supply—were being evaded. Improbably, those words are what has endured. The noisy among us today are certain that the sense of our own time we will bequeath to the future will involve movies, television, the latest pop music star. Perhaps. But so far among humanity's achievements, poems have proven among the most effective time travellers.

I believe that when we teach our students affection for poetry, we teach them affection for the human story as it has been, as it is, and as it will be. Which is to say that as we rescue poetry for love, we teach our students love for their own species, and so for themselves. Surely that deserves our best efforts as teachers; surely our profession has no more crucial task.

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Mark Cochrane

If You Have Read This Far

If you are reading still, do read. If you are not, this is not.
If you are not, this is naught. And if you have stopped.
And if you have naught.
Or if you are still, and are hypothetical then.
Naught is then not.
If you are not still not reading this, then I address you.
If you are among those who have stopped reading
    then this is the poem not for you also.
If you belong to the set of readers who has ceased to read
    then this poem, the hypothetical that is, is for you.
The set of the not.
And is addressed still.
This is the line addressed to you, who have stopped and still.
This is the line not addressed, only not to you
    who have read this far.
Readers of this line are excluded from the community then
    of intended readers.
Those who have ceased.
Who no longer read.
You I cannot address.
Those of you who have not read, not far.
Those of you disenchanted with the current state
    of the poem.
Those of you naught.
Those of you I cannot address because you have stopped.
I cannot enchant.
Those of you no longer reading. Not longer read.
Those of the current state.
I embrace you.

Craig Burnett

Plato on Pluto with Silly Putty

"I can't breathe, friend," he said.
He cursed the other planets
and rested his beard on his fist.
To pass the time he played
with silly putty, making shapes
that resembled the stone
he sat upon or the face
he touched from time to time
to see if he was still there.
Once, he removed a book
from his pocket, rolled
the fleshy material over
the words and peeled it back.
"Two books!" he exclaimed,
perhaps a bit too excitedly.
"Very good," he said, "very good."

Keizan

Give up writing, he wrote.
Give up music and singing, he sang.
Give up poetry, painting, calligraphy,
dancing and miming, he mimed.
Give up thinking, he thought.

But the song kept on singing,
the dance kept on dancing,
thought kept on thinking,
the breezes kept blowing, the sun
continued to shine.

Various Alphabets

Jeff Bien
America and Other Poems. Quarry $14.95
Prosody at the Cafe Du Coin. Quarry $14.95

Alan R. Wilson
Counting to 100. Wolsak and Wynn n.p.

Emile Martel
For Orchestra and Solo Poet. Trans. D.G. Jones. Muses' $12.95

Reviewed by Paul Denham

While one of the ongoing literary critical projects of our time is defining post-modernism and distinguishing it from modernism, poets continue breezily indifferent to categories. In considering the four books under review, however, we may find other groupings suggestive. Jeff Bien is a romantic, and Alan Wilson and Emile Martel are classicists. These are slippery terms and perhaps provide no more than a facile distinction, but they may may help in describing the distinctive tone of each work.

Bien's poetry is angry, emotionally engaged, and incantatory; the jacket of *America and Other Poems* links him with Alan Ginsberg and Walt Whitman, but one can also catch overtones of Leonard Cohen, Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of the world," and the Hebrew prophets. And, oh yes, Michael Ondaatje:

> I will apologize to no one
> I will slander the man who gave me this freedom
> I will call the Country a liar to its face
> I will marshall my intentions
> I will French Kiss the Reichstag
> I will cheat on my blood tests
> I will learn a trick with a knife
> I will scalp tickets at the trial. . . .
> ("A Choice of Masters")

Bien casts his net wide, encompassing the horror and despair of the twentieth century, one of whose manifestations is contemporary America, "Goliath of the third world," with Cuba defying it. *Prosody at the Cafe du Coin* reverberates with the political concerns of *America*, but also includes some reflections on poetic language and the function of the poet:

> The poet must know style
> or he will simply be a complainer.
> . . . .
> Prometheus had style.
> Style killed Goliath.
> ("Ode to Style")

In "Almost Spring," he even suggests that pain is essential to poetry; celebrating the fact that "God's creatures have returned to the feast," he nevertheless remarks, "It is hard to understand poetry / when all goes this well." The impulse to celebrate and the impulse to denounce provide the tension which make Jeff Bien's poetry crackle with prophetic energy.

Wilson, by way of contrast, is cool, ironic, witty, and intellectual—the perfect classicist, absorbed in the abstract beauty of numbers. *Counting to 100* contains 100 poems, one for each number, ascribing to each a personality, some dependent on their mathematical relationships with other

numbers, some on their associations with familiar cultural patterns—38 is a firearm, for example; 45 is an old "single" record; 76 is "such a parade!" The pleasure of these poems is the pleasure of being able to say, "Oh, I get it," to an essentially riddling notion of poetry; here, for example, is "27":

> Feels lonely,
> at a loss.
> Regrets the end
> of the secret correspondence
> with letters.

Need a hint? How many letters in the English alphabet?

Martel's *For Orchestra and Solo Poet* is a prose poem in five movements, a meditation on the rituals of attending and performing musical compositions. Martel begins with the acoustics of the room, the form of the instruments, and proceeds to the various features of the performance and the emotions it generates—especially in the poet, whose art seems at first inferior:

> in all this crowd I am of the least serene, for I'm somehow convinced that the day's light and melody are not merited, and that, in a moment, out of the blue, darkness and a silence will fall so great we will not be able to pierce them with our cries, nor with the perfume come from islands rich in aromatic cultures.

Martel's poet is another classicist, at least at first; art, for which music is the model, is a matter of the slow, careful accumulation of skill, and the artist is a maker. Nevertheless, it culminates in a kind of magical transcendence:

> to tear open the envelope of the senses and respond to that of their desire whose thrust may carry them to the threshold of heaven: to free themselves of living and its various hells, to withdraw from the earth and the bondage to gravity. . . .

Well, all right, if you say so. Still, it's Martel's contemplation of the physical beauty, complexity, and sensuousness of the musical instruments, and the self-effacing, almost monkish dedication of the musicians that linger in the mind and define the true beauty of this volume.

Sports Writers

Kevin and Sean Brooks, eds.
Thru The Smoky End Boards: Canadian Poetry About Sports and Games. Polestar $16.95

William Humber and John St James, eds.
All I Thought About Was Baseball: Writings on a Canadian Pastime. U Toronto P $50.00/24.95

Reviewed by Ian Dennis

The decision of editors Kevin and Sean Brooks to include "the majority of poems they found relating to sport" has not surprisingly produced a rather uneven anthology. All the same, *Thru The Smoky End Boards* contains some effective poems and some interesting patterns.

For Canadian poets, sport is mainly something the other does, on television screens, or in more or less approved-of stadiums and rinks. It is something the self once did, or was humiliated trying to do, or achieved a transitory glory doing, in youth or childhood. Sport is acutely described from the point of view of its effects on its audiences, its innocent bystanders, or as an analogy. The sporting other is sometimes loved, admired and wondered at, somewhat more often the source of a range of oppressions, the focus of subtle and not-so-subtle resentment. Perhaps this is not to be wondered at, from the necessarily bookish people who write poetry, but it is a bit of a pity. After all, one need not triumph at a sport to write feelingly about its pleasures. One suspects that poets are a degree more competitive than everyday athletes, and hence overly sensitive to outcomes, to comparisons.

The editors note a division between lone pursuits like swimming or skating, and team games like hockey. There are good poems of both sorts. Swimming in particular produces

some fine work from Irving Layton, H. C. Dillow and Lorna Crozier, among others. The cultural implications of sports like hockey are, as one might expect, well and fully dealt with, but there is a surprising neglect of the often intense experiences associated with the miniature community formed by a team itself. The Canadian poet, Romantic or post-Romantic, seems able to imagine him- or herself within Canada, and within the heated affinity of fandom, but must remain the perpetual outsider in the locker room or on the bench. Perhaps the most memorable poem here about sporting collectivity is Al Purdy's "Hockey Players," with its bold image of a rush of play down-ice that allows the watchers to "explode out of self" and into a thrilling sense of geographical continuity,

> skating thru the smoky end boards out
> of sight and climbing up the appalachian highlands
> and racing breast to breast across laurentian barrens
> over hudson's diamond bay and down the treeless tundra.

This succeeds by its very fearlessness. Most of the poems are more circumspect, or more ambivalent.

In the latter category, of course, gender issues feature prominently. There are a few dreary "questionings" of the role of sexual difference in sport—moans of male mea culpa prominent—but this aspect of the anthology fortunately does not swell beyond the usual low Canadian whine on the topic. The editors astutely observe that their poets, finding themselves "worried, pissed off or overwhelmed" by manifestations of sexual difference, obtain from sport the "consolation" of "escape" rather than anything approaching a "solution." Here too one wonders whether the degree of implicit competition, in this case between male and female, is precisely reflective of the Canadian psyche. Any sense that shared enthusiasm for sport can sometimes unite sexes and families is absent.

The collection includes a few song lyrics, which do not live well on the page, and an over-supply of the poems of Mark Cochrane, most of which are long and tiresome. It has some oddities, and some odd successes, like P. K. Page's imaging of a ski-lift in which pairs of skiers mount like couples "through successive naves . . . newly wed / participants in some recurring dream." There is very little on (Canadian) football, our own invention, only David McFadden's throwaway about the Tiger-Cats and some dark remarks from Florence McNeil concerning clicking boots, Americans, Nuremburg and Rome. Richard Harrison bravely finds the redeeming emotion in "Coach's Corner," but seems quite to miss its humour and irony. Happy turns of phrase are frequent: "Half-tons stare blindly from the sidelines" of Don McKay's township ball-park; Leona Gom speaks of joints that "feel like the lids of jars screwed on wrong" after aerobics. Also common, however, are clunky attempts to imbue sports terminology with metaphorical import or poetic grace. Baseball seems to present particular temptations to the muse athletic in this regard, with its bases, nine of everything and home plate. Serious efforts to make poetic technique reflect the physical reality of sport are rare, although Charles G. D. Roberts' anapests on a skater give some sense of both the potential and the difficulty:

> A spinning whisper, a sibilant twang,
> As the stroke of the steel on the tense ice rang.

If it is possible to generalize on the basis of the hundred and sixty-odd poems in this collection, one would have to admit that sport does not seem to bring out the very best in the Canadian poet. But some estimable and interesting work does result.

All I Thought About Was Baseball has less for the student of Canadian Literature, but more for the mere baseball aficionado. It

contains a range of material, from sports journalism, to soft-core philosophical and sociological musing, to fiction with a Canadian baseball theme. Almost all of it is absorbing, and some of it possesses considerable charm. Highlights include Bruce Meyer's account of forgotten glory in 1887 Toronto, when one Cannonball Crane anticipated Joe Carter's 1993 blast with a climactic, championship-winning homer in long-lost Sunlight Park Stadium.

Le Noroît souffle

Hélène Dorion
L'issue, la résonance du désordre. Noroît n.p.

Anne-Marie Alonzo
Tout au loin la lumière. Noroît n.p.

Reviewed by Vincent Desroches

Avec ce mince volume, publié d'abord à Bruxelles aux éditions L'Arbre à Paroles, Hélène Dorion poursuit une oeuvre poétique dont la liste des titres ne cesse de s'allonger. *L'issue, la résonance du désordre* pousse plus loin un dépouillement de l'écriture déjà perceptible dans certains recueils précédents. Le vocabulaire est épuré, la syntaxe allusive et elliptique. Les vers s'arc-boutent sur les points en fin de strophe, ce qui leur confère une force et une gravité presque solennelle et impose un rythme lent où les images et les mots résonnent.

Le recueil est ponctué de quatre extraits liminaires de l'oeuvre du poète argentin Roberto Juarroz (dont la traduction française de *Poesia vertical* a été publiée, incidemment, à Bruxelles). Il eût été préférable d'en indiquer la provenance précise. Les quatre moments distincts ainsi délimités illustrent une progression, la quête d'une issue à la douleur, à la désolation de l'absence. Le ton des premiers poèmes est donné par l'utilisation insistante du pronom *on*, qui semble en appeler d'une expérience commune à l'auteure et aux lecteurs et qui prend en charge l'écriture avec une pudeur presque amère : «On ajoute des mots / de l'autre côté de nous-mêmes / la vie / essaie de ne pas céder.» Le *je*, souvent interrogatif et effacé, n'apparaît que d'une façon fugace : «Puis-je appeler -amour / ce bleu des choses / quitté depuis toujours ?» Les poèmes sont saturés de la thématique de l'absence et de la présence, de l'aller et du venir. L'appel au désordre constitue alors une exhortation intérieure à dépasser cet horizon : «Ose brouiller les choses. Les mener / jusqu'au désordre où elles / commencent.»

Le deuxième moment du recueil explore le domaine de la mémoire. Une nouvelle voix apparaît, marquée en italique à la fin des poèmes et un dialogue textuel prend place. Ces courtes notations créent une distance temporelle mais procurent aussi au texte une sorte de basse obstinée, comme le ferait un choeur grec : «*Ne dis pas -détresse, dis seulement / -origine.*» Cette polyphonie hésitante se poursuit de façon voilée par la suite et ébauche, parmi les fragments du passé, une gestuelle de la rencontre. Le *nous* devient plus affirmatif et à l'occasion réflexif : «Pour nous atteindre, nous disons -le vent / les marées, la poussière.» Cependant, le désordre évoqué débouche en fin de lecture sur un espace douloureux de vide et de résignation : «certaines ruines nous rendent au désert.» C'est seulement en atteignant cette dernière perspective désolée que le dernier poème esquisse la possibilité d'un recommencement.

Dénotant manifestement une influence minimaliste, dont on peut soupçonner l'influence européenne, comme pourrait l'indiquer une référence au compositeur Arvo Pärt, ces poèmes semblent toujours sur le point de nous faire un aveu capital. C'est sans doute leur vulnérabilité qui résonne le plus longtemps.

Le titre du dernier recueil d'Anne-Marie Alonzo, *Tout au loin la lumière*, pourrait sembler trompeur; il y est en effet fort peu question de lumière. Tout y est tactile, exploration du mouvement, des formes et

des sensations épidermiques. Poursuivant un travail d'écriture commencé en 1979, Alonzo s'immisce entre les genres, brouille les limites entre poésie et fiction, utilise la parole poétique dans ses récits et le narratif dans ses poèmes. Ici, des filons narratifs s'insèrent dans ces courts poèmes en prose et fournissent un support à l'expérience de l'intime amoureux, pour ensuite être laissés en plan, l'air de ne pas y toucher : «je suis seule à voir, ne sachant pas, j'invente.»

Le recueil est divisé en trois parties, à peu près égales, désignées par les pronoms JE, ELLE et TOI. Ces sous-titres ne s'attachent pas tant aux sujets de l'énonciation, qui alternent tout au long du livre, mais plutôt, peut-être, aux enjeux, aux vivants objets de l'amour, cernés, discernés par les poèmes. «je dis TOI sans penser, je le dis le dis le dis.»

La lecture révèle un travail rigoureux et allusif sur la réciprocité : «tu me regardais dormir, croyant que je dors, me voyant de te regarder», de même que sur la fusion amoureuse : «je vis avec toi comme seul vivre / peut être en soi possible.» La célébration de l'amour entre femmes produit des passages d'un lyrisme remarquable, comme ces étonnantes allitérations « (. . .), pose si finement ses seins sur les siens, (. . .)»

Victime il y a vingt ans d'un grave accident d'automobile, Anne-Marie Alonzo est paraplégique. Le livre ne mentionne nulle part ce handicap, mais sa réalité marque toutes les pages. Ainsi, le thème de la marche, très présent, se juxtapose à celui de l'écriture, liberté retrouvée : «Marcher! dit-elle en marchant, je marche de tant de lourdes immobilités, (. . .)» et plus loin : «Elle marche. Elle ne marche pas. Elle écrit. Elle n'écrit pas.»

Alonzo réussit à créer une vive rythmique textuelle par de nombreuses énumérations de parties du corps, prenant de la sorte un grand plaisir à nommer mains, seins, bouche, ventre, dents, langue . . . tout un univers de formes corporelles sculpturales animées par la parole amoureuse. Exprimant la douleur, avec une sobre candeur rarement atteinte, ou la jouissance et l'exultation, ces accumulations de parties finissent par déstabiliser la lecture, par questionner le rapport difficile entre la matière dont s'accommode la forme et l'intensité qui l'habite. Dans la troisième partie, le *je* des poèmes invite sa partenaire à modeler son corps, à en faire sa sculpture, sa chose. Mais dans ce désir perce aussi une dose d'inquiétude et d'ambivalence devant cette négation de soi. Le dernier poème parvient à rétablir la distance, mais de justesse : «Je garde la pose. Pour la frime, le jeu, une photographie. (. . .) Une sculpture. Je suis cela.» Anne-Marie Alonzo signe un recueil maîtrisé, assumé, mais aussi vif et vibrant, un grand plaisir de lecture.

The Unspeakableness of Love

Kristjana Gunnars
Exiles Among You. Coteau $9.95

Tonja Gunvaldsen Klaassen
Clay Birds. Coteau $9.95

Elizabeth Philips
Beyond My Keeping. Coteau $9.95

Reviewed by Di Brandt

Kristjana Gunnars' sixth poetry collection and eleventh book, *Exiles Among You,* is replete with themes familiar to us from her other writing: the careful articulation of grief and loss, the celebration of solitude, the unexpected pleasures and consolation of landscape, the evocation of fairy tales to signify a shift in identity, the quiet listening to silence. Here, the lost beloved is first of all the mother, and her deep absence suffuses the collection with a poignant melancholy. Unlike *Zero Hour,* Gunnars' prose work about her father's illness and death, or, for example, *Carnival of Longing,* her poetry collection about a lost lover, *Exiles* does not focus directly on the beloved's absence or passing, but rather, circumnavigates the event with short, minimalist

reflections on the ephemeralness of life, and the ultimate unspeakableness of love.

There is a delicacy and fragility here which can bear only the slightest nuance of emotion, and yet, I find in these poems an extraordinary depth of feeling, a generosity, which is rare in contemporary writing, a willingness to expand the heart to hold whatever absences and contradictions it meets without flinching, without turning away, a depth which belies the apparent calmness and simple exterior of the poems. Take the following fragments as examples:

> none of this, none of it
> lets in the sunshine now
> or the glimmer of moon at night
> because it is not you
> yet, not you, not anything

or:

> and I am resurrecting
>
> myself. I am pulling up
> roots of you in my heart
> tearing out what is left of you there.

There is a diffusion of ego, of identity, into landscape which is profoundly contemplative and therefore anti-lyric in effect, despite the poems' reliance on feeling as the main structuring device.

An interesting innovation is the use of footnotes, not as intertextual or self-referential commentary in the manner of Erin Mouré, say, but rather as extratextual references to a range of world events, which provide a kind of public counterpoint to the intensely personal vision of the poems: "Civil War in Rwanda, 1994," for example, for a poem which begins "how did we build all this heartache / out of fractured vapour," and ending with "what you thought was rain, those / are the children floating there / all the children, paying for us / with bodies they never asked to have." Or this reference to the childbirth practices of contemporary China: "In 1992, the government of the People's Republic of China warned the populace they were raising an army of seventy million males by refusing to have girl children," following a poem about "a boy in skin boots" who is both "all boys" and "the boy from Chengdu / whose fingertips touch."

I'm of two minds about this tactic: on the one hand, it introduces an interesting variation in what would otherwise be a more or less uniform voicing; on the other, it reinforces the split between private and public, personal and social, poetic and nonfictional, in the very act of trying to speak across it. The "boy in skin boots," for example, does acquire more meaning for us after we read the gloss about Chinese social practice; the poem about Rwanda's dead children insists on a rhetoric of beauty and timeless reflectiveness in which place names and specific historical references would be out of place, yet wishes at the same time to locate itself in relation to a known event. As though there were a kind of underlying mistrust of the poem's capacity to reach or address the real world, which is not however allowed to break into it, break it open, formally.

My other quibble about these historical footnotes is that they are obviously taken from daily media sources, and tend to reflect the kind of superficial headline gathering we all get pulled into with radio and television, so that the commentary on them is somehow depersonalized, universalized, depoliticized even as we are being, on the other hand, so carefully sensitized by the poems' deep expressiveness.

But apart from this partial quibble, or rather question about the politics/poetics of the collection (and I'm not really sure about this, given the force and beauty of the poems: perhaps the disjunction is a necessary and tragic one), I cannot give enough praise to Gunnars' book. She is one of our most accomplished writers. Each new book takes us into a larger, clearer imaginative space, and expands our sense of the possibilities and pleasures (and challenges) of language.

Tonja Gunvaldsen Klaassen's first book of poems, *Clay Birds,* also from Coteau, has been well praised. There is a sort of stylish panache in the writing which suggests a willingness to try anything, to tackle any subject or form, and to do it with grace. I found some of the poems a little *too* stylish, that is, they seemed enamoured of their own beauty, which interfered at some level with what they were trying to say. Take these carefully arranged lines and repetitions from "Sister," for example:

> Who has so painstakingly
> pushed
> a dull knife to her breast?
>
> Beautiful, but she doesn't look longingly
> at sky,
>
> blue blue sky. Her blue eyes
> clouding, muddy.

I also found the carefully misspelled and ungrammatical prose poems in the sequence entitled "Fish Tales," despite their textual playfulness, both patronizing and irritating.

In other poems, Klaassen's obvious talent shines forth with a kind of openness and innocence which is highly engaging: "When the horse picked Mama up by the hair / that time, was she scared?" Or take this striking, tragic portrait of Camille Claudel:

> Two strips of calf bare
> and veined as marble. The blood leaves
> her
> breathless with what she never guessed
> was inside her. In the lovely union, a
> violence,
> a breaking of stone:
> this is the body, this the blood

Klaassen tends to focus on image and metaphor rather than, say, voice, or breath, or sound, or spacing, or feeling, and in this shows the influence of realist/symbolist mentors such as Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane. Occasionally, though, I hear a kind of welcome understatement, a casting about in waters too deep to arrange into neat images and lines, an evocation of a cry in the space between the words, which suggests more ragged, experimental possibilities, as in "Grief Pot":

> A bowl of dead bees, daddy-honey
> that's what I'll give you
>
> like the unrequited lover
> in a poem. A wisdom tooth
>
> my mouth was too small to keep.

This is obviously a writer to look out for, and a book of considerable promise.

Elizabeth Philips's third book of poems, *Beyond my Keeping,* from Coteau, is also in love with landscape, but unlike Gunnars' poems, which evoke a sense of largeness with precise, controlled understatement ("places that held me . . . buttercups / on a windy plateau, saxifrage / in a damp meadow"), Philips' tend toward the grandiose: "Heat lies over the garden with the weight of oceans"; and "the hills falling away / from the car like a sea / subsiding." There is too much promise of magic here, for my taste; it is doled out in so generous a measure, I am neither surprised nor moved by a moment like the following, which ought to strike us like a blow or shaft of light:

> I wanted to remain in the open, where the
> hush that fell
> with the last light across the hills, and the
> sweep of sky,
> were so generous, even I, traversing my
> own
> landscape of fear, found benediction

I want something nasty, something naughty in these poems. Or at least startling, jarring. I want to know that the world is a dangerous place, that it can't be held together with beautiful words, that the poem only lives if it teeters, desperately, on the edge of death, the brink of the unspeakable. "Whatever I say must include the rose bush," writes Philips. Okay, but whatever you say must also include darkness, dislocation, the broken heart; whatever you say must also push at the seams of language,

the words on the page, the syllables in our ear, if it is to move us beyond the habitual. "To begin (writing, living) we must have death," as Cixous said, "but young, present, ferocious, fresh death."

Philips is obviously a person of conscience and intelligence and commitment, to both language and a humane vision. In her finest moments, which I find here to be also the most realist, the prosiest, where the temptation to eloquence wears thinnest, her writing offers a clearsighted, almost elegiac portrait of the relation between people and things: "I want to show you this picture of yourself at work. When I look out and see you, focused and intent (you have begun to draw now), I know you've thrown aside that heaviness that might have been your inheritance. . . . although last night your face was pale and sore with grief, your eyes are quick now and the sunlight glances off your hands as they order the chaos of this place, this silence we have summoned between us." If she can let go of being *nice* more often, of wanting to make everything beautiful, perhaps Philips can make good on her promise, to some extent left unfulfilled here, to take us to a world beyond her keeping.

The Works

Robert Lecker, Jack David and Ellen Quigley, eds.
Canadian Writers and Their Works. Poetry Series. Vol. 11. Intro. by George Woodcock. ECW $50

Lorna Crozier
A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley. McClelland and Stewart $19.99

Sharon Thesen
Aurora. Coach House $12.95

Di Brandt
Jerusalem, Beloved. Turnstone $12.95

Reviewed by Dean Irvine

Introducing the eleventh volume of essays in the poetry series *Canadian Writers and Their Works* (*CWTW*), George Woodcock reflects on the format of the series itself, and so "offer[s] a different strategy in reading this book than its predecessors." Ambivalent and even hesitant in his assessment of the reading strategies employed in the essays on Roo Borson, Lorna Crozier, Mary di Michele, Erin Mouré and Sharon Thesen, Woodcock questions the application of "a much narrower linguistic tradition" of French-language deconstructionist theories to English-language Canadian writing. Woodcock concludes that in the essays "there is a tendency to imagine what the poet has thought fit not to say, which may be a means of detecting underlying literary strategies but which often reads like a new version of the explicatory writing that was fashionable in the 1950s." This unexpected conflation of what appears to be New Criticism and deconstruction arrives as a peculiar, yet representative, preface to the reader of essays that at first cautiously practice interpretive strategies based upon the poets' biographies as well as their standing in literary genealogies, historical milieux and critical reception, but that later offer new critical explicative readings of the poets' works as well as mediative approaches to deconstructionist theories of gender, language, nation, and ethnicity. Woodcock's different reading strategy is, he claims, "one of the simple applied lessons of deconstruction": "criticism is no longer an affair between writer and critic; it is, and always at its best has been, a three-way communication" between writer, critic, and reader. That Woodcock emphasizes the "lessons" contained in the essays is indicative of the pedagogical impetus behind the *CWTW* poetry series: it is a series of critical introductions and historical outlines designed for student-readers, rather than writer-critics, of Canadian literature.

Cued by the disclaimer with which many of the essayists preface their writerly contract to survey the biography, critical context, and texts of each poet, one must imagine

while reading this volume what the critic has thought fit not to say. Graham Barron's essay on Roo Borson, an exercise in biographical criticism, begins by establishing the California-born Borson "as a poet—and as a Canadian," and concludes by citing her recent poem "Hockey Night in Canada" as testimony to her Canadian content. Apart from this rather patronizing citizenship ceremony, Barron does examine the double effects of defamiliarization and refamiliarization of Borson's language, "making the familiar new," and "capturing and renovating the familiar"; however, his analysis of the familiar often slides into the familial—or rather, the familiar mode of biographical criticism. Barron, reconstructing the narrative of Borson's life in tandem with his own narrativization of her works, fulfills his own desire for a biocritical narrative through Borson's own drive toward narrativity in the chronological progression from imagistic, short lyrics to narrative and prose poems. The reader is left wondering when, and if, the biography section is going to end.

Nathalie Cooke judiciously eschews biographical fallacies in her survey of Lorna Crozier's poetry, quickly moving beyond the context of Crozier's Prairie life and writing into an analysis of her "feminist remythification"—that is, her reinterpretation of Western patriarchal myths of origin not as an affirmation of an essentialist feminine myth but as a multiplicity of feminist perspectives on originary myths of Prairie and Western man. Cooke's tendency, however, to piggyback Crozier's "feminist poetics" on top of Atwood's "power politics," along with her desire to explicate Crozier's affinities with Atwood's poetry through repeated citation, leads the reader to suspect the critic's explicit displacement of a regional, parochial poetics and the implicit emplacement (and canonization) of a national, feminist poetics *and* poet. The reader might ask what the critic has thought fit not to say.

M. Morgan Holmes, in his thought-provoking essay on Mary di Michele, deftly maneuvers in the shadowlands of her "chiaroscuro" poetics. Holmes imports the Italianate aesthetic of "chiaroscuro" as interpreter and guide to di Michele's writerly journey across the private and public borders of confessional poetry, the national borders of Italy and Canada and Chile, as well as the ontological and epistemological borders of Italo-Canadian being, memory, language, and identity. A mediative approach to theoretical discourses on ethnicity, gender, poetics, and semiotics, Holmes's essay ushers the reader past a pedagogical introduction to di Michele's poetry into an area of necessary and challenging criticism. Equal to Holmes's mediation of theoretical discourses, Dennis Denisoff accesses and makes accessible to the reader Erin Mouré's compression of language-centred poetry and lesbian-feminist language theory. Writing from an informed and interested critical position, Denisoff not only decodes the intricate intra- and inter-textual networks of Mouré's poetry and autocritical essays, but also decompresses the grammar and language employed in her feminist deconstruction of oppressive systems of power and dominant codes of patriarchal discourse. The student-reader might, at times, ask for another decompression. Far less amenable to the student-reader, even to readers versed in psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, Andrew Stubbs's "rather prolix essay" (to quote from Woodcock's evaluation of the essay) on Sharon Thesen plunges into the murky depths of psychobiography and never really surfaces long enough in the explication of individual poems to give the reader a breath. Stubbs's analytic logic is difficult to follow, and often verges on free-association. My devaluation of Barron's biographical and Stubbs's psychobiographical criticism need not tarnish Cooke's, Holmes's and Denisoff's essays, however; these latter

contributions are minted in this volume of *CWTW* poetry series like rare coins in a collection worth the entire purchase.

All of the five poets included in the *CWTW* series have since published new collections of poetry; the two poets I am reviewing here, namely Crozier, in *A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley*, and Thesen, in *Aurora*, have continued their practice of the serial/long poem. Even in her title Crozier foregrounds the post-1970 tradition of the Canadian serial/long poem, echoing Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and, in one poem ("Wilderness"), invoking the figure of Susanna Moodie by way of Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Crozier, extending her "feminist remythification" of "Prairie man" in *A Saving Grace*, primarily writes in dialogue with and in memory of Sinclair Ross's "Canadian classic" prairie novel *As For Me and My House*. Crozier's polyvocal dialogue with canonical figures and texts in Canadian literature, both regional and national, signals her strategic attempt to bridge the gaps between region and nation. Although in the tradition of Anne Marriott's prairie long poem *The Wind Our Enemy* (a contemporary of *As For Me and My House*), Crozier's *A Saving Grace* crosses a regional poetics with what has become a national poetics of the contemporary documentary poem. Similar to Atwood's and Ondaatje's respective manipulations of textual documents, Crozier incorporates and supplements the narratives, characters, and images from Ross's novel as well as his short story "The Painted Door" (from *Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*) in the assemblage of what Dorothy Livesay once called a Canadian genre, the documentary poem.

Immediately apparent is Crozier's intertextual engagement with Atwood's and Ross's writing in the paraliterary form of the journal; yet Crozier's book carries the subtitle *The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley* —that is, the collected poems of a literary character who never writes as a poet (like Ondaatje's Billy), and who never lives as an historical writer (unlike Atwood's Moodie). The doubling of Mrs. Bentley's journals and Lorna Crozier's poems, the doubling of the name, speaks to the duplicity of the documentary subject, the doubled "I." Crozier self-reflexively examines the duplicity of story-telling—Mrs. Bentley's journals and documentary poems alike—in the closing poem, "The Truth":

> Truth is, there never was a Judith.
> Truth is, Philip is not the hero
> of this story. Truth is, the only ending
> is the one you make up, the one you can't
> live without, the sweet, impossible birth.

The truth is, however, that there is little new in Crozier's commentary on the relativity of "truth," that her debt to a tradition of Canadian documentary poems is not necessarily to her credit, but that McClelland and Stewart has made a safe investment on the basis of Crozier's national recognition (again, like Atwood) as one of Canada's precious few best-selling poets. One suspects the truth is that there are greater marketing interests than literary interests backing *A Saving Grace*, interests not so different from the strategic marketing of *As For Me and My House* in the New Canadian Library series (see Robert Lecker's "The Rhetoric of the Back Cover Copy: Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*" in *Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature* [Anansi, 1995: 173-87]). The truth is, paradoxically, that the publisher's duplicity is written between the lines in the double discourse of economic and literary value.

Thesen, having left behind the so-called documentary poem in *Confabulations: Poems for Malcolm Lowry* (1984), picks up and plays with a radical poetics in *Aurora*. In concert with what Fred Wah names "the practice of negative capability and estrangement" in his *Music at the Heart of*

Thinking and *Alley Alley Home Free*, Thesen composes her own series of improvisations on literary and critical texts as well as music and visual art (see Wah's preface to *Music at the Heart of Thinking* [Red Deer, 1987: vii]). Even before her finale "Gala Roses," Thesen writes her way into jazz through Wah's sense of writerly improvisation, Jack Spicer's sense of dictation, and Robert Duncan's sense of "composition by field," scoring her musical phrases across the page in "Billy [sic] Holiday's Nylons." True to the practice of the serial poem in the hands of such mentors as Duncan, Spicer, and Robin Blaser, Thesen's series "Gala Roses" is composed according to a poetics of dictation and improvisation, recording the imagination's aleatory givens:

> Green machine beyond the ruby dahlias
> & empty
>
> town without you-him-it a gap thinking
> fills overflows
>
> scrolled as music coiling out the mouth
> of the alto
>
> *love's refrain* ornamented elizabethan
> *garden*
>
> *wall where stars are bright* imagination
> hides her purple
>
> violets *such sweet sorrow* striates the
> mind like bar codes . . . .

At the hinge between the first of two sections—"and when she weeps, weeps every little flower" (from *A Midsummer's Night Dream*), followed by "Gala Roses"—swings the title poem, an improvisation on Guido Reni's baroque fresco *Aurora* (1613), a detail of which wraps the covers of Thesen's *Aurora*. Analogous to Reni's painterly baroque, Thesen's exuberant poetic galas perform a writerly baroque. A hybridization of the contemporary and early modern lyric, *Aurora*'s cultivated image-gardens exfoliate in stunning new varieties.

Di Brandt's serial/long poems travel between the Manitoba prairie and the Gaza Strip in *Jerusalem, Beloved*. Suffused with the Old Testament cadences of Jeremiah's lamentations, Brandt's incantatory prose poems articulate an insistent poetics and rhetoric of desire: a departure to the longed for Jerusalem, beloved, but arriving at Jerusalem, "acquired, converted, occupied, settled, stolen, appropriated, translated, destroyed, developed, renewed." Although divided into three discrete sections—"Jerusalem, beloved," "blue light, falling around us," and "those of us who have daughters"—these three long poems interact as a narrative (in) series. It is a maternal narrative that Brandt has accentuated through the writing of consecutive volumes, *questions i asked my mother* (1987), *Agnes in the sky* (1990), and *mother, not mother* (1992), a narrative that she herself theorizes in *Wild Mother Dancing: Maternal Narrative in Canadian Literature* (1993) as "an ongoing lament for the missing, silenced, absent mother and her mediating, nurturing presence, in social institutions and discourse, and in story" (see "The Absent Mother" in *Wild Mother Dancing* [U of Manitoba P, 1993: 14]). From questions of the mother to the question of Palestine, Brandt's narrative journeys return again and again to learning to speak out, learning to question, learning to desire, learning to lament, in a mother's tongue. Again and again one encounters in Brandt's maternal narrative the numinous figure of the wild mother, dancing.

The political narrative of *Jerusalem, Beloved* negotiates difference, between the dreamed-of kingdom of the New Jerusalem and the geopolitical reality of Israel-Palestine, between the Mennonite experience of homelessness and the Palestinian experience, between a Canadian tourist and her Israeli-Palestinian friends. Subsequent to the publication of *Jerusalem, Beloved*, Brandt has said that she has not encountered as much public controversy since she spoke out against patriarchal violence toward

the women and children of her Mennonite community in *questions i asked my mother* (see Brandt's essay, "Because because because" in *Dancing Naked: Narrative Strategies for Writing across Centuries* [Mercury, 1996: 153]). Brandt's daring to provoke public questions and controversy about her narratives speaks to the fact that sociopolitical work is indeed possible through acts of literature, through the agency of poetry. *Jerusalem, Beloved* really works.

Time Capsule

Pat Lowther

Time Capsule: New and Selected Poems. Polestar $24.95

Reviewed by Iain Higgins

Pat Lowther died in 1975, her life cut brutally short at age forty by a murdering husband, but she has had an unusually prolific afterlife, and this fortunately has helped preserve the memory of her fine poetic gift. First in 1977 there was *A Stone Diary*, a book accepted for publication shortly before her death and announcing that here was a poet clearly come into her own; then in 1980 *Final Instructions: Early Uncollected Poems*, a memorial tribute published by *West Coast Review*; and now in 1997, nearly a quarter-century after her death, *Time Capsule*, a book whose subtitle and contents might make many readers do a double-take. Fully one-fourth of the poems in this collection, some 60 of its 240 pages, represent new work.

According to the brief Introduction by her daughter Beth, the new poems were found in a box discovered "on a chance excursion into [her] brother's attic," and they comprise "both unseen and previously published poems . . . including parts of a manuscript [her] mother had been writing at the time of her death," part or all of which was apparently to be called *Time Capsule*. This named work Lowther herself describes on a likewise recently discovered cassette recording of her last public reading as "a complex kind of witness . . . buried and dug up in the future" and concerned with such things as "history, context, and continuity."

The present book, appropriately enough, is offered to readers as a treasured family find, representing, celebrating, and honouring the work and life of a poet and activist who was to its editors also a mother and a friend; it is in every way a labour of filial and familiar love, the poems themselves being framed by a pair of introductions by Lowther's daughters, Beth and Christine, and an afterword by her close friend, Lorraine Vernon (it also contains a request by Lowther's daughters for any documentary information about their mother, to be sent to them via the publisher). Both book and poems are of a quality for which anyone beyond the circle of family and friends can be grateful, even though the book is presented as a poignant family memorial. Even the book's cover, which was designed by Val Speidel, is a thing of beauty, graced by a pair of fine, almost abstract photographs (Shari Macdonald's) of two of Lowther's most important poetic and personal icons: lit and shadowed stone, and a peeling arbutus trunk.

Inside, in addition to thirty-one new poems, the book contains a selection of poems from each of Lowther's five previously published collections: eight from *This Difficult Flowring* (1968); the moving title poem from *The Age of the Bird* (1972); twenty-three poems from *Milk Stone* (1974), including the powerful "In the Continent Behind My Eyes," "Penelopes," and "The Falconer"; twenty-one from *A Stone Diary* (1977), amongst them "Chacabuco, The Pit," "Notes from Furry Creek," "100," "Intersection," and "The Dig"; and four from *Final Instructions* (1980). Generous as they thus are, these selections offer little to quibble over; there

is the odd poem that one or another reader could probably do without, but few omissions to regret: I personally miss only "Le Roy S'Avisera" from the first book, and "Demons" from the third, and those who want to read the whole selection under the new title might regret the absence of "For Robert Bly Saying his Poems," in which more than twenty years ago Lowther describes the manly man of the current moment as "this late last son / of the medicine show man."

Reading through the whole book, I was struck by three things: first, that the poems generally become stronger and more assured from collection to collection, even though Lowther showed herself from the first to be a true poet, as in the early "Two Babies in Two Years," one of many fine poems on motherhood and domestic life; secondly, that as they meditate on everything from unusual psychological states through political terror to the night sky the poems circle almost obsessively around a smallish cluster of important themes and resonant images (social life in all its guises, the human relation to nature, generational change, sex and love, violence; birds, water, trees, stone, clouds, street scenes)—which means that any one of Lowther's poems benefits from being read alongside others of hers, whether the reading is serial or discontinuous; and thirdly, that the new poems, despite the odd line or image that might have been struck out or reworked, are generally very fine indeed, of a piece with her best work—which makes reading *Time Capsule* an occasion for mourning as well as gratitude and celebration.

Amongst the new poems, I was familiar with only one, "Elegy for the South Valley," from its appearance in Gary Geddes' west-coast anthology *Skookum Wawa* (1975), and there are a small few that leave me unmoved: the three "Planetarium Poems," for example, which may be pieces from a multimedia show that Lowther presented at the Vancouver Planetarium and for which the setting is crucial ("*Look!* Three planets / in opposition. when? / March of some future year?"), or the well-meant but unachieved "Words for My Son: II." But I would want to give up almost none of the rest, even a poem like "Green Panthers" that is stronger in conception than execution, and certainly not anything so fine as "The Animals Per Se," "History Lessons," "Ion," "Posthumous Christmas Eve," "Moving South," "1913," "Riding Past," "Magellan," "The Sun in November," or "Small Memorials." Here, for instance, is the fifth section of the powerful "Sun in November," set down after a partly echoed stanza from "The Falconer," both of which deceptively simple excerpts meditate as movingly on eros and time as something by Octavio Paz:

> Will we grow old
> rocking the creaking furniture of sex?
> Perhaps some year
> two aged brittle sticks rubbing together
> we will ignite again
> and burn each other out.
> The firemen will say,
> "They must have smoked in bed."
> . . .
> All day it's the moment
> after we are stupid
> with bliss glazed over
> talking politely
> with strangers not hearing
> our own words
> submerged in our bodies
> under the glaze
> we are baking
> sweet meat baking
> in our own juices

And there are forms of passion other than erotic ardour, and other emotions and sentiments, including irony, tenderness, humour, awe, pain, grief, and blind rage, often finely judged in expression and made more resonant by images that grow quietly inside you afterwards. This, for example, from "Small Memorials," where the line-breaks and the syntactic unfolding are

almost perfect: "Now that your ashes have been given / to the wind, / times when I breathe / a sudden atom of sourceless laughter / I shall acknowledge you, / my friend." I expect that readers new to Lowther or coming back to her work after a time will feel about this book, and especially about the new poems, the tempered awe and open delight that are suddenly released at the end of "Riding Past," where the speaker wants to pull people away from their daily dinner preparations at dusk in winter to "Stand on the front steps / stare at the sky and wave / Look, we're riding past Venus."

It would be misleading, though, to conclude this review without also re-acknowledging the ever-present social, political, and historical dimensions of Lowther's work, as in poems like "Riding Past," "Before the Wreckers Come," or "Elegy for the South Valley." Or in the painful turn from erotic bliss to familial dissonance and institutional indifference in the long ninth section of "The Sun in November," where the woman's echo of the doctor's words breaks off both complete and incomplete, as if in troubling honour of Lowther's own life:

Here is a prescription
for 292s. Avoid anxiety.
Take the sun.

Take the sun.
the sun

take

the

Visions Out Loud

Judith Mastai, Hanif Jan Mohamad, John O'Brian, eds.
Collapse #2: The Verbal and the Visual. Vancouver Art Forum Society n.p.

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

This is the second issue of an engaging journal from the Vancouver Art Forum Society. (The first, which appeared in October of 1995, focused on "Ideologies of Britishness in Post-War Art and Culture.") It concentrates principally on writing and art associated with Vancouver and British Columbia, and includes texts on or by Rodney Graham, Robert Smithson, Emily Carr, Roy Kiyooka and Robin Blaser, localizing the work and knitting its thematic concerns with verbal-visual hybrids tightly. (An essay on Joseph Beuys's performance art, a piece of reportage on the philosophy of the visual in American and English art and a response to the journal's previous issue round out the contents.) The journal makes for varied and thought-provoking reading, and the writing throughout is generally strong, with a somewhat polemical edge: the issue's introduction notes "the collapse of modernist certainties that had previously regulated vision," setting up a well-worn straw man against which its implicitly post-modern texts and visuals want to operate. An essay by Charles Bernstein on Blaser, and a number of assessments of Blaser's own embrangled association with Robert Duncan, ground the poetics of this collection in so-called "language" poetry, although Kiyooka's rather homespun "stripped" texts (as Roy Miki calls them) sit very uneasily with other more self-consciously philosophical discourses.

What is most noteworthy in this particular issue of *Collapse*, however, is the inclusion of a compact disc containing recordings of Blaser and Kiyooka reading in Vancouver, in 1995 and 1991 respectively. With the demise of the l.p. (and the continued atrophy of the audio cassette), records of poetry readings have all but vanished; there has in the last year or so been a mild resurgence in poetry performance, but little of it has managed to find its way onto disc. (Weltering in a few scratchy record collections, there must be a deep archive of spoken word—particularly Canadian poetry—

from the last 40 years, but only a fraction has been reissued in contemporary formats.) The readings by Blaser and Kiyooka, which clock in at approximately 35 minutes each, are valuable documents of voices whose improvisatory vitality and immediacy can only be caught in the illusion of presence that such a recording offers.

I should stress that these are decidedly documentary recordings, lacking any studio polish or rehearsed elegance: the producers appear simply to have taken their source-tapes and transferred them with little mixing or internal editing to the two tracks of the disc. Blaser's voice is, on his 70th birthday, strong and impressive, and his audience (attending a 1995 conference in the poet's honour) responds enthusiastically to the two longish serial poems he performs: "Even on Sunday" and "Image-Nation 25 (Exody." For me, it is not the poetry (which leans rather to the discursive and away from the "melodic" he says he hopes to touch) but the poet's intermittent banter which is most compelling, as we hear him feel his way toward an engagement, an "inclusive" conversation as he says, with his listeners. Kiyooka is, by contrast, a weaker reader, often stumbling and losing his place; he maintains a noticeable distance from his audience, holding to a dour, flat tone throughout his reading, as he works fitfully ("I'll just sort of skip around," he notes) through translations of stories that had been dictated to him in Japanese by his mother. His writing is rather prosaic, and at times curiously morbid, but this recording remains important for at least two reasons. First, it was one of Kiyooka's last public readings before his death in 1994, which makes it an essential document of his sound, of the grain of his voice. Second, and more importantly, it traces the sometimes fumbling, often delicate movement of finding speech, the work of enunciation. This may not be Kiyooka's best poetry, but it realizes itself, it moves, with a halting uncertainty tinged with pathos which makes it, to my ear, important listening. These tracks certainly lack any "professional" veneer, but *Collapse* has made a significant gesture toward the possibility of publishing discs of poetry in performance. Now that the cost of making compact discs is lower than it has ever been, it is becoming increasingly viable to hear and re-hear poetry in real time, and to enter into the fluid conversations of visionary making that texts such as these body forth.

Some Musical Polities

B.W. Powe
Outage: A Journey into Electric City. Random House $19.95

Frank Davey
Cultural Mischief: A Practical Guide to Multiculturalism. Talonbooks n.p.

Roy Miki
Random Access File. Red Deer College Press $10.95

John Riddell
How to Grow Your Own Lightbulbs. The Mercury Press $14.50

Nick Bantock
The Venetian's Wife: A Strangely Sensual Tale of a Renaissance Explorer, a Computer, and a Metamorphosis. Raincoast Books $28.95

Reviewed by Stefan Haag

The title of this review is inspired by an epigraph in B.W. Powe's *Outage.* The epigraph is by William Irwin Thompson: "Now at the end of print, electronics appears and seems to be paving the way for the musical polities of the future." This epigraph expresses a number of concerns that the five books under review have in common. First, it points apocalyptically to an end that is at the same time the future. Further, it stresses the importance of the kinds of media involved in this transition from end to future. It also declares the auditory qualities of the future, and, finally,

it assures us that there will be order. Speaking directly or indirectly to that transition from print to electronic, auditory media, the books under review share as well a fundamental paradoxical tension, namely that reading a book (in silence) is virtually the only escape from the electronic onslaught that we are suffering. It will be revealing to see how these books work with or against that tension.

In *Outage*, B.W. Powe tries to resolve that tension by confronting it head-on. The book moves from the electric, hectic, and artificial city of Toronto to the natural and relaxing city of Venice. Toronto is associated with the stock market, television, and the fast-paced information society that make people insane. Significantly, the first words of *Outage* are "I hear the city." And indeed the information saturation is epitomized in the white noise of the city and in our inability to distinguish the sounds of the city. Venice, on the other hand, is also described in aural terms, but there is a certain calmness in these descriptions that Toronto cannot muster. The experience of Venice is symbolized by the blind author Jorge Borges, who on a visit to Venice declared himself its last citizen. Venice, the city of natural, auditory experience thus becomes the end of our age and the (impossible) future.

Frank Davey is obsessively frank in *Cultural Mischief: A Practical Guide to Multiculturalism*. Mixing the witty with the trivial and the dull with the insightful, this collection written in an epigrammatic style partially succeeds in poking fun at the tendency to take things too seriously. The epigrammatic style sometimes draws our attention to things worth considering in another light, to wit: "Pocahontas is remembered because she met a certain John Smith." This style can also point to rich juxtapositions that provoke thought and criticism: "Japanese men fly by the thousands to visit Thailand. / Small gifts can forge ties between large and small countries." At times, however, Davey merely attests to his own willingness to curtail or even falsify information in the same way it was curtailed or falsified in the media, in the following example the English Canadian media: "Lucien Bouchard called for more white québécois-speaking babies." Such a biased statement given without any context is bound to please English Canadians and enrage French Canadians because it omits the context of Bouchard's remark, namely a call for more access to free daycare. Overall, one wonders why such a mixed bag is published. Perhaps some shrewder editing and another year or so of material would have made this collection worth the effort. As it is now, it seems too unbalanced and too dependent on the occasional sneer it provokes from the reader to succeed as a "practical guide" to anything.

On the back cover of Roy Miki's *Random Access File*, we find the following announcement: "These poems search for accesses to *home* as a problematic term bound into the shifting terrain of language, subjectivity and imposed identities." I found this pronouncement certainly a valuable aid in approaching Miki's poems. One type of *home* in a collection containing an homage to bp Nichol is certainly language itself. Miki throws the reader first off-balance by shifting word borders slightly so that language seems alienated (from us, from itself) and leads either to gibberish or else to new meaning that does not add up to any sense: "do yo uf in dyo ur self / wo ndr in ga bou tt he." However in the next poem—the hommage to bp, "thin king (of bp)"—we begin to feel at home in language again because Miki leads us gently from an increasing fragmentation of language to a realization of the beauty of these fragments in a surge of onomatopeia and open questions: "after basho— / splash / / frog? / / oh! / / who / a / / x?" A sense of *home*, furthermore, is also at issue in the ethnic

Canadian context. Concerned with memories and their representation, Miki points in "september 22" to the holes memory necessarily leaves and that must be filled in for a story to emerge: "'we' say what's left / until all's said // for the sake of story / in our telling times." In this poem, the relation to the past is decidedly marked by questions, nine to be exact, some of which are incomprehensible due to the fragmentation of memory. The photograph at the end of this poem does not help in deciphering the past: the two women and the three children all stare questioningly into the camera (as though to ask, how did we get here? or what are we doing here?). The thought-provoking paradox is, of course, that these questions are answerable and unanswerable at the same time. We all know about the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War but these answers do not account for the hostility and the racism underlying these events. How to explain *that* to the children in the photograph? is the open question we are implicitly asked. Miki also reminds us of the Japanese Canadian resistance to the internment, the Nisei Mass Evacuation group. Ironically, the abbreviation for that group (NME) marks a betrayal of the language itself and becomes "enemy" in the orders of the justice minister. In a footnote, Miki comments in exasperation on the poem across the white silence of the page: "NME, 'enemy' woven into the mandate of english—no luck to be borne under that alphabet." Perhaps the notion of feeling at home in a language is called into question in this context. At this point, one begins to re-read, a sure sign of a good book. Miki is also looking for *home* in a trip to Japan, visiting relatives and travelling around as an academic with a notebook computer to hide behind. In this section, the poet's contrasting experiences/emotions are reflected in contrasting forms: lyric poem with extremely short lines (one or two words per line) follows a prose poem. The last stanza in this collection is worth mentioning because it provides an overarching sense in that the cacophony of history / memory / story resonates with the unwinding of Miki's thread in the poems. The title, *Random Access File*, finally, is reminiscent of RAM (Random Access Memory) where information is stored for *immediate* access and we need not search sequentially through all the information to find a specific bit of information. In this way, Miki's thread can be thought of as intermittent and not continuous, a thread that we can follow here and there neither losing orientation nor a sense for the whole.

How to Grow Your Own Lightbulbs, by John Riddell, is a book in eight parts to be performed by the willing reader. However, "performed" does not capture precisely what this book is about. Riddell advises at the beginning: "Each title in this book requires the application of certain accessories (in parentheses) for completion. In other words, the outcome of each depends upon your input. I hope you will be *content* with the final version!" For some reason, I doubt that anyone would actually perform these pieces. Take for instance "How to grow your own lightbulbs." Riddell demands that fertilizer and garden tools be used in "reading" this piece. Yet the irony of planting lightbulbs and waiting for the seedlings to light up (without power source, of course) is so straightforward that no one would miss it. Thus the performance or the thought-performance is reaching into an emptiness or into a noisy nothingness which is the space of (pure?) irony. At times, we can snicker at the meticulous pseudo-scientific argument that seeks to convince us that lightbulbs are not manufactured but secretly grown in Mexico (with photographic evidence to boot!), but I doubt that these morsels of irony or good humour will sustain a reader from page 1 to 112.

Nick Bantock has founded a virtual

industry of colourfully illustrated novels. After a less successful venture into another format/genre with *The Egyptian Jukebox*, he has created another *Sabine*-like novel in *The Venetian's Wife*. As in the earlier trilogy, we find a charmingly innocent character being enchanted by a seemingly unreal "ghost." Where there was some enigma at the end of *Sabine*, here everything is cleared up and unambiguous; in fact, the plot is so unambiguous as to become somewhat boring halfway through the book if not earlier. Some of the description of an innocuous first date of the protagonist with her secret love borders on the tedious. And the usually artful illustrations do not help either; when her flame, for instance, mentions that he used to play soccer as a kid, one finds in the margin a little soccer player which is indicative of the interrelation of illustration and text in *The Venetian's Wife*. What seemed to make the book interesting at first are the e-mail exchanges between the ghost and the protagonist, and the latter's computer diary, but as it turns out, the author does not take these ideas where they could throw light on the tension between print and electronic media. Hence these characters may as well have written postcards or used the telephone, or . . . remained silent altogether.

Sonatas of Memory

Raymond Souster
Close to Home. Oberon $13.95

Stephen Scobie
Taking the Gate. Red Deer $12.95

Janis Rapoport
After Paradise. Simon & Pierre n.p.

Marya Fiamengo
White Linen Remembered. Ronsdale n.p.

Brian Henderson
Year Zero. Brick $11.95

Reviewed by M. Travis Lane

The best poems in *Close to Home*, "these old man's verses" ("The Reason"), are spoken in a natural, colloquial voice, full of gusto, and very likeable. They read like the very best sort of newspaper columnist's observations. If Souster had not told us that "This poem is taken from a verbatim from Hansard," his "Pictures From a Long-Lost World: From a Speech By J.S. Woodsworth House of Commons, September 8, 1939" would be taken for Souster's own words, for Woodsworth's speech has the same directness of address and aura of responsible concern and secular piety. In Souster's poetry we seem to hear all our fathers and grandfathers, remembering, recounting.

The most attractive poems in *Close to Home* are the short poem "Last Hours in K Wing" and the wonderfully effective twenty-four poem sequence "Last Words with My Mother." A wealth of memories and a strong affection make these poems more interesting than some of the lighter ones. Perhaps part of the long sequence's effectiveness comes from its imagined audience, the dead mother, who clearly had been stout-hearted, loveable, and possessed of a sense of humour. "Last Words with My Mother" may be Souster's best poem ever. I enjoy it immensely.

Taking the Gate is a notebook diary recounting Scobie's revisit to his native Scotland. Summarizing descriptions in

prose are interspersed with short-lined, unemphatic poems and small, dark photographs. The book seems more of an *aide-mémoire* than a travel guide. In the Prologue Scobie speaks of his self-consciousness as poet; this, or perhaps a desire not to stand between us and the landscape/history to which he refers, leads him to a very modest style: almost generalizing, conventionalizing, simplifying. Only occasionally does Scobie venture toward the artificiality of artfulness, and then not always comfortably. His verse imitation of the repetitive activity of the spider who saved Bruce vividly refigures for us some of the fidgetiness Bruce must have felt. We want to say (to the spider or Scobie) "Get on with it!" More often Scobie simply presumes our empathy, as when he captions an unremarkable photograph of an unremarkable house:

the house
the house
the house where I was born

Taking the Gate includes a number of translations from the Gaelic, one of which, "The Blind Harper," is sufficiently unique in imagery and idea that even in translation the poem is beautiful. Scobie's preference for unornamented language seems an effective way of conveying the antique dignity of these old and yet, with the exception of "The Blind Harper," somehow familiar poems.

Scobie's basic tactic is to assume we share his responses, that we will recognize "Glencoe" or "Culloden" with many of the feelings that well up almost mutely in him. For Scobie, memory is a culturally shared thing. Whether we stand at a parent's grave or at Culloden, there are memories, feelings, we must share. Scobie's inconspicuous poetic voice allows us to remember or imagine for ourselves matters still dear to us. Most of his readers will respond very sympathetically to the honesty and modesty of this collection.

Stephen Scobie uses his poetry as if to point away from his poetry toward the material of memory. Janis Rapoport also uses the materials of memory, but she points toward the poem. Her art is not an *aide-mémoire* but an entertainment. In *After Paradise* she uses a supple verse line, often quite long, that gives us a sense of kinaesthetic space. Both prose poems and stanzaic poems read out loud wonderfully well. Rapoport's work tends not to be philosophical or self-examining, but she has a wide, sophisticated, even witty range of perceptions and information, a rich fancy, and a zest for colorful imagery. Most of the poems in her collection seem to exist sheerly as a celebration of the materiality of the material world (including material language). "Solar Aspects," for example, has virtually no referential or symbolic pertinence; it is decorative rather than interpretive. But it is top notch.

I found Rapoport's long sequence, "Saltwater Ghosts," very attractive, perhaps in part because her imagination, nourishing itself on a history that still matters to us, adds her inventiveness to our responsiveness. An example of what Scobie or Souster might recall, but would not attempt to achieve, is the magic realism of the bartender with the ghost-bartender in the mirror in number 9 of the sequence:

Along the counter toward the crammed
ashtrays
the bartender reaches for his future
through his past.
Vermilion embers leap from the night.
The figure
in the mirror starts to burn, a pocket
watch dangling
from an ear. And on the bartender's cheek,
two red hands: insignia of unidentified
intervals,
the unrecorded and the unclaimed.

Rapoport's other long sequence, "Angels," appeals to me less; the angels, like the playful rites of "The Last Annual Death Party—by Invitation Only" and "Misinterpretation of Dreams," have the deracinated charm of

"ethnic" decorations in an expensive shop, talismans turned into toys.

Rapoport is most responsive to nature, and in poems such as the camping trip poem "Boreal" the richness of her own natural description seems to kindle her abundant Fancy into an illuminating Imagination (I am using Coleridge's capitals). In this poem dream and myth begin to work for Rapoport as if they were still integral for her and us, not deracinated. In the beauty of poetry such as this the gods (or "angels") still seem to live:

> We lie under the open eye of night, each
> woven into the fabric
> of our separate dreams. In sleep, I see
> you again in the river.
> You're gliding across rapids, holding a bow
> shaped like a lyre. Stretched back on itself
> its sinew holds the symmetry of sky. All
> night
> I walk across a bridge of arrows.

Marya Fiamengo shares Rapoport's relish in the beauty of the natural world and in its language. She relies, like Scobie, perhaps a little too much on reader-response to memory-loaded names. She has included too many light-weight poems for my taste. I think her title poem would be better without the Eliot quotation which begins it, since Eliot's meaning is irrelevant to hers. And her breath-line is short: some poems are so heavily, frequently stopped (sentence after sentence consisting of one word each) that reading them is like looking at a mosaic from too close. But most of the poems in *White Linen Remembered* are very good.

What I like about Fiamengo's poetry is her ability to work with imagery that goes beyond literal reference and which is not just decoration. If Rapoport's "angels" are charming fancies, Fiamengo's spiritual bodies are real presences. And Fiamengo's ghosts will have had warm blood. The sacred—and the mortal—are Fiamengo's themes.

I particularly admire "The Pear Tree," "Circles and Painted Horses," and "Stains of the Eternal." "Stains of the Eternal," ostensibly about the painter's art, speaks for poetry, and represents for me what Fiamengo does best. Her poetry roots itself in real life, remembered, re-experienced, but she does not limit it to memory; instead out of her experience she makes something not previously experienced: a new beauty. This new beauty is not only a sensuous handling of words and memory; it involves, as well, intellectual/spiritual interrogation. Her poem asks, as it moves, how the stillness of art (and the stillness of the poem, completed) relates to the motion of life, of nature, of time? What does art do?

> Everywhere the stains of the
> eternal seep into corners. . . .
>
> Duration, existence sublimated
> into a dream of doorways. Exits
> and entrances. The tranced
> coming and going. Cathedral bells
> distanced. Echo of marble marvels.
>
> Totemic fingers point toward
> a darkening height. The dark
> that follows where we cannot
> go caparisoned in chandeliers. . . .
>
> Movement points to stillness.
> A fragrance of flowers distilled
> into a witness for angels —
> focused on the milk white
> core of a lifted brush
> we love with love of the recording
> partial eye

For Fiamengo, the "lifted brush" does not have to be disguised by an appearance of artlessness. For her, art justifies itself, even as it returns us to our mortal, imperfect, partial loves.

The poems in Brian Henderson's *Year Zero* are consistently strong and exhibit what so few of us these days ask of poetry: musical form, philosophic depth (physics as well as semiotics), and imagery that can "open even a word like a book," to quote from his "The Old Garden." The first half of the collection is composed of poems that

contain, as part of their motivating force, a study of our situation confronting the deaths of those we have loved. The second part rejoices with births and new being. Every poem is so good I can find no favorites. Yet there is no repetition. Every time, he does something new. This is one of the best books of poetry I have read in some time.

What I particularly admire in Henderson is his gathering into his poems the whole of the situation of the poems: the specifics of time and place and nature, the layers of memory, the present thoughts, and the varying, disorganized emotions. For example, in "Listening to Chopin," Henderson represents himself as at once remembering and making a poem, "a sonata of memory." His sense of loss registers at several levels at once: it seems to permeate the night sky and makes both the sky and "your helpless wheelchair" futile. He also is strongly aware of the beauty of the night sky which seems at once inhumanly frightening and yet still redolent of the scarcely imaginable mythic heavens of religion. And, at the same time, the poet and the poem want to assert the human dimension, to bring back the familiar, to joke. The last lines of the poem tell us more about the frustration, sense of futility, and genuine pain of the situation than any other poem on the subject I can think of—we read them with what Edmund Wilson called the "shock of recognition." This is what that situation is like—and this is also art, a "sonata," Fiamengo's movement that "points to stillness."

LISTENING TO CHOPIN

Blue becomes more and more perfect,
intense as the sun leaves it

Night sky with its stave of stars,
its X-rays, trussed with loss

Not only are the dead living
but the animals are human
out there beyond the wavering lights

The table unfolds its legs like a spider
in the mansion of darkness

But here, in this futile glow,
your helpless wheelchair
stands

I cannot don
a suit of scales or wings or
get the martinis out
we both miss now

What's worse, this sonata of memory
I am custodian of, seems to have no coda
and is nearly impossible to listen to

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Dear Editors,

Iain Higgins' editorial in *Canadian Literature* 149 speaks of the commonest form of contemporary poem as "the vernacular anecdote in free verse." "Free verse" is not an adequate description of the tonal style common to most of these vernacular anecdotes, which are generally written in a manner that resembles neither written prose, with its variety of sentence form and rhythm, nor the prose of conversation, with its semantic awareness of situation and partnership and the intimacy of "you and me," nor the heightening of rhythmic awareness and the greater musicality of verse. These anecdote poems are poems only through the syntactic artificiality of their presentation.

Most contemporary Canadian anecdote poems are written as a sequence of sentences or phrases stressed at the beginning of each line or unit, and with a lessening of stress at the end of each line or unit. These phrasal units are almost invariably simplified to the subject-verb-object pattern, where there is a verb at all, and, when read out loud, tend to sound like a list: a list of things noted, or of things demanded, or, still somehow list-like, the lines that lead up to the punch line in a performed joke. This simple, somewhat punchy style is similar to that of the short anecdotes that appear in *The Reader's Digest* and to the anecdotes of professional comedians and story-tellers. It is a style to be performed in front of an audience that may not "get" an involved sentence or a complex thought.

Because this poetry is meant to be heard-as-performed, it is not intimate or "overheard." What confessional or personal material is meant to shock, entertain, or instruct? Concessions to emotional intensity are made through direct reference, and, when printed, by the use of short-breathed lines as a way of indicating focus (an effect like the smiley-face used to denote emotion on the internet: it works for the eye, not for the ear). The brick-layer sentence structure avoids the natural rhythms our language tends to fall into when we muse. Chanting or singing rhythms are entirely avoided.

To some extent the tunelessness of much contemporary poetry is due to a theorocratic/moralistic disapproval of beautiful language. St. Bernard was said to have struck off the heads of flowers by his path as he walked, because their beauty might distract him from pious thoughts. Similarly, contemporary theory-saints suppose beauty might "reconcile" us to submit to evil; they claim that as long as injustice exists we must not make beauty. Even writers who are not aware that they distrust beauty, and who quite like pretty scenery, find beauty of language "artifical," "stagey," even "false." They prefer literal meaning, translatable meaning, plain sentences. They don't seem to want to know what a mysteriously beautiful landscape or piece of music "means" in words, but that a verbal phrase or a sequence of phrases might have mysterious beauty that can not be verbally explicated seems to them somehow wrong. Perhaps they want "meaning" in language to be only that which can be scientifically defined. Or perhaps, unKeatsian, they

believe that in language, only the ugly is true.

Some contemporary poets still write beautifully. But for whom? For those professors, reviewers, editors who can write only about subject matter, and who can not listen to the sound of the language? For people who think a poem's work lies in its subject and not in its untranslatable, unparaphrasable, specific choice and sequence of words?

And how about that part of the audience for poetry readings which comes, as if egg new, to prehistoric metaphors and antediluvian perceptions, giggling ecstatically, as if they had never been to kindergarten much less high school? Ignorant of history, religion, science, geography, culture—remembering no old books, no old movies, no old music, they understand nothing that is not literal, vernacular, and told them in that simple subject-verb-object manner, with, perhaps, a few clues acted from the podium to tell them how to take it: serious or funny.

In "A Reader's Deductions," in *Canadian Literature* 145, I wrote that "A poem says how its words feel." The majority of contemporary Canadian vernacular anecdote poems feel unrelaxed, kinaesthetically inhibited, uneasy in their flesh—as aware of the audience for whom they are performed as Jack Point with his thoughts about wages. It is, perhaps, their wages they have in mind.

I agree with your editorial in No 149, we need to pay more attention to other kinds of poetry.

Sincerely yours,
M. Travis Lane

Stopping In At the Coach House: An Open Letter

Norman Ravvin

Early this past April I met with the publishers of my recent book to discuss production details. They had accepted a quote from Stan Bevington's Coach House Printing, and I asked if I could sit in when final decisions were made on how the book would look. Once inside the old brick building at the rear of 503 Huron Street you would have trouble believing that what's been known for more than thirty years as the Coach House Press was "defunct," "mourned," and otherwise "unrescued," as many recent headlines would have us believe. Bevington's operation is still a busy, eclectic place—dedicated to on-line publishing, the kind of job my publishers brought in, as well as to selling the Coach House backlist by way of the internet and a 1-800 number. Things look much as they did when I spent the summer of 1988 working at Coach House as a design assistant to Gord Robertson, who was, and still is, one of the best book designers in the country. But this is not the story of my failure—a notable one—as an apprentice book designer. My summer at Coach House is worth recalling for the light it helps me shed on the outcome of the government of Ontario's recent refusal to extend loan guarantees to Coach House Publishing, a development that became a kind of *cause célèbre* and focused attention on threats to cultural institutions in Canada. The public outcry in response to the government's failure to step in and shore up an apparently sinking ship raises numerous questions that were not dealt with accurately in superficial press accounts. Nor were these questions adequately addressed by the high-profile comments of writers and publishers. By saying that things are complicated, I don't mean to suggest that there is anything but mean-spiritedness behind the attitudes of governmental stooges here in grey Ontario. There's no question that Ontario citizens are living under the same sort of grim political overseers who guided the Social Credit government of British Columbia toward an unprecedented public strike in the early 1980s.

What I want to describe is the background to the collapse of Coach House Publishing, which for some reason has not been publicly aired. This has to do with the breakup, in the late 1980s, of the long-established Coach House Press to found two separate entities: Coach House Publishing, which closed its doors last year, and Coach House Printing, which remains in business under Bevington's guidance and which continues to do what he and his dedicated staff have always done best: make beautiful books.

I worked at the Press the summer that this breakup was in the air, being trained by Gord Robertson, who, years before, had walked into Coach House after arriving from B.C. and stuck around to learn his trade from an earlier generation of designers. When I moved from Vancouver to Toronto with the vague idea that I'd become a writer, I thought it might be good to have a day job that had something to do with publishing, so I walked into Coach House and asked if I could do anything for them. For no good reason Gord and Stan took me on.

During the months that I was there, I was surely no insider. But it was clear that the place was under extreme pressure. The long-standing arrangement, where a board of writer-editors, including Canadian literary lights like bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, and Victor Coleman, ran the place, had grown tired. Influential figures like Ondaatje were no longer as involved in what was going on, and though the quality of book making remained high, the publishing side seemed somewhat rudderless. A great deal of back-stock in the warehouse was simply given away to all comers one summer afternoon. I'm not sure what initiated this, but I landed a nice little library of early and middle-period Coach House gems, like Crad Kilodney's *Pork College* and a 1974 cloth edition of Matt Cohen's *Peach Melba.*

I can't account for the decisions that followed, because I wasn't privy to them, but the key change was the separation of "Press" from "Publishers." This was done in two ways. A publisher—Margaret McClintock, who had been a literature officer with the Ontario Arts Council—was hired. The long-standing editor-writer board was discontinued; and to make the separation between Stan's print shop and the new "Publishers" crystal clear, McClintock moved the latter to a neighbouring building that was renovated and made to look like a modern publishing office, with white walls, brightly lit loft ceilings, and sleek furniture. The original "Press" habitat, strictly hippie-eclectic, looked like the back of a well-appointed barn by comparison. Immediately, it became clear that the break between Bevington and the new publishers was not amicable. The feeling on the well-appointed-barn-side-of-things (where I worked) was one of patient disappointment. The message communicated by the new "Publishers" was that Stan had been jettisoned so he could stick to press-jobbing, while the new guns would do what he'd been doing, but better. Ironically, books bearing the Coach House imprint were no longer printed at the Coach House Press, and for a few years in the early nineties, McClintock's team turned out disappointing looking product with lackluster print quality that looked like they might have been run off on a high-resolution Xerox machine.

I didn't work at Coach House long enough to have a clear sense of what came of these developments. But by talking to people who stayed on, and by walking down the back alley that is now dubbed bp Nichol Lane, I learned that the "Publishers" had gone one step further by moving out of the renovated part of the Coach House building to an office on the main floor of an apartment building on Prince Arthur Street. Anyone who knows Toronto knows that this is geographically a quick walk from Huron, but is in another world altogether. Prince Arthur is near Yorkville and

the Four Seasons Hotel, it is downtown and upscale (the building the publishers rented offices in has a doorman who opens both outer and inner doors for you).

I don't raise the doorman to be funny. The people who ran Coach House Publishing during the early 90s, once it had distanced itself from Bevington's shop, wanted little or nothing to do with the history and cultural roots that his project represented. They showed their disdain for such things in the way they hived themselves off from the Press, and they made their feelings clear by picking up and moving to a "better" neighbourhood. The bitterness that came with this break is conveyed in a poem by Victor Coleman that appeared recently on the web site announcing Coleman and Bevington's plans for a revived publishing venture affiliated with Coach House Printing. Coleman calls his poem "The Day They Stole the Coach House Press," and its more salient bits go like this:

> The order of the day was "cut your origins,"
> or "remove the dead wood of the past"
>
> the elixir of greed had crept under the skin
> of the interlopers, some of whom had
> come on board to make careers
>
> The abrupt flakey presence of the handsome
> crowd
> became a liability
> they stole it with intellectual acumen
> combined with fucked-up notions of
> marketing which misread literature as
> afternoon soap and gossip
>
> they stole it outright with no thoughts for
> the people who created it

So, when well-intentioned locals talk about what the government "did" to Coach House, I wonder if they know which Coach House they are talking about. I have a feeling they may not have thought it through too clearly, and this lack of care makes a mockery of a discussion that's meant to hold the Press up as a symbol of the sort of institution that deserves government support. Bevington's project, with the involvement of Nichol, Coleman, Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, Roy Kiyooka, George Bowering, and designers like Gord Robertson, was a true Canadian cultural milestone. Its backlist includes a treasure trove of ground-breaking books by Canadians, as well as a host of other surprises, like the 1972 edition Coach House did of Allen Ginsberg's *Iron Horse*. This book—which, on my 1973 imprint lists no designer, and thus stands as a kind of co-operative effort between printer, designer, and writer—uses a repeated image of a passenger train, its front end small in the first image, gradually growing, until it fills the bulk of the last pages of poetry.

If we want to preserve Canada's cultural heritage, which does seem fragile and in many ways under attack, we need to tell our stories as if they matter. It's tricky, and rather sticky, trying to put your finger on exactly what happened in the back rooms of publishing and government bureaucracy leading up to the demise of Coach House Publishing. There's no doubt that Mike Harris's followers didn't know the value of what they were hitting when they swung the big axe, but those of us who speak in support of cultural institutions are doomed if our praise and indignation are equally unfocused.

In the public discussion of the demise of Coach House, the history that's key to our understanding of what happened has receded from view, to the point where the people who were present at the founding, and throughout the long course of the Press's quirky success, seem to have disappeared. But of course, they haven't. At the somewhat off-kilter meeting my publishers held with Stan and his long-time printer, we did the stuff writers have been doing at 503 Huron for decades. We looked at cover colours on a fan of paint chips; we talked

about whether the binding would be glued or sewn; I shuffled author photos on top of the picnic table where I'd eaten my lunch back in the summer of 1988; Stan told us about the snowmobile accident he'd had in which he'd broken an arm and a leg.

The next time you get a chance, walk down bpNichol Lane and peek in the back windows of Bevington's building. The presses will be roaring, new print jobs piled to dry on the worn cement floor. In the binding room, machines that look like they were designed for Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* will be chopping and folding and gluing books. And upstairs, out of view, somebody as green as I was in the summer of 1988 will be eating a tuna sandwich, thinking about the novel she's going to write if she could only get the time.

Charles Lillard, 1944-1997

Susan Musgrave

I didn't know Charles Lillard well. I knew his poetry much better, and through his poetry, perhaps, can say I knew him better than some. I've been reading his work since the early 70s, at a time when both our first slim volumes were published by Sono Nis Press.

Charles Lillard ("Red" to his friends) was highly regarded not only as a poet but as an historian specializing in the Northwest Coast. He wrote with a wistful love and intimate understanding of our land. There was a shaman in him somewhere, or perhaps a shaman's voice speaking through him. Reading his poetry it is easy to find ourselves right beside him in the hard rain, picking huckleberries in the slash, getting the woodsmoke from his smudge fire in our eyes, smelling his Old Style Airplane tobacco, corn in the billy, bread frying, mussels stewing in Muscatel at early dusk.

On the surface, Lillard's poems can appear tough, like the hard-driving, Bull-Durham-and-whiskey-voiced men he portrayed, men who drink alone, suffer alone in ruined and windy places, and dream of being body-slammed by "those back-breaking whores of Alaska way." But when they have caught their limit, and the stories have grown old, the men in Lillard's world always return to certain acorn-smelling women (those who will not be shaken off) with "eyes / blue as those steep rollers off Yakatat / bright as a glacier's calving blue."

It's romantic, the stuff of legends. And it becomes intoxicating. Scratch the kick-ass surface and this is what happens down deep, when a "boom man from Alaska" reads Ovid and Yeats in a sodden alder shield. Each poem sounds the depths of his profound loneliness, at the same time leading us closer to our own. Who among us does not know the sorrow of finding, then losing, "someone who would forever define love"?

I believe Red Lillard has done more to create a mystical and passionate Northwest Coast mythology than—dare I say so?—Raven himself. But in his last years I get the feeling Red came to the quiet realization (as many of us have) there is *just* as much romance and mythology centred around family life as there was in those days when he returned from a solitary stroll through the combers, to read "[Robinson] Jeffers / to men breaking dun horses / on those sun-blasted ridges of Point Sur." Here's Red, drunk on moonlight, better than ever, atop Anderson Hill with his young daughter, her long hair whipping across the small of his back as she tells him her own stories, full of the twists of fate, as they watch the lights of Port Angeles in the dark:

Happily I exile myself to instances like this,
it will be enough to live in these hesitations;
all my days and their nights will come and go,
the cancer in my gut will come or go;
it will be enough to catch the shape of this
morning's light
on my daughter's voice and never let it go.

Red, Loy Called Him

George Payerle

from "The Lillard Papers: Fragments of a Piece"
Aboard MV *Spirit of British Columbia,*
28 March 1997

He was born in California
and went to Alaska
and after that was always from Alaska,
a boom man with a peavey in one hand
and Rilke in the other,
who wrote this coast as no other man has done
because he was the ark of the covenant
of Sitka, this land
between the sea and the mountain that falls
into the sea
from the Aleutians to Sebastapol
and back and forth again—
where it always rains.
A man out of time,
the last of the Old People
and the first of the new,
living his own history
as a Coastal Sanctus
of all the generations known
and before them
and after.
So that we can say amen.

Dorothy Livesay, 1909-1996

Robert Kroetsch

Dorothy Livesay was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on 12 October 1909 and died in Victoria, British Columbia, on 28 December 1996. She graduated from the University of Toronto in 1931, then spent a year at the Sorbonne. She was a social worker in Canada and the United States during the Great Depression. In 1937, in Vancouver, she married; she raised two children. She taught adult education courses, she wrote and edited and lectured. She was, nine times, writer-in-residence at Canadian universities.

A childhood in Winnipeg made Dorothy Livesay always a poet rooted in the prairies and in that city. Her parents were journalists, and in the great tradition of Winnipeg journalism, with its attendant social concerns, she came to see poetry as news. Poetry for Dorothy Livesay was what you had to read and hear if you were to be alive, not only to universal values, but also to the social and political imperatives and abuses of the day. Poetry to her was immediate and demanding. Out of that sense she came to see the tradition of the long poem in Canada as grounded in what she called the documentary. Out of that same sense she wrote lyric poems that in their passionate exploration of her own, immediate life gave visionary consequence to what it is to be, in our time, both public conscience and private self, both poet and woman.

Gifted, daring, stubborn, resolved beyond all hindrance, Dorothy Livesay was and is the poet as teacher/activist, inciting her students and readers alike to emulation.

Contributors

Essays

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Opinions & Notes

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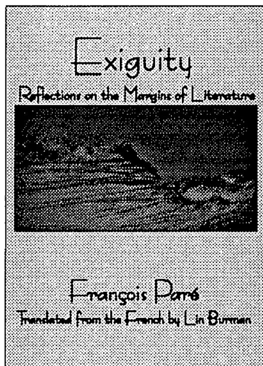

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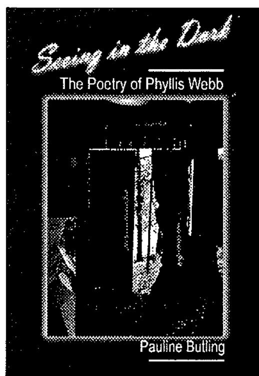

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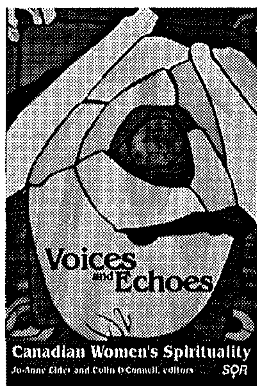

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