

PHO

ottawater: 2.0

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STEPHANIE BOLSTER

BIODÔME

Snow thickens the light
through which tamarins plunge.

When I last went
she was still alive.
This is true of many places.

Sometimes a lone man sketches.
Sometimes a woman carries a child.

This is not the difference between life and imagination.

Even the briefest distance is divisible.

GOING TO THE ZOO

Lack of work worries
knuckles to the fat sheen
of bone. Weather falls,

our umbrellas mistaken
for weapons. Bag tugging
the shoulder, ketchup pack
leaking onto cash.

The corners
where they go
when we come.

DOMES OF NEW YORK

AAAt the end of the Mall, near Bethesda Fountain, a ragged bandshell.

The aviary's arch of mesh encloses stink, flamingos red as flesh, scrawl on a sheet:
flamingos, flesh.

A tunnel ceiling lined with tiles by Minton; the restoration of one section teases –
this could be the future, with your donation. In the film *The Hunger*, a man was
stabbed here.

A woman nurses before *Allegory of Faith*, a late work of Vermeer, her belly tugged
a little emptier each day.

An agave's risen through the roof to flower once.

Louis Cabri

LIKELESS FINDS A LIKENESS

likeless like L
 sound a as j sound k
 make a look g
 make a not j not k

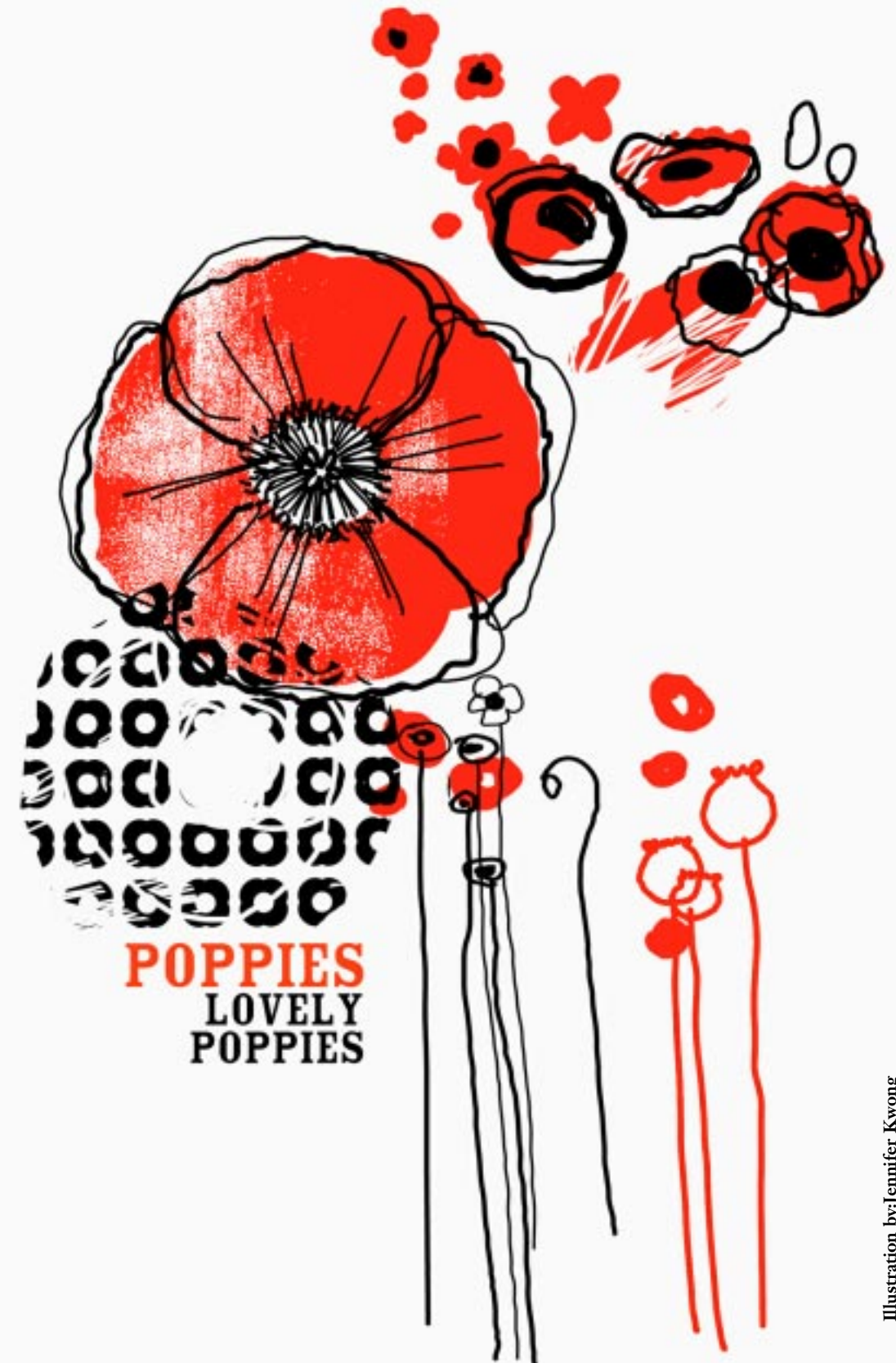
likeless like F
 sound b as c sound d
 make b look d
 make b not c not d

likeless like O
 sound e as g sound p
 make f look t
 make e not g not p

likeless like Z
 sound t as v
 make i look j
 make t not v

likeless like H
 sound m as n
 make h look y
 make m not n

likeless like R
 sound q as u sound w
 make m look w
 make q not u not w



Rhonda Douglas

CASSANDRA AND THE FIFTH GRADE ESSAY

Miss? I don't understand why
I got an 'F'. Didn't I have all
the right grammar: past, present,
future?

You said write a page about your family
and all I said was:

This is me and my house, my mom
and my dad and my forty-nine brothers.
My dad carries the weight of authority
and the inability to say no to women:
this will be our downfall, all of us,
these things that run in the family.

Once upon a time there was a city
and the people were happy. Mostly happy,
only sometimes sad in daily ways,
small griefs given perspective.
In the city, a family; around the family, walls.
What happened next was like a fire
made by Boy Scouts who are still learning –
many sparks, at first no hope and then
one catches and we are all
ablaze, uncontained.

That is all past tense now.
Future tense; my favourite
and the one we all fear.
Flashes of something normal: it's just your sister-in-law Helen
in a pretty dress, the gold on her neck like the warning rays
of the sun at noon in July – go inside, protect yourselves.

I tell this to my mother, she says “no, Cassandra,
today it's raining”, takes me firmly to the roof
of our house, makes me hold my hand out
to feel the warm wetness slide
across the centre of my palm.
I know enough not to say

it feels like tears, the temperature of blood.
She holds my hand out in the rain
as if I'm blind but I can see
and this is the problem.
Is guilt easier to handle if you can't see it coming?

Nothing you can do, Miss? Same grade?

By the way, Miss, did you know you will die alone?

EIGHT MOMENTS OF TRUTH FOR CASSANDRA

The sky is a warm grey like angora rabbit. When light touches the trees, the
leaves give it back; they want no part of illumination.

Your mother is supposed to take her stories to the grave. Or give them to you to
take to yours. Either way, she's wrong and you will be too.

When they lock you up and throw away the key, pretend they have given you a
room of your own. It will drive them mad.

Offered an apple or all of Asia, don't ever – not ever – pick the pretty girl instead.

Almost all nouns lead an average existence. They can't do anything on their own.

This last thing isn't true. You have to learn for yourself what you can trust, or
can't, in language.

Forms of lunacy are in fashion; try not to give in.

But when the world breathes its ardent love for you, it is madness to resist.

Jesse Ferguson

SAID THE RIVER TO THE FLOODPLAIN

mould your need now, woman
like seeded clay

plant the raw statue of desire
deep in the kiln, your abdomen

feel the ripening seeds swell
against your tight-knit darkness

never mention the sleek gods
of previous seasons

for now the granary
of your womb overflows



Anita Lahey

ABANDONED RAILWAY BRIDGE OVER THE OTTAWA

Everything is designed to remind us of our smallness. We walk to prove it doesn't matter, trespass on the CPR line, tromp into its black-trellised hovering on narrow planks god-knows how old. Metal arms criss-cross, criss-cross: their taunting, their gaps. The river tarries beneath puckered skin. There is no alone, not here. November hurls itself at us, elbows and knees drawn. Pigeons fuss & coo; clouds stare back; somewhere is a man who fitted rocks into pillars, laid rails, hammered steel and died. There were men in canoes who didn't stand a chance. They whisper back and forth. The dead want peace, but only sometimes. Kids have been here wielding cans of paint, accusations: *How could you want more than this?* Their uneven letters lie whitely, backed against flagging sun. A scrubby shore

calls to one you left behind. Midway, the rope, lashed to a jutting beam. Twenty feet of braided yellow fixed to the sky, fretting over water. Evidence of swimmers, or worse. Someone climbed & clung to tie that far-off end. The sky sweeps the river roughly, without pity. The question is whether to exist in two places or one. Keep keeping all you've amassed or fling it off this old bridge. Teeter on rotting boards, tethered by hope. Or tautly arc into glory and back, glory and back, each triumph less graspable than the last, until, wind-whipped, with calloused palms, you yo-yo about, doodling on little sheets of air. In wonder resides no footing; kicking won't get you home. You're bound to blackening yellow, nighttime's impressive arrivals, the immovable bridge with its slime-plastered legs. Ward off, longly and without sound, that sweaty, red-palmed slippage as you undulate with memories of height, the wooden, underfoot sureness that was.

SEVEN-FOOT BALSAM FIR FROM THE PARKDALE MARKET

It takes two to sacrifice a fir. Wear lined boots, toques. Find a shaggy miser clinging to greenness. Prepare to starve its resin-coated heart. Lug your catch down the slush-ridden road. Audacity's bristled arms flap between you—heady with plans to stuff the forest through the front door. Sap congeals on your mitts. Prop the tree on the living-room floor; stab with silver screws. Think of woods, night, a diet of snow. Remember bitter afternoons at the cut-your-own, axe in your dad's gloved hand, Mom clutching a thermos. The studied circling of branches, winter caking your nose. The severed tree hauls water up its spine, sheds onto unopened gifts. Legless, it weeps the sticky-raw scent of why, how, when?

We enter the room as the year recedes. Woodsy sweetness gathers in prickly heaps. We vacuum, we sweep. We see what the tree is capable of knowing, unable to know it ourselves. The rug thickens with our disappearing. Plastic replicas threaten to rise from the basement: squashed, evergreen, the opposite of truth. The nose lives for these wintry thefts, the acrid memory of that stained-glass man. His blood was not enough. Every year a tree dies in the house, one thirsted needle at a time. Months later, remnants thread into socks, jabbing our feet. Unlike the oak desk, maple floor, Jesus and those six million Jews, the fir is a fresh kill; we dress it in tinsel, bells. For mercy we lodge a sliver of sky—an angel, a star—over its uppermost branch.

INSTRUCTIONS ON SNOW

Its canvass, your sky. Watch it wrinkle,
doodle those sugary messages.
Breathe whiteness till it becomes
starlets pinking your throat. Beware
self-important flakes, indigestible

purity, heavenly filaments threading
into ominous blankets. Be a tree.
Be wind.
Shake. Subdue.

There is a six-sided language
we should all learn. This is not about

the blackening heap in the ditch, yellow
sprinkle of dog piss, threat
of acid frost. Do your duty. Stick out
your tongue, that the bleached
world may melt. Snip it from paper

with a steady hand. Suspend the delicate
cold in a window, over the bed.
Haul out your shovels, sleds, well-waxed
skis. Roll the great white into heads
with pocked cheeks, destined to jowl

in the sun. There is snow you plow,
snow you salt. Snow you put on
like a new fleece. Snow you wander into and forget

to leave. Some mornings we wake
under a dreamy layer. Dig in
before the untrod glint retreats: Scoop
mittfuls into your grief, give
to it all your faith in decadence,
ice-cold. Fall. Flatten
and flap, flap till your limbs dissolve.



RIVERS

(for Pat)

so many rivers
old viens, snaking earth's
directions

*

you followed one river somewhere else
fucked off out west, I think

*

needed a model
a spirit-guide geography
pulled you away, taught you something
about windowed guilt painful landscapes

*

now, the green of B.C. and a new brain

*

but where's the abandoned hockey arena
in the little town of your heart?
the one where you got that hat trick...



Anne Le Dressay

A SMALL THING

A small thing happened on this dirt road from nowhere to nowhere, a back road between fields where no houses were.

A summer shower turned the dirt to mud and clogged the wheels of a bicycle. There was no traffic at all, no traffic in sight except distantly on the highway. Just the mud and the cyclist miles from home with a bike she could not abandon because it was not hers.

The wooden bridge within sight, the bridge with no side rails, so narrow only one car could cross at a time. Nothing happened. But what *could*?

*The one car on a muddy road
not a friendly neighbor. The one car
driven by a bad guy who wants to get you
under the bridge, and what do you do?
Only the fields and no houses.
Only the bush and the deep ditch and
the long grass and the mud.
Only the lonely spot on a lonely day
and you can't get home.*

Nothing happened. The one car on the muddy road was a friendly neighbor, a real one. He put the bike in the trunk and drove her to the highway (the long way home), then cleared the mud from the wheels before leaving her to the rest of her adventure: a flat tire, another summer shower, a friendly stranger driving her to the gas station so she could call home, then her father annoyed and refusing to drive out to pick her up 3 miles from home with her brother's useless bike, so she would have walked, pushing it all the way, but her brother came.

PD DAY IN THE HISTORIC TRAIN STATION

Where the railway tracks used to run are bicycle paths and lawn. The train station retains nothing of its former purpose: meetings, partings, arrival, departure, movement, change. It is a conference centre now, and the meetings that happen here are more mundane.

On this spring day, civil servants are gathered under duress for carefully orchestrated fun according to some professional idea of what that means. They call that somebody a *facilitator*, a *motivational speaker*. They call the process *professional development*.

We play games that mimic friendship with people who are (or not) friends in very specific daily-contact ways where intimacy has clear boundaries. We pretend to cross those boundaries, but we are careful: we have too many tomorrows still to spend together.

High above us, in the halfmoon windows, under the vaulted ceiling, echoes of all kinds sleep: greetings and goodbyes, loudspeaker announcements, distantly the trains. Echoes of the city's past, the city's change and movement.

Spring sun touches the stone walls, moving slowly as the hours move, never reaching low enough to touch us.

The speaker speaks. We go through the motions, motivated towards the *Exit* sign, the spring daylight, the outdoor air.

THIS SCIENTIST

This scientist specializes in minute microbial life from the swamps of northern Canada, forms of life that had no name (to us—to them they were them) until she caught them in her clean glass containers and held them under microscopes, probed and defined them. Several small life forms bear her name. It is like naming stars—a kind of immortality.

I imagine her in hip waders in smelly places other people avoid, bending over reeds and swamp water, reading the scum, the textures of live water, the glyphs of stirred up mud. In my mind, it is always a cloudy day and the land flat with no sign anywhere of human life except the scientist and her tools. In my mind, she is here most fully herself, most content.

NEIGHBOR

She asks if I work at a local bar. She can't account for my irregular comings and goings. Later, she asks if I am a nun. Perhaps she has peered through my windows and seen the stark black & white Crucifixion on my wall.

She lives next door and spends hours on yard work. When she runs out of yard, she rakes the boulevard. If she ran out of boulevard, she would carry over into the park across the street.

She is always outside. I cannot come or go without running the gauntlet of her questions. She does not hide her curiosity, or even try to disguise it. She is insatiable. I volunteer nothing, and I ask no questions. I answer hers, but without elaboration. What she does not know, she invents, and no doubt spreads to the neighbors.

In this neighborhood where I am a stranger, I have a shifting identity. I am a nun who works at a bar, serving drinks and bantering with customers, or blessing them. I drop prayers among the jokes and curses. I finger like a rosary the coins that pass through my fingers, each coin a prayer.

Karen Massey

PHOTOGRAPH

A woman on the prairie visiting her mother's
abandoned childhood home

A woman on the beautiful, bald prairie
with her ailing mother, returned to her homestead
left alone over time in a place called Holdfast

A woman at fifty absorbing some of the
spilt emotions her mother rarely shows;
her mother dancing nearly childlike beneath the huge-hued sky,
her body unusually spirited, resounding in rare laughter

A woman with a borrowed camera taking b&w photographs
of the deserted house and prevalent memories

A woman on the unforgettable prairie;
sad woman, beautiful women, on the prairie

An idea of dust and memory caught in gray scale,
the spell of years broken around them;
the mother uncharacteristically fey

and the daughter, gorgeous, slipping into that middle age
that has its own vision and endless sky

Two women, a shimmering, broken open
in Holdfast; the woman as open as the sky;
her mother, the sky, as close as they've ever been



COLD WATER WASH

The midwives are gone, everything is still,
you're sleeping with our baby eight hours in this world
and I'm watching,
unwilling to sleep, to let the day slip past

Here in near-darkness,
snow piling up outside, I can't let this feeling cleanly end,
won't let the day leave without leaving
as deep a mark as it can

Here, in this apartment, a baby was born;
here in this small space, beneath a small statue of Odin
another mother and newborn finally touched skin
and now, hours later, who could tell,
except for a kitchen counter of emptied mugs and drinking glasses,
faint streak of blood on the hall closet door jamb,
you'd never know what transpired here today;
I pushed a baby out of my body

with so little supporting evidence; a camera
of assorted exposures, small bag
of garbage, a bag of bloody laundry
headed for cold water

Not even realizing
the ways I'll turn nostalgic for this afternoon,
wishing, for example,
to have the bloodstains return to the shirt I was wearing
this snowy Thursday afternoon in December when I first held you
and my life changed forever,
the slate wiped clean

WINTER AFTERNOON ZEN

Winter light purifies
 it's the voice we ache to hear
 lover we long to remember
 drawing bright fingers across
 the dark branches of winter trees—
 No use,
 every metaphor tosses out jumbled;
 since your birth I can't look at any same world
 Around us the world whirls is whorls
 whips past, days dissolve into daynightday

All light refracts through you
 your centring just happens *is*
 You know only trust and fate
 and being

I try to decypher you
 swathe you in metaphors entirely foreign to your skin
 Your breathing simply *is*

The world pulses in your blue iris

NOT A SONNET

Where are they now, young bodies on the streetcar
 heading out for food after hours and hours
 building and unbuilding one another's bodies,
 glimpsing the soul's secret sorrow and passion.
 Good night, here comes the snow,
 there's no TV here, just a stereo and a cat or two
 and a pile of blankets on what we've deemed a bed,
 though we never sleep, we're so young and our bodies feel
 as if we're running out of time and this timelessness
 is all we've been made for. It's always night here,
 stars work just for us, seasons pull in and out of months;
 spring outside now, kids noisy in the school playground,
 pushing bodies through the air— they don't even know yet
 what they've been brought here to do

Una McDonnell

DESPERATE SWIMMERS

(After a mixed media work by Betty Goodwin, *Untitled*, 1994-1995, graphite and oil stick over gelatin silver print on translucent mylar film, 94 by 71 cm).

This lone figure floats, face-down
in a subcutaneous sea—
he could be making love, or dead

on a bed of nerves. See how he is sinking
when his body longs to be taut?
Taught. Everything we need to know

is held in the body. The skin, a windworn gate-
keeper barring the world from celled
inmates who record our days in their own

arcane language. Our bloody emergence
in the world, penned there, the body
we leave, imprinted. If I could translate

one woman, one man. I write them
in love, if only for an hour.
I am coupled to a drawn man, his death

dance, untold stare in skin and what lies
beneath. I want to open
him, spread him against this graft,

love him nerve-bouncing raw. Doesn't he
know? Don't I? We sink
into our own bodies. He has traded breath

for wisdom: how long can he suppress
breath? How deep is deep enough
in the language of skin? Hours

between two people click past
as cells divide. I will never touch
the hand that touched me first. Never

—like this desperate swimmer:
drowning, dead, or dying
for answers—stop staring into skin.

GRIEVING KNIFE

(After a mixed media work by Betty Goodwin, *Grieving Knife*, 1991, pastel and graphite on translucent mylar film, knife, 85.5 by 71 cm).

“The biological birth of the human infant and the psychological
birth of the individual are not coincident in time.”
—Mahler, Pine and Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*

If there is an edge to this, I want to run
my palm along its steel sharpness, let blood
pool and gather until I can float—
an embryo with no cord but my own

small yearning. Somewhere there is an
ancient song. Its rhythms live in skin.
Its slow strum, a choke-throated Ah—
knotted in my tongue, warming words

in my mouth but never speaking.
Will I ever sing me? I have been
given away. Grief follows
the lost child with a stalkers' grace.

His knife at my throat, exacting
its price: one family
for another. I take the blade
and in its glint, see my own

fractured reflection. Feel its cold metal
weight in my hand. When I have it,
I use it. With a wretched precision
I tell my first self: You are not real,

of earth, or born. Here, I say.
Cut here. I am
blessedly exact. Conclusions
are satisfying, but bloody.

AGAPE

For you I will become the stoneless olive, pulled warm
from leaves, slyly entered and perfectly left: intact

but barren inside the circle. In the dream of a child, the man
looks at the girl with unflinching interest. She will mistake

this for that pull she feels as he winks and strides, lone,
in his own direction. On the road, the roll of tires

hitting gravel and the singe-sound of crickets. She opens
the door, *Efharisto*, steps inside. She is willing to risk the dark

locus of a strange, estranged man—his blood and its pressure
in her veins. *E agape mou yia sena*, she might say, *my love for you*,

the gape of it inside me. Tonight, she will sleep inside the moon
of her small silver tent. Pour careful water over hot coal, watch smoke

as it rises, slow, into night—

ORANGES

Your hand clutches a weighty mesh bag
full of them. The day you find them. Him—with her.
Bursting into the room, you, your naked
wrist, hold forth a single offering: blood

orange, mottled. Notice the alien landscape
of the fruit's skin. On your palm, its rough mystery.
Notice how the shape of the orange mirrors the O
of your mouth. In this moment. Notice.

When the oranges drop, it is a slow
sinking. They spill from the bag
like the smallest lies. They spin

to the edges of this room. Your foolish body
will remember everything: tender
spot below your throat, pulling open apart

and underneath, something fine
about to break. The boundary

of your scent colliding with theirs—
crisp citrus against an oceanic funk.

You will be the one left
open, outstretched hand, pulp

inside your grasping fingers.

LOOKING DOWN WATER

I.

I will tuck my eye into the smallest valve of my heart, bury it
at the root of a tall oak—then, then

you will not enter me. Skin, your voice, my ear, your breath
in the room as I breathe. At the base of the hard root

I am meant to change everything. Love differently. The heart
is a cruel knot. I wish it would slip itself
undone. My finger on your forearm

did trace a screaming track, your chesthair rose like smoke
to the lean bones below your throat, the rattled air, the moment,
a stone I held,
and somehow dropped...

Come winter. The river will freeze and when spring ice breaks, bodies
rise. The heaviest things stay down, silted—

II.

Who doesn't contemplate the river? The cool amber flow and down
silt clouds slow as we touch; the fish circles the worm. The patience of grief,

I can see the fist coming a long slow line in time into the hit, a good crack,
and think, huh—numb; then blood, bruise, break. What gets called healing:

Pain. The heart circles back on itself. Inside its walls, sparse
sweat-heavy rooms, dank and prone to flooding. I cannot let go: Hit me

hit my earth-bound heart—it beats again again...

years rip out like the fish-lured line, chasing the silver flash.
At the end of the reel, there I am, looking down water—

Colin Morton

ON THE OTTAWA

Glint of light from a wave, sound of rolling
pebbles. Loon moans across the water.

Ring of ax on stump, drinking cup on hook.
Suck and chug of hand pump. Gush of water

Overflowing palmfuls, mouthfuls.
Holy water on ice. A border runs through it.

A ski-boarder's stubborn perfectionism
splits an otherwise perfect Outaouais morning.

Chatter of waves over gravelly shoals.
A boarder runs through it. Holy water on ice.

POEM BEGINNING WITH A LINE BY VALLEJO

For days now I have felt an uncontrollable urge
to embrace my democratic freedoms, to kiss
on both cheeks, to kiss three times
like the French. And I want to declare
I wholeheartedly love the French
from grape to truffle, wine-dark eyes
burrowable corners and all.

I have been drunk on fraternity and equality
and taken liberties with my democratic freedoms.
Now my irresistible desire to feed the hungry
dries my mouth, I go on tirelessly
trying the pump I can no longer prime
because I know no greater love than to dry tears
unless it's to make the one who's smiling laugh.

YOUR QUESTION AGAIN?

Last year he had a lot to say
Had a thing or two all figured out

Or so he said
Now the announcers have their day

But what's to say
The question is inertial spin

Whether it's blending time
Into the other three and if so

What it has to do with why
All neutrinos are left-handed

Butterflies still alight on a bell
Just before the hour

Dew on a rose shivers as at first
Space and time shivered into being

Quantum effects in the brain
Invention's wiggle room

A second's inattention or viral infection
Junk DNA riff raff shed snake skin

Mutations transforming from within
Everything you thought you understood



Jennifer Mulligan

MISSING PERSONS

I.

daze an age
people tracking "persons"
bio-mechanical machines &

devices carrying
in)visibility highs and lows
against borders

when do they register the low?
when, decided
(when, they "need" to

canucks exempt
(just like them
owning industry & tim's

sharing a faded excuse
(border-ings
push sentimental boundage
dis-putation over wood slats

and young things ripe with slaughter

previous form with fire
white house scorched black
(underground
new national bridgings

II.

the commonality
of how

& where do people
missing go

III.

lists of students
not sitting in first year psych

or a man (husband,
med-doc
grecian, money, deep within pockets, hanging, overhead
with a wife (woman,
mold-made

travelers at the top
with footage
& a journey

of disappearance

VI.

an en-viable solution
get (round to a side
to dis)solving
a widening () net
catching people with/out while

(finding

(hiding

(staying in one place

MIXING

for zed

gestures, small
without () qualifiers

sends a
message () with one m

shiny newness,
coin () between

lips, taking
roasted () liquid

thicker than
bread () breaking

late arriving,
at () 6 p.m.

in bed by 7”

ONES & ZEROS

buildings below the horizon
built for floodings,
about the getting, about the losing,
stillness, marked by terra bites of mess
computationally unpredicted
the woman in a yellow coat,
somehow she knew more than “el presidente”
the greatest of the eight & arrogance,
wealth money has no control over
weather & whether
someone saved or rotted

UNUSUAL TREATMENTS

smooth hit
of walnut
with clean shot glass

eyes
cast quick
a cool heat

eats what he loves
every joke
with consideration

“he thinks
you’re too smart for him”
scared

offers firm
against
slip covered furniture

“she’s the only one”
here
“who would be able to tell”

calling to ask what
was over
overheard



Nick Power

from **The Peculiar Uncertainty of the Hand's Technique**

**poems for Eric Cameron's *Divine Comedy*
(a series of gesso paintings on objects)**

I

confronted by the object
in its humility

not knowing how to address it

layers of paint
glistening
in the intense light

like Magritte's rock
in its room by the sea
this Book of Matches
burns into the mind

yet remains
unnaturally smooth

i am drawn by the shadow
shifting the sphere
toward infinity

i am there
the object comes and goes

II

a package i want to open
in a pillowcase of paint

organic surface indentations
neatly painted over in smooth strokes

small craters
pulled into shape
by the object's own gravity

loose corners masking
an intense rectangular cube
the axis of painting
shifted ninety degrees
from the original book:
Telephone Directory

holes along the curves of the corners
the outer limits of a lost city of names

IV

paint in a state of alarm
urged toward permanent form
brush strokes like
snow in an updraft
drawn across a relentless arctic surface

pulled down and around
by gravity
artist outwitting entropy
through ritual

gesso neutrinos
the missing mass of the Alarm Clock universe

V

Shoe
 stares ahead
 like the bold wearer

reduced to one colour
 paralyzed in sculpture

cracks creases coruscations
 its pebbly underside
 lifted by the owner's activity
 and by contractions of paint

the posture of the shoe
 the casual drapery of the laces

this is Keats' "silent form"
 its own past
 not yet
 stilled

IX

recreating the pumpkin:
 organic growth of skin
 layer upon layer
 like bark

the world has its outer texture
 that shines in the light
 coarse, heraclitean
 the pull of rough
 at the edge of smooth

a quieter world within:
 Cup, Saucer, and Spoon

XII

"working over the open wound"

believing art can heal the broken world
 he creates this ancient *ixoye*
 holding its suffering open
 scarred surface screaming

drawing the sign of the fish
 around the body of dead flesh

XIV

it stands there
 like some wilted classical ceramic

rejecting sympathy

impious in its self-consciousness
 revealing no history

no broken statuary
 testifying to the brutality of time
 merely
 accumulated incompleteness
 an Empty Box

like a plant in hibernation
 swept clean
 waiting for the next season

XVII

brushstrokes imitating air currents
 over an identifiable flying object
 sculpted by nature
 scalloped edges suggesting origins
 on a benign watery planet

built for slipstreams
 Brushstroke swings into our hearts
 without hindrance

ELLIPSIS

i want to say i but

i say you

i want to ask myself a question

but the voice that answers

is not my own

live in your dreams for awhile

you are a sleepwalker
in your own dreams
somniaambulating past poets
holding open books

between your own lines
you read words under words
their meaning obscured

you break the dream into pieces
and reconstruct it out of paper

an onion explaining all its skins
in the grammar of the outer layer

HE WOULD GO TO A COSTUME PARTY DRESSED AS HIMSELF

when i look at you
my hands are empty

when you look at me
i stand transparent

is that you?

visibly normal
with dreams of missing limbs
arms ending in tentacles

dragging your shoulder around
as if it belonged to somebody else

tormented inside your body
bones exploding through the skin

if you breathe too deep
you will fly apart

they give you a soul like an iceberg
a cross inside you
where semen should flow

a cock through the heart
like a log through a buzz saw

your grotesque solidified mass
falls through a doorway

your head lifts up
attached by strings

if they gave your hands back
you'd have nowhere to put them

HE'S STANDING IN TO TAKE A BEATING FOR SOMEBODY ELSE

you are leaping from one crumbling housetop

to the next impossible sanctuary

surfaces drop away

unbounded space

that's not you

half-alive half-starved

bald gawky naked

hair around the neck and face

a stuffed rag doll with skin

**HIS HOME WAS RANSACKED BY DRUG ADDICTS - PAINTINGS WERE
SLASHED, SCULPTURES STOLEN, PIANO SET ON FIRE**

afraid of something coming out

you were on your way to kill yourself
saw yourself coming the other way

she opened her mouth
and you fell inside

your partner dances
in a flying position

you fall from the cliff edge

wrapped in other men's clothing

you wake up under water

swimming beside her

i want to explain how neutrinos glide through our
bodies as we fuck

i lie awake all night

listening

my eyes closed on darkness

not all the pictures turn out

remember this:

a colour merely a detail of a fence on a street darkened
now the wind is blowing in the night the fence pulling itself
tighter around the yard the gray limb of the tree reaching
remember this -

she won't be coming back
herself ripe inside her body barely holding
her standing across the room as if she were right next to me
her face breaking with the strain

i have forgotten so many things

keep your comments to yourself

the life of the streets like cold water

**WHEN HE OPENS THE DRAWER - THEY'VE HAD THEIR SLIMY FINGERS
IN THERE**

a dance with bones

in my mother's arms
amid ruined churches

there's no one there

walking through shattered buildings

there's no one there

my whole body trembling

THE ROOM IS FILLING UP WITH WATER

when a lake appears

i immerse myself

all the gargoyles drowning
as i drift beneath the surface

in the blue-filtered sunlight
humming with pleasure

the talismans of childhood
messages left by a stranger



K. I. Press

DID MINOR SURGERY HERSELF.

Scared little oysters. I'd scrape away, replace what I took with a grain of sand. And instead of children they each would bear one perfect pearl. That is what I did for them, if they survived, I turned their children into pearls, and they struggled home not knowing what they held.

ENDOWED WITH THE JULIET NATURE.

Every city, every age has its child stars. My place and time had more than most. We overflowed into the streets, reciting Shakespeare on corners, in costumes we stole from the wardrobe managers and didn't want to take off. Some of us clothed with little ropes of braided leather, some of us so small we wore collars 'round our waists, tight as corsets. We wore those, too, our bosoms stuffed with fruit and feathers; flies followed us. They showed us to the audience in red rooms. Some would smile, some would not; there were men who chose carefully and those who took all within reach. A peculiar man loved me. He brought me flowers, beads, small tawdry corner-store rings—my fingers were too small for jewels—shell-combs for my hair, and oils to wipe the rot away; he killed himself with a bone-handled knife, and I hid in the bookshelf till the police sent me back to the theatre, and the wardrobe manager said—give me those rings and pearl beads. Pearl beads, if you close your eyes, are like insects, as if—as if you are tied to the railway track, feeling life—feeling who knows what—what worms, bees, rodents—crawl up your legs. We were a dime a dozen. We were prodigies.

HER HUSBAND DIED AT SEA.

Lt. Roche died at sea on 4th December 1876. I was at the Cape, beating farmers and waiting in the infernal heat with other Navy wives. The worst part was the mourning dress in that heat, the full-on blackness of it, a walking wood-stove, a conductor of wretchedness, even when I started hitching up my skirts so the men could see my ankles I still felt the weight. Oh, the young officers would eye my fortune and poke me up and down with their walking sticks, I was not proud and would bend over, so long as it was only their sticks I felt. I would not touch skin. That was also the way with Lt. Roche. In desperate times we used the snapped-off legs of old chairs. At sea they had a variety of seaworthy instruments, spare thingamabobs and whatnots, I don't pretend to know about this boat business. Eventually I allowed one, a young naval man named Dr. Boomer, to impose his member up my rear, but this I took to be a sign of the deepest commitment and in essence my acquiescence was an acceptance of an unspoken proposal of marriage. We sailed for Canada within a year, and on the voyage Dr. Boomer died of malaria contracted before we left; and so I wore my mourning garb again, but the heat is much less in Canada, and I am not so weary of it yet.

SAVED THE LIFE OF THE GAME WARDEN

No time to think. She came at my chest
with all her heft, gravity,
acceleration and physical attraction, her claws
already covered in crusty blood and bits of sinew
from some other fight another day, some kill, a meal
of fish or little creatures. I didn't think but knew
I had to move. I moved. The sky moved. The trees.
It all got smaller. I hit branches and looked down.
She was low, now,
far, on some island
I'd left behind. The expression on her hungry
muzzle. She swiped. I kept
staring down. My claws. My giant furry
belly. A sound in my ears—I know it now.
The sound of fish swimming
in a stream a mile away. The sound of burrowing
under the earth. The sound of plants pushing.
I roared. She bowed her head. We sniffed.
I didn't think, I bent down,
rammed my claws
into her belly, smelled the air.



Drawing by: Kerry Cavlovic



Artwork by: Amy Thompson
 Title: Depart Not (Detail)
 artwork available at: La Petite Mort Galery, 306 Cumberland



Print by: Jennifer Kwong

Interview with Monty Reid

KNOWLEDGE, KNOWABILITY & THE ALTERNATE GUIDE: AN INTERVIEW WITH MONTY REID by *rob mcLennan*

This interview was conducted over email from February 2004 to November 2005

Widely published as a poet and essayist, **Monty Reid** has produced a substantial volume of literary work. His volumes include *The Life of Ryley* (Thistledown Press, 1981), *These Lawns* (Red Deer College Press, 1990), *The Alternate Guide* (Red Deer College Press, 1995), *Dog Sleeps* (NeWest Press, 1993) and *Flat Side* (Red Deer College Press, 1998), a collection of new and selected poems, *Crawlspace* (House of Anansi, 1993), and the chapbooks *cuba A book* (above/ground press, 2005) and *Sweetheart of Mine* (BookThug, 2006). He has won the Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry three times and is also a three-time Governor General's Award nominee. He spent nearly twenty years working at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller, Alberta, in the heart of the Alberta badlands, before moving to the Ottawa area in 1999 to work at the Canadian Museum of Nature. His next trade collection of poetry is due out in fall 2006 with Ottawa's Chaudiere Books. A selection of his work-in-progress, *The Luskville Reductions*, appeared in the first issue of *ottawater*.

rob mcLennan: It's been a while since your last collection of poetry, *Flat Side* (1998, Red Deer Press). What have you been doing in that time?

Monty Reid: I've been busy. Probably the biggest thing has been a change of jobs and a move from Alberta to Quebec. I worked at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller for almost 17 years out but in '99 I took a job with the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa. The Ottawa job has been great, but it's been huge time and energy sink – we're starting a major renovation project and I'm heavily involved in it. Somehow I've got to produce almost 100,000 sq ft of new exhibitions in the next five years. My family, including my grandson, came with us and I've tried to help them get settled. I'm trying to learn French. I'm playing music. Plus, I'm now living near the little town of Luskville, on the Quebec side of the river just under the Gatineau Hills. Landscape has always had profound influence on my life and my work and I knew that leaving the badlands would unsettle me for a while, and it certainly did. I'm just not used to all the trees, you know. I didn't write a thing for a couple of years and it's only been in the past 18 months or so that I'm writing regularly again. It's funny, because I didn't miss it – the writing – at the start. *Flat Side* and *Dog Sleeps* had come out fairly close together so I didn't feel any great urgency to produce another book. But after 3 years I had to actually prod myself into it again, and it's only recently that I'm liking what I'm seeing. I kept telling myself it's ok, you're hoarding the stories and images and ideas, organizing, or at least freeing-up, the space in your head where writing can occur. Then you start to worry that all this rationalization is just another displacement activity and maybe it's not going to happen again. So I started doing exercises and even started translating poems from French and Spanish. I was travelling in Cuba a while ago and, since I had to stay in one place because Air Canada lost my luggage and it took a while for it to catch up with me, I'd get up every morning and translate poems by Nicolas Guillen. Not that I'm much of a translator, but it was great practice.

And it seems to have helped. I've got a couple of books that seem to be taking shape lately.

rm: Has the shift in geography (from badlands Alberta to badlands Quebec) and the time you spent not writing produced any shifts in the way you write now? Does it feel different to you, or is it like "riding a bicycle?"

MR: Well, there are some changes, but I'm not sure how much can be attributed to a specific landscape or whether it's still the change of location itself that is making a difference. I do think I always write out of a specific location, a particular site, and one that is not reducible to social construction, so I guess it's reasonable to expect that the Ottawa River and the Gatineau escarpment will have an effect. But I am now spending much of my time in an urban setting, which I haven't done for the past 25 years, so that's bound to have an impact too.

What I'm writing these days seems in some ways de-settled, at least to me. The gaps, in rhythm, in knowability, in social correctness – I'm just not feeling the need to fill them in as much as I used to. At the same time I think my recent work is more constrained, more reticent. Maybe I'm just missing that endless prairie horizon.

In terms of whether it feels different, in most ways, no. It's still a discipline, it's still an endless interplay of text and world, it still feels good to produce something you think is ok. But in one major way, yes. I'm now very conscious of how easy it would be not to write. I could easily play more music, write more songs. I could easily build more exhibitions, out of fur and ice and bones and all sorts of wonderful materials, and they could be beautiful and/or intellectually provocative, or funny. Or useless for that matter. But I'd still feel I was doing something productive and that my narcissistic need for an audience was fulfilled.

I do think I always write out of a specific location, a particular site, and one that is not reducible to social construction, so I guess it's reasonable to expect that the Ottawa River and the Gatineau escarpment will have an effect.

But it isn't quite the same. The other things don't have the intimacy, or at least the option for intimacy, that language offers and so I keep coming back to it.

rm: What first started you writing?

MR: Yvonne Gadd. She sat ahead of me in Grade 10.

I actually grew up in a very religious household, and I mean religious not as a social glue but as fundamental belief, and I've always thought that one of the reasons I write is displaced belief, or maybe as a secular firewall that keeps all that transcendentalism at bay. Other than the Bible, my first brush with literature was the *Odyssey*, which my mother had to read as part of some correspondence course she was doing. Parts of it were offensive to her and that pretty much guaranteed my interest. We were also a pretty musical household. My mother was a piano teacher and man, I practiced. So an alternative theory is that writing is a replacement activity for music.

I can't remember a time when I imagined myself as a writer. I've always read voraciously, even in high school, but even when my first books came out, back in 1979, the idea of being a writer still struck me as kind of a fantasy. I'd had very supportive teachers, Percy Goodburn in high school and folks like Doug Barbour and Bert Almon at university, and the literary scene was certainly an exciting one, but I think I knew even then that writing was never going to be the only thing for me. Even now, it's only one of the things I use to give my life some definition, it's not the only, essential parameter. Like I said, I've learned how easy it would be not to write.

rm: I remember we had a conversation a while back about prairie poetry in the 1970s. There seem to be a lot of book-length pieces coming out around that time involving prairie history and/or family history, whether Barry McKinnon's *I Wanted To Say Something*, Andrew Suknaski's *Wood Mountain Poems* or even, later on, Dennis Cooley's *Bloody Jack*. Your own *karst means stone* (NeWest Press, 1979) is very much a part of this. What do you think accounts for such a burst?

MR: It's true there was a lot of that semi-historical work going on. Eli Mandel's *Out of Place*, Leona Gom's *Land of the Peace*, Kristjana Gunnars' *Settlement Poems* are others that come to mind. The reasons are probably as much sociological as literary. Improving economies made more jobs in general, and especially in universities. So folks like Bob Kroetsch could come back west and teach in Winnipeg, where he had such tremendous influence. The west was urbanizing and there was a general awareness of trying to hang on to some of the recent past, which was rapidly disappearing. Gradually, funding appeared, so more poetry could actually get published.

And the doors to the temple were open. All sorts of literary possibilities and influences washed across the prairies, like they did most places. There were the Beats, there was Projective Verse, concrete, indigenous writing, oral traditions, proto-LANGUAGE work, and more traditional forms. It just seemed like there were so many options to explore. And bpNichol seemed to be out there exploring most of them.

The book-length poem wasn't unique to the prairies – then or now; *The Martyrology* comes to mind. Of course Plunkett, Saskatchewan is the geographical centre of that whole project. But we did seem to embrace it with some enthusiasm. Was there some sort of topographical predisposition? The much remarked sense of space, or the need for a substantial bulwark against that endless space? Who knows. I can get as mystical about the open horizon as the next guy, but really I think the biggest single factor was Robert Kroetsch.

rm: A number of your collections seem very deliberately built as complete units. Do you think there are links in the prairies between writing history through poems and writing the book as unit of composition? How do you see it evolve through your own work?

MR: It's true. I sometimes build my poems as book-length units. But not always, and I don't think there's only one way to build. You use the materials you've got.

The book does seem to have a little more room for history than a short lyric. Maybe on the prairies there's an awareness of written history being so short that it's easy to feel in the middle of it, that it's clearly on ongoing at-hand process, and the ongoing poem is a way to try to capture that continuous flow.

In my own work, I don't think there's a clear evolutionary trend. I go back and forth between short poems and long ones, between terseness and indefinite blather. Often I settle in the middle, in sequences of 6-10 shorter poems. That seems to be the right balance for me between carrying capacity and a sense of ending.

rm: Is there a difference for you in building a collection of short lyrics and the long poem? In some ways, is one simply an extension of the other?

MR: There's obviously a relationship, because sometimes short lyrics get incorporated into longer poems and sometimes the things conceived as longer works fragment into pieces. And my particular obsessions, from the marvellous persistence of the non-built environment to the rhythmic drive of a unit of words, are usually there.

I think long poems are almost always about time. The epic, as per Pound, is a poem containing history. Time is all over Kroetsch's long poems, from the stone hammer old as the Ice Age to the lemon shaped exactly like an hour. Quartermain's *A Thousand Mornings* runs, very conspicuously, from November 11 to January 29. Long poems can't be innocent about time. But time is always a limit in the lyric too, no matter how it tries to ignore or resist. It can't have form without time. Maybe that's why I find work in a museum so satisfying.

In the end, it's all part of the same ongoing project – to try to engage the world in language. It does come back to the author, his or her attention, capacity, and in the end, his or her death. That's the only real closure.

I think that's far less arrogant, and considerably more humane, than positing some great romance such as language, or the market, that is somehow originary, formative, and runs mysteriously without us.

rm: Structurally, *The Alternate Guide* (Red Deer College Press, 1985), seems the most fun of your collections. How did this book come about, and how interested are you in formal experimentation?

The Alternate Guide grew explicitly out of another book. I had been editing *A Nature Guide to Alberta* for the provincial museum in Edmonton – my first job in a museum now that I think about it. I had to leave a lot of stuff out, which did upset some of the naturalists and scientists who had contributed material. I was being pretty brutal, since I didn't think I'd ever work in a museum again. But I started writing poems based on the material I was leaving out. It was just my way of acknowledging the cuts – not that that would've made any of the birders happy. And since the initial book was based on a set of maps, so was the second one, and the identification numbers of the mapsheets became the titles of the poems. And I tried to keep the poems short and thin. So there's this whole system-like formulaic look to the whole thing.

Fred Wah's *Pictograms From the Interior of BC* was an important book for me at the time. I saw it as an attached poetry – one that could be tested against specific evidence – the pictograms themselves. That's still a comforting thought for me today – I want poetry to have evidence.

rm: When you say you want poetry “to have evidence,” what do you mean?

MR: I want it to contain, or at least identify, its performance indicators – now there's a phrase I learned in Ottawa. Where it is coming from and the means it's using to get moving. This can be done in lots of different ways and Fred Wah has been particularly interesting at doing this, in works like *Pictograms from the Interior* and *Owner's Manual*. I think that may not be how he envisages his ongoing work, but I do think it enables a helpful reading of his poems.

I think that poetry only exists in relation to something else. It isn't just about the means of its production. It's also about its source material. I like work that is up front about its source material.

I think long poems
are almost always
about time.

There's always a non-author (sometimes another author) that potentially gives meaning to the text. Think of Erin Mouré's translations, Anne Carson's Greek texts, or the way some writers use computer technology. The author is no guarantee of meaning, something else is. Or at least might be. When it isn't, what eventually happens is that the author gets re-introduced and re-valORIZED. Most postmodernist efforts, often in spite of their positions, are really about the reconstruction of the author. And if the author in the text is ironized, contested, turned into textual vapor, then it's usually the live author that gets valorized.

This can get done in relatively simple ways, like in those books that depend on paintings, or on diaries or on specific locales, and be no less profound or moving for it, but the more aware the writer is of not only the source, but the gap between the source code and the new work, the more interesting it can be. There's an interesting lineage between Williams “A poem is a small (or large) machine made out of words” and Barret Watten's “This is a machine”. And now Erin Mouré's “Little theatres is a small machine”.

rm: What has always impressed me about your writing, and something that really comes out when hearing you read, is how long you can sustain a particular moment or idea. What goes through your head when you are composing a poem?

MR: Music, most likely. Rhythm. Cadence. Tone. The overall curve of the poem. I know I hear the poem before I respond. Or maybe it's all those non-linguistic markings of a poem that make it truly understandable.

rm: I know you're currently working on three poetry manuscripts: *The Big Zoo* (as you've described, "a post-translation of *El Grande Zoo* by Cuba's Nicholas Guillen"), *Disappointment Island* ("mostly straightforward work in sequences") and *The Luskville Reductions* ("fragments, inventories, post-relationship residue"). Do you usually work on more than one project at once? How is working on three different poetry manuscripts affecting the work you are doing in each one?

MR: And there's a couple of kids books in there, and the usual songwriting, and a long work called Patois that I've been adding to for more than 25 years, so yes, I always work on more than one thing at a time.

The most practical and immediate aspect is that they all progress rather slowly. It's never 100% certain where any particular element is going to end up, even if I sometimes have a pretty clear intention about what I'm doing when I get started. Some of the projects have very deliberate parameters at the outset, and probably this is just a way of trying to corral them, so the Zoo book has to relate to the Guillen work, and the Reductions is full of spare, short inter-related pieces that focus on a particular site, etc. *The Alternate Guide* had an obvious framework, *Ryley* also had a site, and even *Karst* was based on a pre-existing memoir, so this isn't new for me, and it's certainly not unique or profound, it's just useful.

Do they inter-relate? For sure. Inform each other? Yep. Complement each other? I hope so.

rm: If you are comparing *The Luskville Reductions* (where you no longer live, by the way, having now moved into Ottawa's centretown) to *The Alternate Guide*, how would you compare the two? The second was obviously worked as an exploration of the province of Alberta as a whole, and the second as your first five or so years living post-prairie. Would it be fair to consider both works as not only engaging and exploring, but perhaps taking some kind of ownership of the geographic spaces in which you were living?

MR: There are some similarities, for sure. Both do try to engage the locale, the particular environment, and whether it be the Luskville frogponds or the Alberta badlands, the natural environment is a big part of both. Both of them work with a predetermined structure, whether it be the system of Alberta mapsheets or the less obvious seasonal cycle in Luskville. And both have a kind of reduced palette — the poems are short, the vocabulary is pretty simplified, and both try to find a clear space where the imagination can work. Both are attempts to cohabit the space.

But there are some big differences. In the end, *The Alternate Guide* believes it can enter the space. *The Luskville Reductions* is about the failure of habitation.

The Alternate Guide seems to me to be a pretty optimistic book. The terrain is companionable, or at least livable, even if there are death camas and drowned waterstriders and stolen nests. There are no miracles, it says, but it's ok, the world is miraculous enough. We don't need anything more. The world can accommodate us.

Luskville is about loss. It's kind of a forgotten part of Quebec to start with — in some recent tourist maps produced by the provincial government, that part of the province is cropped off. But more significantly, it's about the failure of a relationship and the complicit failure to enter the space.

In neither case though, was there an attempt to own the space. Other than for legal purposes, you never can. It owns you, if you're lucky, and then it lets you in.

rm: How does your songwriting compare to your other writing? Is it an extension of your more serious arts practice, or a relief from it?

MR: It's related of course. It's all related. It's another attempt to find a way into the world with language. I played in a blues band for a little while, and now I play mostly bluegrass, and in both genres there are fairly standard structures for the songs. And in both, the mayhem, fears and longing that the songs can evoke are all poured into this routine verse-verse-chorus-verse structure that whatever else, has great rhythmic drive. That drive, and the tension between the words and the structure is often what makes the songs compelling. Something similar occurs in *The Alternate Guide* I think, where the rigid structure of the poems is often at odds with their fairly casual language, and that's what really creates the particular rhythms of that book.

In a sense, the songs often have more immediacy. Generally, I find them easier to write, in part because they usually have a predetermined structure and because they have this stock imagery you can rely on if all else fails — I mean, if you're lonely there can always be a train going by in the distance. If you're playing with other folks, they become something of a communal bonding ritual. And if you're performing them you usually know right there and then whether people like them.

But in both cases, poetry and songs, the impetus is write a way into the community and into the world.

In neither case though, was there an attempt to own the space. Other than for legal purposes, you never can. It owns you, if you're lucky, and then it lets you in.



Drawing by: Kerry Cavlovic



Drawing by: Kerry Cavlovic

Shane Rhodes

YOUR RETURN

When you come,
come lightly.
Carry a backpack with bread
and a thermos of wine
which will taste of tea.
Come lightly, carrying
a book full of words
and a book that is empty.
The ferry from the mainland
is slow. When you sit
in the plastic chair,
watch how the waves funnel
through the straight
from the lake
huge, toxic and clear.
Each wave worth
your attention
just as each factory
along the shore
with their steams,
plastics and cooling towers.

When you come,
come lightly.
Things, here, live closer
to their description.
Talk of wars
in foreign countries,
of women strapped
with dynamite who walk
through a market square.
Talk, too, of how these things
do not happen here.
I don't blame you
for joining or avoiding
the conversation,
for not knowing
what to do.

Once on land,
come by foot
over the gravel road.
Stop beneath the willow trees,
elm and beech
along the shore.

When you come,
come lightly.
You will see the house
we built amongst the trees.
Not our get-away,
not our cottage-home,
not our vacation-spot
but a place lived
in the ecstatic boredom
of anywhere lived so long.
There will be no one there. Enter.
You are a welcome friend.
Take out your bread and wine.
Eat. Drink cool water
from the spring
with a metal cup on the wall —
no water before will so quench
the salt in you.
There is a pen on the table.
Or sit and listen
until nothing fills you.
You've been away
so long.

"BUENOS AIRES

es como un plano / de mis humiliaciones y fracasos" – I read from a copy of
Borges I bought in a tienda for 20 pesos.

My hostel room on Hipólito Yrigoyen is cheap because, I find out later, it's beside
a porn cinema. All day, street noises mix with the long lingering polyglot moans
— the international cinematic sign of faked female orgasm — echoing through the
courtyard.

In 1946, Perón appointed Borges the "Inspector of Poultry and Rabbits in the
Public Markets," as an insult. Borges resigned but, three decades later, was
appointed the director of the Biblioteca Nacional, built on the razed deathbed
home of Eva Perón, as an insult.

Did he fell more *humiliacion*, because of this? Did he feel more *human*?

What was more surprising than the constant sexthrob vibrating through the walls
were the intermittent sounds of racecars and German dialogue. Every morning, I
would rise more drained.

In the square before the presidential palace, which I passed the day before, the
grandmothers still walked their circuit and white bandanas were tied around the
trees to remember that the government killed children. Many were tortured,
drugged and dropped into the sea, when the city tried to kill itself.

"In endeavouring to describe these scenes of violence, one is tempted to pass from
one
simile to another," wrote Darwin while hiking through the Pampas.

As he grew older and blind, Borges wrote more poetry (for he could carry poems
in his head) and paid young men to read to him. Two men in a room — one
young, reading; one old and blind, listening. Is this and image of memory or his-
tory?

When he was old, a writer from Argentina says on the radio, recounting the literati
before and after the coup, *he became a fool, believing what other people told him and
shaking hands with Pinochet.*

PAINTBRUSHES

for the Lepchas

The day was hot and my father drove the gravel logging road through the high mountain pass with its many pot-holes and small silver creeks that had overrun their edges. My brother and I were promised, if we were good, we would stop to pick Indian Paintbrushes.

Heated pine.
Lumber dust sifts
through the open window.

We were let out into a small flat meadow of marsh grasses, flowers and stunted spruce covered at the base with thick pillows of moss. The air was tense as steam rose from the heating muskeg and each purple bloom strained upward in the light. Indian Paintbrushes. Looking back on it now, it was beautiful I'm sure, but I remember feeling disappointed. I had literally expected "paint brushes" and had hoped to be able to do something with them. These were just flowers.

*Whatever being is born,
know it is sprung
through the union of the field
and the knower of the field*

says the *Bhagavadgita*. Krishna is not talking of small mountain meadows. Even if he is, Arjuna doesn't care for he prepares, regretfully, syllable by syllable, for battle. It is an English translation bought from a bookstore in Darjeeling in the middle of summer. Cloud swirls in the valleys below. Directly opposite the bookstore and 70 miles to the northwest starts Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. On any clear day, it sits on the edge of your vision massive and snow covered. In the steep valleys below, woman labourers, wicker baskets strapped to their heads, pick the first green flush of orange pekoe tea (Super Fine Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe Number One).

Over a year since
I have heard from you
my friend.

As for grandfather, he is
dead and T'shangu
full of snow.

Which reminded me, when I read it in your letter, of something I had read once in a travel book. Since the turn of the century, with the exception of a few foreigners, mountain climbers no longer summited (that great mountaineering verb) Kanchenjunga but always stopped a few metres short. Because the mountain-top is sacred and not for the foot of man.

A TIME OF GIFTS

We hiked all morning to get there. Up through pine trees and jumbled scree, thick mattresses of moss sucking at the summer storms. At the top of the mountain ridge and to the north a spooned-out hollow full to our feet of blowing cloud, while, to the south, the sky was clear and blank. And it seemed – walking across that ridge – our feet slipping on shale and mid-summer snow green with rock-dust – we moved as light moves, on the constant brink between two wholes incommensurate. *If you want something five times more distant, said Leonardo, paint it five times more blue.*

We descended in late afternoon, down through the shrill screech of pika, high mountain meadows sucking the last crescents of snow. The hard religious hunger of rock-bound roots. A feeling, then, of life bedded down deep within itself. We had argued all day and only now did a peace ascend to meet us as the snowmelt flowed in an ermine-like lather down through the valley below where children filled with the rapture of Guadalupe-Tonantzin appearing high in the enamelled pine. And when we returned to the city, there were the signs and sounds cities make: clink of cutlery, men on street corners laughing and exchanging money. Children played with summer-intensity last games of tag. Everything still happened for the first time.



FROM THE BINDERY

44. Because, in the movies, there would be backlighting.
45. No telephone. Just books,
open windows, and a radio
to sift the still air. Saskatchewan.
The CKAU announcer talks
of “hog futures” and, I think,
this, indeed, is a kind place.
46. David’s story of a Moscow cemetery and how he found Pasternak’s grave
on the anniversary of his death by the sound of people reciting poetry.
47. That every landscape should be found so.
48. And we shovel our voices into the mist soaked air.
49. My aunt’s escape from East Germany at the end of the war: Her family
lived for two weeks on stolen potatoes and eggs as they walked by night
beneath the searchlights and razor wire to a new line in the dirt.
- a. That country no longer exists, yet my aunt is still living.
- b. Her story, like most, is built by absences and fleeing.
50. Televisions were new in the town and all the programs were in English
though everybody spoke Sufi. Those with even a small knowledge of
English were given the task of translation. After several months, though,
some townspeople realized many of the translators did not know English
at all but were making new Iranian stories. Jack and Krissy in *Three’s
Company* discussing, intimately, the value of the hejab. Fonzie from *Happy
Days* worried about black market parts for his motorcycle. Gilligan lost,
somehow, in the Red Sea.
51. Because, in the movies, it would happen fast with slight whistlings of air.
52. Bigger bombs (past the 50 mile radius) did not result in more collateral
damage but were wasteful, “needlessly pushing up the atmosphere.”
53. you giving
me head
- this snow
not so
- barren
54. Because we would be massaging your beautiful feet.
55. Because at Missile Park near the White Sands Missile Range in Santa Fé,
New Mexico, security is very, *very* important.
56. Or is it that my uncle laboured all his life so someone could say, in a eulo-
gy, in a funeral home in autumn, he was a *good worker*? His body another
five pounds of ash for the tired lake.
57. *My* plutonium primer *Your* plutonium primer
58. Saskatchewan. I live here for a week and count the number of trucks
gone by on one hand. Ten species of cacti, two flat tires, twenty seven
deer, one wood stove called New Perfection. Tell me, then, of the things
you hate.
59. Somebody has a headache. Somebody rests their head against a cold tail
fin.
60. Nothing but vast wheat fields and loneliness
- b. Is this what Blake called *milky fear*?
- 61.
62. Even now, when she hears sirens, she thinks of hiding.
63. ~~Human thinking is error.~~
64. Even in this cold
you are naked
so quickly!

65. A grandfather is 70 and his children want to throw him a birthday party. He accepts but with the pre-condition that the party be held not in his name but in the name of a niece or nephew. I have not lived 70 years, he explains, by attracting so much attention from gods.
66. Reading this reminds me of the Nisga'a Treaty.
67. The bluebird makes a racket.
Is he also hoping
to get lucky?
68. "No ideas but in things," wrote William Carlos Williams, middle-aged and knee deep in the polluted Passaic.



Sandra Ridley

TRINITY TEST SITE

he drove a truck from los alamos new mexico
to get closer, he rolled down his window.
kept his dry eyes open behind dark goggles
until a shock sense of fingers burning.

and the outside smelled like skin.

memories of sparkler sticks and birthday cakes
distorted into white. white flash of magnesium.
phosphorescence so bright there were no shadows.

just a broken joshua tree.

a blind rabbit.

he got out, but what he came for he couldn't find
only melted sand. nubs of pale green glass.
he filled his pockets
and gave them to his children.

CAMP DESERT ROCK

a broad curve after a straight road
felt in the pit of his stomach.

he has given his hope to sunlight
the slow method of drying things up.

he's inclined to forget
his walk through a wide nothing.

doesn't see the tracks of coyote
and kit fox.

a gypsum sand hourglass
counts down to blank white.

he must find his own water
to know the sacredness of wells.

MERCURY TOWN SOLDIERS

they trucked from camp before sun up
to a pretend town of slap shacks.

fake fifties homes with matching sofas, chairs
polyester curtains starched and hung.

white mannequins sporting painted grins
dishes set at breakfast tables, plastic fruit.

contours of desert formed by trenches
blossoms of poppy and blazing stars.

how hard the sound, how soft the sand
how quick the coming light.

NO WATER

yeab, she said she knew something about being poor
luxury was having a summer outhouse
with not one seat but two

other times were spent in the hanging light
of a wet basement, stone floor, slop pail
emptied three times a week

cement stairs she broke her toe on
it's still crooked

she bathes now in ceramic, not tin
tub pulled up a cold flight
eighth child in dirty water



Photo by: Sacha Leclair

an interview with Chris Turnbull

This interview was conducted over email from May 2005 to December 2005

Originally from outside Vancouver, British Columbia, **Chris Turnbull** lives in Kemptville, Ontario, just outside the Ottawa city limits, where she publishes *rout/e* (now and again) and chapbooks (hawkweed press). Her poetry chapbook, *Shingles*, was published by Thuja Press, and she has had pieces appearing in *Open Letter*, *TADS*, *Dandelion*, *fusebox* (http://www.rattapallax.com/fusebox_01intro.htm), *Undercurrents*, and in the anthology *Companions & Horizons: An Anthology of Simon Fraser University Poetry* (A West Coast Line Book, 2005) as well as in the first issue of *ottawater*. A graduate of both Simon Fraser University and Carleton University, she currently works at Carleton.

rob mclellan: Let's start with something simple. What first started you writing and when?

Chris Turnbull: I'm not really sure if there was a 'what' that involved me in fiddling around with language. Probably a combination of things contributed – I am fond of patterns and things that are tactile, and I remember as a kid enjoying looking at the alphabet, pinned in separate squares above a blackboard with requisite colourful symbols, and wanting to touch them. Then again, I also tend to sit back and observe things, needing time to absorb information before I can communicate what I see or think, and writing is a good form for expressing things without the demand of speaking them immediately. There's also more jest in the written word – a person can invent a lovely word and not be expected to explain it, and when you add that to a space and let it hang...but there's a second part to your question, too, the whenness, hmmm. Probably when I started reading – I was lucky enough to be surrounded with books – my parents rented from a retired UBC professor before I was born, and he moved east, leaving them most of, or maybe his entire, library. And, growing up rurally, you learn to read the oddest things – labels on penicillin, for example, or community newsletters and posters, books on diagnosing dropsy. I probably started out playing, trying to mimic forms and ideas and adding my own whatever here and there. Once I figured out how entertaining it was, I was hooked.

I tend to think of writing as an exchange, and in that, an ongoing process with lots of touchups and erasures and borrowings.

rm: Through all of this writing, did you see it as purely a private act? At what point did you start bringing it out to others, or know of anyone around you doing the same?

CT: I tend to think of writing as an exchange, and in that, an ongoing process with lots of touchups and erasures and borrowings. I would say that at times for me there is a solitude in writing, or a singleness, that is parallel to past and present conversations and ideas. I like to keep things in mind. As for private – I hesitate to use that word because it suggests dichotomies, and I don't believe much in those, and it suggests all sorts of things about the writer rather than the writing.

At some point in university I took a course taught by George Bowering. I was reading quite a bit of poetry, mostly non-Canadian, and his course was a course in Canadian poetry. I hadn't really thought about Canadian poetry before. Then I started reading Erin Mouré, Lisa Robertson/Catriona Strang, Nicole Brossard. About the same time, I'd started going to readings very shyly. Then I took a course in American postmodern poets, again taught by Bowering, you know that anthology, and in that course was Roger Farr, Aaron Vidaver, Steven Ward, Ryan Knighton. They were quite terrifying; I remember Aaron standing up once and scrawling out an address for a poetry meeting in some downtown hotel to talk about Charles Olson. I actually headed down, but took the wrong bus or got lost or something and missed it. Somehow I got invited for Friday night beers at a bar on Robson and over time met Ryan, Reg Johanson, Karina Vernon, Jamie Reid, George Stanley, Renee Rodin, Cath Morris, Thea Bowering, Willy Trump, Jason Le Heup, Chris Walker and Wayde Compton, as well as others who'd swing into town off and on. Reg and Ryan were putting together a magazine called *TADS*, so I submitted some stuff I'd been writing. I had no idea how one went about something, but I was very interested in how a small press mag was put together. I have vague memories of pestering Reg and Bowering about that. I was spending a lot of time in the Special Collections at SFU reading odd magazines, chapbooks, listening to taped readings and stuff and had somehow made friends with Gene Bidwell, who'd talk to me about the collections and show me some of the archival processes. An amazing guy. I went to more readings, and started to put faces to names, you tend to see the same people at readings. Bringing the writing out to others really occurred via conversation, often just shooting the breeze (a lot of the latter) over beer or coffee. There was not a lot of conscious discussion about what one was writing more about the things we were interested in, or things going on locally or otherwise, what we were reading – which tend to impact the writing, which is why I used the word exchange. Or perhaps the discussions around the whatness of writing occurred elsewhere. Jason and I would often talk about how we were writing, but usually when it was a smaller group, or just the two of us hanging out. There was also, and continues to be, a lot of natter, irreverence, teasing. Testing boundaries, maybe. In the friendships that developed, there's a history of interests that intersect and complement each other (or disagree as well). I think at

crucial personal times, and at separate times, we travelled and lived elsewhere – Reg and Ryan went to Korea for awhile, Jason went to Savoury Island, I went to Hungary. When I got back, I was lucky enough to get to know Aaron Vidaver, Roger Farr and Steven Ward better – they organized evening poetry discussions in the Orr Gallery and Reg and Thea and I went. Roger, Aaron and Steven were never really part of the Friday pub night thing. Those meetings in the Orr Gallery were, I feel, really important for my thinking space. Interestingly, mags were put together during these absences: Jason and Chris Walker put *Judy* together while I was travelling; Reg and I put another *TADS* together while Ryan was away, and another *TADS* was put together while Jason was away. I hung out with Jamie Reid and his wife Carol on occasion – always enjoyable and informative – and I was working several jobs and sometimes hung out with Gerry Gilbert at the end of a night shift at a local coffee place. Wayde and I were roommates for awhile before I came to Ottawa and Karina and Reg lived across the hall. I would do cycling trips now and again and often met interesting individuals along the way who had lots of ideas and insights. And there were friends I had known for a long time, very separate from this community, who were shapely, familial. Sometimes they would cross into each other. I guess I'm trying to make a point that for me, writing emerges from different relationships and histories and their interstices and the movement in and out of them.

rm: I like that you use the word “exchange.” Robert Kroetsch uses a variation on the same thing, which I agree with, writing as part of a “conversation” with reading. What I do find interesting about the informal group of *Tads* is the range of expression that comes out of it. There is certainly overlap between you and Le Heup, for example, but I wouldn't say that either of you are doing close to the same kinds of writing. The same could easily be said for any one of you, in any combination of you, Le Heup, Compton, Johanson and Vidaver. With so many of the same influences, how do you account for the differences? What exchanges are you having that other members of the group aren't?

CT: You see, I'm not so certain we had many of the same influences, I don't think we were reading the same things, but perhaps our interests collided now and again. I can't speak for any of the people who frequented the pub table – and it's important to note that there were a number of others beside Jason, Wayde and Reg. I don't think Aaron ever came to the pub with us – if you're trying to document some sort of “history” of TADs, perhaps it's only within the space of the pub table that it can be documented. Mind you, you'll find a lot of holes, but that works with Kroetsch – who, I'd add, wasn't a huge influence for me.

Accounting for similarities and differences returns to dichotomies; perhaps the thing is to recognize the changes and returns over time – within the writing practice – of those individuals. That's what I learn from – whenever I read someone's work or hear that person read – and when it works, it's very tangible, and when it doesn't, I can admire the attempt, or the discord.

I haven't lived in BC for 5 or 6 years now, and my contact with the Vancouver crowd is sporadic at best, although I do enjoy meaningful emails here and there.

I like small towns; I think they're fascinating in their histories, challenges, adaptations and geography. A person could claim the same in an urban centre, but small towns, rural small towns, can have a generosity to them that is its own thing.

I couldn't say what exchanges I'm having that they aren't, because I have no idea what sorts of things they're up to, day to day. My writing work these days is very slow; abutting it is a lot of outdoor activities, walking, observing, and considering the variety of trails in Eastern Ontario; reading – just finishing Jane Jacobs and Erin Mouré, I see Kathleen Fraser has a new book out, and poking through an interesting book of botany. Recently finished Ross A. Laird's books and Richard Van Camp's short stories. Someone generously gave me a swack full of old chapbooks and poetry books. Pondering disintegrating architecture and bricked over doors. And a myriad of other here and there's. Much enjoy the work of Jess Smith, as well, who is in the States.

rm: It's interesting to see your work alongside the work of other poets with connections to Simon Fraser University, in Stephen Collis' new *Companions & Horizons: An Anthology of Simon Fraser University Poetry* (A West Coast Line Book, 2005). How was your experience writing and learning about writing at the University, in the context of all the other poets in and around the school? How do you feel about being put into that sort of context of other poets?

CT: I wonder what you mean by "interesting" ... to be honest, I didn't really consider that I was "experimenting" anything out of the ordinary. I didn't meet a lot of the gang I know now until 4th year, maybe 3rd year, and as for other poets in and around the school, I didn't really know any. I was involved in a lot of other things off campus, other interests and people not involved in the writing community, so that community was, once I got to know a few individuals, only one part of a number of other parts. I think that's true of most people. I pursued my interest in learning about writing by hanging out at the CLC, as I mentioned, or the VPL or hanging out at the back of poetry readings, and reading/thinking.

Not sure what you mean by "context of other poets" — I'm really enjoying reading the anthology; there are a number of people in there I'm reading for the first time, so that's quite fun. I know that there are others who couldn't be in it for a variety of reasons, such as Jason Le Heup, and I consider work that's missing from the anthology as part of the anthology as a necessary "companion", even if phantom. The work is still accessible in other ways.

rm: Given the visual aspect of your work, and even where you live, and your interest in the outdoors, you seem very interested in physical space. Where do you think this comes from? How do you consider physical space as it applies to the pieces in your piece "Continua," for example?

CT: Are you referring to the pictures in "Continua" when you say my work is "visual"? I tend to think of writing as a visual form — partially because I don't read aloud much and find that reading my work out loud really alienates a lot of different things embedded in it — the visual process allows for accrual, layering, lack, sediment, etc. It also allows for staging, a certain drama. I live in Kemptville, in the downtown, so not rurally per se, but situated, in context, rurally to Ottawa. I like small towns; I think they're fascinating in their histories, challenges, adaptations and geography. A person could claim the same in an urban centre, but small towns, rural small towns, can have a generosity to them that is its own thing. I'm not really making a comparison here between urban and rural. I do think that rural municipalities and small towns have unique challenges that are totally off the political radar, and that too often rurality is romanticized, and the politics aren't given validity. There's a manure pile in a small town close by to here, with a gigantic sign on it that says: Centre for Canadian Political Thought. Classic. My interest in the outdoors is not dichotomous, as though there are "THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE OUTDOORS" and "THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE INDOORS" (makes an interesting staging, though). That phrasing of "interest in" does much to point to how we separate ourselves from many aspects of the physical world, how we attempt to manufacture our environments (as romantic, or gm'd, or via corporate advertising –e.g. housing developments with manufactured "wetlands") rather than accepting that we are part of and with the environment and with that acceptance developing a more sensitive understanding of changes within the environment(s) and our selves.

Hiking, and/or being outdoors elaborates my sense of space and gives me opportunity to think and observe. I enjoy patterns and texture, and I can be aware of these things any number of ways, but find them most unique and enjoyable surrounded by trees and along trails, where spaces can be juxtaposed with other spaces, empty or solid. To answer the last question, a person would have to walk the poem, taking note of pauses and meanderings caused by the person walking, not, perhaps, only by the poem's pauses and meanderings.

**if I asked you would
you disappear (our hover)**

with



daylight savings again ~ maglev transport
front runner for the green rose pinned to the sunny
kid's lapel a couple of decades
later. His mom thought he looked cute with it.

Were he to be swarmed by maenads he would
run for the school bus. They would be
after a song, some revelry to celebrate
nature's heist of the city, some caressing on fall
leaves and sidewalks, a tinge of prodigality

the sunny kid would not be believed by his teachers;
his friends' right to witness revoked. Inside, he'd
peel at construction paper with an exacto knife, making
paper lanterns stapled at the bottom for his mom, who
has an environmental illness and has to stay at home
these days.

pinnate

lac

the
unae

of

stalk

*une fantaisie,
winter's milk-pod,
precipitate*

[for g.t.]

and sent
wherever noting

a cabin
with four walls
: to step lightly

out of



Artwork by: Amy Thompson
Title: Sing and Rejoice
artwork available at: La Petite Mort Galery, 306 Cumberland

Ian Whistle

DEBRIS, OR FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

you know

] the journey
of one's life.

you know the thing about writing.
chinese eatery past it's prime.

blue
collar.

(fore)gone conclusion

abfgdhecijmplnokqrsxvwtYu

zed.

She

] steals a broom from a park bench

a-boom. staid

and singled out. oh,

he.

bring me

for the new day, offa hits,
pizza bits, bring me
down some

] no hope, so dope
slo stope, nope nope

was it any wonder, dear?
Wednesday night is _____ night. should know.

no, no.

fore(gone)

"the page as the lake
which is blue"
— *Steve McCaffery*

long before our legend started.

with the help of our kites we crafted.

if it's too loud, you're too old.

Diana Brebner's *The Ishtar Gate*. Ed. Stephanie Bolster.
Hugh McLennan Poetry Series 15, McGill-Queens
University Press, 2005. \$16.95

reviewed by Chris Jennings

I am apparently among the many who had little experience with Diana Brebner's writing during her lifetime. In this, she is a terrific example of why we dwell on the regional and local in Canadian poetry. Brebner's style, her imagination, had nothing to do with the localising particulars of an Eli Mandel or a Robert Kroetsch. Abstraction attracted her; sentiment was part of her ideation; traditional prosody was, in what now seems a conventional irony, playful rebellion against organic, free-verse norms. Regional, in her case, is a question of access. She won several major awards including the Gerald Lampert award for best first book of poetry and the Pat Lowther Memorial award for best book of poetry by a woman, but *Radiant Life Forms* (1990), *Golden Lotus* (1993), and *Flora & Fauna* (1996) were all published by small, now-defunct, Netherlandic Press. *The New Quarterly* published many of her poems before and between books. Scavenger hunt: find two stores west of Kenora that stocked *The New Quarterly* in the 1990s. In her introduction to *The Ishtar Gate*, Stephanie Bolster notes that Brebner, whose readings were "dramatic performances, often with musical accompaniment, that left her drained" (xi), never read west of Winnipeg. Even the award established in her honour reminds us that Brebner was "devoted to fostering literary talent among new local writers" (www.arcpoetry.ca/contests/brebner.shtml; my italics), rewarding emerging poets living in the National Capital Region. I've met several writers who speak glowingly of this devotion having benefited from it. In fact, I probably had a better sense of the woman than of her poems before opening *The Ishtar Gate*. If I am again one of the many in this, then Bolster has met a need by making the poems available.

The title of this book refers to "a ceremonial gate from the Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, reconstructed and housed in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin." Brebner called it her "personal symbol for the merging of ancient and modern culture, the old goddess-centred religions and the scholarly rational West." You can see the attraction in the potential tensions: old world and new (Bolster identifies this as a key thread in Brebner's work), religion and science, belief and reason, eastern and western world, art-in-use and art-as-artefact. On a large, essentialising scale, there's an abstraction of gender, too – the female deity standing for fertility, sexuality, and emotional aggression, the museum a metaphor for 'male' rationality and classification. I'm painfully aware that this reproduces bland, bald stereotypes, but there they are. The blend of conflicts, though, is what keeps the poems from becoming bland or bald, just as, even without Bolster's brief mention of Brebner's biographical challenges (abuse, cancer, divorce, finances), *The Ishtar Gate* creates a very strong sense of an interwoven life and work.

Brebner the poet wrote in stanzas. With the exception of "Desire, Mother and Child", all of the poems collected from *Radiant Life Forms* depend on the same two line stanza with a loose pentameter base. The pattern expands in *The Golden Lotus*, where the couplets share space with loose quatrains. By *Flora & Fauna*, and continuing into the last poems, both line and stanza length increase more frequently, though poems in those unrhymed couplets persist. There are no free verse poems here; maybe three or four poems use space as content. End-rhyme is very rare, and when it occurs it provides little support for the stanzaic structure. Instead, it becomes a local effect like the opening lines of "Poison Dart Frogs 1: Red Variation": "Out eco-shopping in the city mall / deep in a nature store things crawl:". Other rhymes are placed subtly with the similar effects, as in "III. Vanitas" from Brebner's Vermeer sequence "Head of a Girl". The argument turns over rhymes that begin mid line, enjamb across lines, then migrate to the terminal position. The painter says to his wife, "[e]verything we have ... / ... shall be taken away" by time, but the painter's adoration is "a / stay"; what he paints "cannot wholly pass away" but will be "always new," introducing a new internal rhyme to cap the poem's last line: "My dear Catherina, I love you." The effect is quiet but audible and coincides with the poem's division into couplets, but even here the stanzas flow freely together, minimizing the stanzaic effect. Why, then, was Brebner so persistent about stanzas?

The principle extends to several sequences. Only three poems run, uninterrupted, for more than two pages, and one of them is part of the sequence "The Sparrow Drawer" from *Radiant Life Forms*. The selections from *The Golden Lotus* and *Flora and Fauna* are largely sequences, the two longest taking their cues from painters (Vermeer, Mary Pratt), the two most difficult emotionally ("Karuna", "Pictures of My Heart") addressing Brebner's personal challenges. The urge to compartmentalize seems to be central to her poetic. Compartmentalizing is a very basic way of generating control, even if it's an arbitrary control whose compartments have permeable boundaries. It's a way of rationalizing, classifying.

The volatile emotional content – abuse and cancer – of Brebner's most arresting sequences explains the need for such control. Biographical authority lends immediacy, but biographical immediacy can seem more therapeutic than artistic unless it is skilfully controlled. In "Karuna", Brebner makes disturbingly effective use of nursery rhyme conventions to convey the mental trauma of sexual abuse. Rhymes in close proximity emphasize that a father abusing his daughter is partly a violation of relationship categories by violently shifting linguistic register: "He will come. To tuck you // and fuck you". More elaborate sequences perform similar shifts, such as revealing the split between the public and private personae of the abuser:

He is quiet and good.

He has always done all of the things that
he should. And you are alone in a room.

He is there. If it comes to a choice between
me and you, I'll save myself, he says: for

your own good.

Here “good” in the first line is a conventional, public evaluation judged against what a father “should” be; the rhyme highlights “good” as a conditional value. The repetition of “good” at the end of the passage inverts the illusion of the father’s public persona. The disjunction of “childish” form and language with severe subject matter mirrors the split between innocence – “A little girl in a white dress” – and power, and makes the trauma, the mental violation, palpable without reducing it to a discursive attempt to find words for something unspeakable. The main trope in the poem is the room as personal, inviolable space; sometimes the room is physical, sometimes mental: “Some rooms are the rooms you wait in.” The trope connects a therapist in the frame – a “woman that you tell your life-story to” – to the child’s room, to a dissociative mental state where the child waits out the abuse, to a new room that promises a false safety, to a metaphoric room that the abused child/woman must leave behind. In the tradition of poetic form as a “room,” each articulation of the trope carries a new poem in the sequence. Without ever making the abuse explicit, sensational, or shocking (unless you are shocked by the occasional profane word), Brebner creates a very powerful, very intelligent sequence about abuse and recovery (“Karuna. Compassion. / And a little bit lower: Attention”) that delivers emotional impact as a consequence of understanding, of our attention, rather than sympathy or horror.

“Pictures of My Heart” does something similar with an invasive illness. Here, a painfully objective description of diagnostic procedures is haunted by the symbolism of hearts as it alienates the speaker from her body.

The drugs have a cardiotoxic
effect and machines will
measure how much you can take.
I wait while my heart fills
up with light. I imagine

angels with their research
wings, beating like test
flight pilots, crashing and
rising up, hitting walls
of despair.

Literally, irradiated dye fills the heart with light. The gesture toward a religious world fades quickly, mixed into scientific metaphors: angel wings perform research, become pilots who crash their charges. Consolation fades equally to despair. Elsewhere, the image in an x-ray is a “pointillist / mug sho[t], strictures for // love’s centre patiently / constructed out of dots.” Suggestive “[t]erminals” show “[l]urid blots” that “squirm.” The medical visuals overwhelm the potential to swerve into symbolism, and the images of support, of many-handed comfort, establish an emotional core of sad acceptance bolstered by love that is more complicated and true than any available abstraction on “heartbreak.”

Most powerfully, though, *The Ishtar Gate*’s new poems begin with an unacknowledged sequence of poems that creates a strong, thematic, narrative flow. (I can’t be certain that the order is Brebner’s, based on her numbering of the poems or a preliminary manuscript, or Bolster’s; either way, the ideational flow is there.) The new poems begin with “The Trout,” a parable about poetry and perception that connects to Brebner’s short essay at the end of the book, “The Trout in the Holy Well: Ideas on Order and Poetry”. It’s followed by “My Hope”, a poem-as-prayer about the power of poetry as prayer. “Porthole” follows with a more secular doubling of perspective, and perspective on disaster in particular: “disaster comes towards you and / the porthole at about the same time and / when it rushes through, you are swept away”. “Port” then tells a very simple story fully informed by what has gone before. In matter-of-fact language, the trauma of abuse and the trauma of illness come together. The speaker employs a “trick” she learned as a child when she was “beaten / or raped” to manage the pain of having a chemotherapy port surgically removed without proper anaesthesia. The trick is to create an imaginative space similar to the imagined room of “Karuna”, only here it is a mountain that serves as the metaphor for distancing, the speaker “at the top [...] / where it is very cold” and the doctor “way, way down at the bottom [...] / tending / a fire”. This split mind again allows her to deal with pain, but it has its consequences. After the procedure, the speaker is “a body but not wholly connected.” Shaking, as though shivering from the cold at the top of the mountain, she imagines:

someone lost in a storm, perhaps
at sea, hoping like crazy to make
it to port, to the safe place that is

calm, and the first thing to do when
you arrive is to be sick to your
stomach, to know you have survived
but also to know that out there,

in the dark centre of destruction,
someone you loved, and had known
so well she might have been yourself
was lost, irretrievably, at sea.

The powers assigned to the imagination in “The Trout” and “My Hope” both enable the trick of imaginative dissociation and produce this split sense of self. The imagined other self, sacrificed to the pain while the rest of the mind retreats, is forced to watch disaster rush through the porthole and to be swept away. A safe place, port means survival but also that split perspective on experience that enables this speaker to survive. There is an objective quality to Brebner’s work that seems to depend on a similar principle – distancing, through art, the poet from the woman, the theme from the biographical event. It’s effective, intelligent, and, the more I think about it, painfully sad.

The final poem in this non-sequence sequence is “For the Poet Who Told Me To Think Less and Feel More”. I can see why the poem rebels against that rather facile binary. It is a conflict that Brebner has not exactly transcended but certainly proven far more complicated than platitudinous advice would suggest. Brebner makes feeling intelligible out of necessity, addressing a frighteningly powerful imagination to painfully difficult subjects. Bolster writes, in the introduction, that “writing did not always bring [Brebner] pleasure,” that “she believed she needed to advance within her poetry,” because “she could write ‘Diana’ poems in her sleep.” The sense of imagination as an equivocal gift bears out in these poems; though the poems themselves are gifted, they seem to have a cost attached that may make the brevity of this selected a minor blessing to the artist if not to her audience.



William Hawkins' *Dancing Alone: Selected Poems 1960-1990*. Ed. rob mclennan. Broken Jaw Press / cauldron books, 2005.

reviewed by kemeny babineau

FanfuckingTastic is the only way I can begin this review of Bill Hawkins' Selected Poems. Here is Canada's answer to Jack Spicer, only our version survived. From the sounds of the preface by poet friend Roy MacSkimming, Hawkins has been thru some shit, and some of it his own making, but he made it. Today Bill Hawkins, also a notable singer\songwriter, drives a blue line cab in Ottawa where he has nearly always lived –but enough about the man. Let's get to the poems. Astounding. Raw.

Poetically, William Hawkins, by no means a household name (not even in poetry circles), can hold a candle to any of his more acknowledged peers, Purdy, Ondaatje, Newlove... even though he has published little or nothing else since 1974. Hawkins' literary career was like a rocket, up and down in a hurry, never reaching orbit.

When reading retrospective 'histories' like this I often wish the books weren't put together chronologically as this often places the weaker poems first. Unfortunately, this is so in *Dancing Alone*. Some of the early pieces could be better served in an appendix, afterwards, or final section. Where the book really took off for me is with 'Spring Rain' a poem that MacSkimming quotes in its entirety in the preface. When reading I suggest skipping some of the first poems of the book and beginning with "Spring Rain;" although it should be noted that "Postage Stamps" is an early wonder. But this is all quibbling after the fact and regardless it's an amazing book. At the end, you may return and find yourself reading it again. I did. But I'm tellin' ya when you hit page 45 –hold on because Hawkins is in full flight by then with the mythopoeic in his claws. And he's not only astute, but sweetly abusive and amusing. "If I am a continual question\ you are an endless answer." (Impressions of a Mythical Being, p 47). Also included in *Dancing Alone* are selections from Hawkins' *Ottawa Poems* (originally published by Weed Flower Press in 1966), which are a landmark in that city's growing literature. Not only is the book an invigorating read but it's important as Canadian Literature.

A Mild Effort at Philosophy

Things disappear fast,
are gone, I'm trying
to replace them as fast
as I can- the plants
in the gardens, the no longer familiar
cat, past loves
& even despair.

Generally the past
is more difficult
than the future.

& I don't know
what I can say
about my lack of either.

& the present,
too immense,
provides me one more ending,
but no hint at which way
to begin.

(#7 of *The Ottawa Poems*)

The *Ottawa poems* are a tour of personal force. Heavily influenced by Olson's Maximus Poems and imbued with both the objectivist stance and the confessional mode of the era these poems are like letters out, from I to you, from the poet to the polis. The poems drift and leap, shock and disappoint, as they work through everything from philosophical questions and psychological plights to the poets place in society. But don't be fooled by these lofty topics, they emanate from the underbelly; both gritty and seedy they provide a bitter sweet sort of fruit, depending which side of the tree they fell from.

On the strength of his Ottawa Poems and earlier work Hawkins is included in Raymond Souster's important anthology *New Wave Canada* published in 1966. Hawkins was on the way to becoming a great Canadian poet. In the next few years he is at the peak of his artistic abilities, even as his life appears to disintegrate around him. With the Ottawa poems behind him Hawkins casts off the overt influence of Olson and settles into a voice more his own. By writing poems that are mostly centered on the self what he manages to create is a mythopoeic character that descends into the underworld. His journey into hell however is not without humour. It is humour that saves him, much of the time.

Declaration of Dependence

I HAVE LOST MY SMALL WAR WITH GOD STOP I WRITE
THIS SO AS TO SUE FOR PEACE STOP KNOWING UNCONDITIONAL
SURRENDER THE ONLY TERMS AVAILABLE STOP I ACCEPT STOP

SEND COLLECT

Dancing Alone is easily a classic of Canadian Literature as it captures an era by bringing together in one single volume Hawkins' previous works. What is disappointing about this book is that there isn't more of it. And what it should do is warn us of what can happen when we look into our dark heart. What we find there may be more horrifying than what art can manage to assuage.

Before ending I have to mention how much I admire the artwork of the cover. Chris Well's black and white image is exceptional and could easily stand as a full canvas painting framed on anybody's wall. Good work. So check this book out, it's worth the cover charge.



Nadine McInnis' *First Fire / Ce feu qui dévore*.

Buschek Books / Vermillon, 2005.

reviewed by rob mclennan

Fifth in a series of translated works is Ottawa poet Nadine McInnis' *First Fire / Ce feu qui dévore* (Ottawa: Buschek Books / Vermillon, 2005). Built as a loose collection of poems new and selected, the collection includes uncollected poems, as well as pieces taken from her three previous collections, *Shaking the Dreamland Tree* (Coteau, 1986), *The Litmus Body* (Quarry Press, 1992; shortlisted for the Pat Lowther Award and winner of the Ottawa Book Award) and *Hand to Hand* (Polestar, 1998). With poems in their original English on the left side, and in French on the right, the collection was edited and translated by Ottawa poets and translators Andrée Christensen and Jacques Flamand. A contemporary of Ottawa poets Colin Morton, Sandra Nicholls, Susan McMaster, Blaine Marchand and John Barton (since moved to Victoria, to run *The Malabat Review*), Nadine McInnis was included in Morton's *Capital Poets: An Ottawa Anthology* (Oroboros, 1989) and, as well as author of three poetry collections, went on to publish a book of criticism, *Poetics of Desire* (Turnstone Press, 1994), on the love poetry of Dorothy Livesay, and an impressive collection of short fiction, *Quicksilver* (Raincoast) which was nominated "for national, provincial and regional literary awards."

A series that seems to alternate between English-speaking and French-speaking authors, publishing similar collections by Christopher Levenson, Denyse B. Mercier, Joe Rosenblatt and Virgin Burnett, I'm disappointed that this faux-selected, the only one of the series I've seen, doesn't include an introduction of any sort. One of the most important parts of any selected poems is the introduction, included to put the author's work and history into a particular context, writing a stance of the work, or even to know which poems came from which collection, and which ones are new (the arrangement of the poems in McInnis' book aren't chronological). Promoted and package as a collection of love poems, the back cover writes "[t]he poems in *First Fire / Ce feu qui dévore* explore passion in all its forms: from the first sparks of sexual awakening to the steady embers of a mature love that is increasingly aware of how death makes love that much sweeter. This is the fire that kindles the creativity of motherhood, of poetry, of life itself."

With only one hundred and twenty pages in total, it's perhaps telling that the collection doesn't actually come out and call itself a selected poems (or tell us who might have made the selections), which would suggest a kind of representation to her body of total work, which this collection doesn't, focusing instead on the domestic poems of motherhood, marriage and the beginnings of young girls. Unfortunately, with that as the collection's strain, the book as a whole tends to come of repeating itself through similar kinds of poems working the same territories again and again. One of the more interesting poems in the collection, the title

poem to her collection *Hand to Hand*, works a much darker image in a poem suggesting the First World War, getting McInnis outside of herself, writing:

He holds a man's hand in his own at night,
behind the field latrine, the one private place.

For some, escape is possible: they seep out of their heads
like blood, their eyes close,
thoughts vanish into the humid ground, through roots,
down to a red glowing core.
They swim towards it like nascent fish.

But for him there is only this wakefulness,
this endless ringing in his head

even though the guns
are now silent, standing in their metallic trance,
all the same, one after another.

He is not the same.

(His hands must remember what they have forgotten.)

That's why he hides the hand in a drab military sock,
why he's cleaned the hand with water in a tin cup,
dipping his finger into the shaky reflection of the moon
to clear the bad luck from the lines on its smooth
brown palm.

He thinks about the hand
when he leaves it behind for the day,
the memory of it thrilling.

With his rifle to his shoulder, the world flattens
into a disk intersected by two thin black lines.
Through the sight of a rifle everything

is crucified.

But there are no holes in his flawless hand.
Even the severed arteries, the cut bone is clean,
already hollowing towards nothingness.
The skin, unbroken, gives him comfort.

Other men might have preferred a breast
but a breast in his hand would melt away
like childhood snow.

(His hands must forget what they have learned.)

He's seen other men pull women from their huts,
women smeared with their own faeces.

He's seen a woman led back to camp on a rope, hosed down
and reclaimed from the mud.
Youngbloods taking turns planting the American flag.

His hand is clean. He did not take this from a man.

For whatever reason, any attempts to bridge the gap between the English-language and French-language writers in Ottawa (a history that goes back to 1865, when the Civil Service was moved from Quebec City to Ottawa) has never seemed to stick; hopefully through this series, some sense of community can be passed back and forth between the two groups. Still, I am hoping that once Nadine McNinnis does actually come out with a selected poems, the construction and selection of the collection might be more deliberate, and more about the whole of her work than about any particular strain taken out of context. Unfortunately, as an introduction to McNinnis' work, focusing on her love poems leads the reader astray and comes off as a bit thin, showing off more of the repetition of such works, and not the range of what she is actually capable of. Any first reader of McNinnis' works would get far more of a sense of her poetry by starting off with her previous collection, *Hand to Hand*, or even back to *Shaking the Dreamland Tree*. I think she deserves better.



Author biographies:

Kemeny Babineau is a poet and publisher reading between the vines in Mt. Pleasant, Ontario. He hopes to be survived one day by his daughters and long suffering wife. Previous to current affairs he edited *The Mentor's Canon* by Broken Jaw Press. Babineau also publishes the visuallyric lit-mag-rag *The New Chief Tongue* and pedals chapbooks of various authors with his publishing arm Laurel Reed Books.

Stephanie Bolster has published three collections: *White Stone: The Alice Poems* (Signal/Véhicule 1998), which won the Governor General's Award and the Gerald Lampert Award; *Two Bowls of Milk* (McClelland & Stewart 1999), which won the Archibald Lampman Award and was shortlisted for the Trillium Award; and *Pavilion* (M&S 2002). Born and raised in Vancouver, she lived in Ottawa from 1996 to 2000, teaching writing and working at the National Gallery. She now teaches at Concordia University in Montréal. Bolster edited *The Ishtar Gate: Last and Selected Poems* (McGill-Queen's 2005) by the late Ottawa poet Diana Brebner and is working on a collection of poems about zoos. Her poems in this issue of *ottawater* are from the chapbook *BIODÔME* (2005), her second with above/ground press.

Louis Cabri's recent work appears in *Logopoeia 2* (columbia.edu/~jj20/) and in *Post-Prairie: An Anthology of New Poetry* (Talonbooks, 2005). In the late 1980s and early 90s, Cabri, along with Rob Manery, ran the Experimental Writers Group in Ottawa, which produced both The Transparency Machine and N400 Reading Series, as well as the journal *Hole*, and ongoing *Hole Books*. He currently teaches at the University of Windsor.

Rhonda Douglas is a Newfoundland writer now living in Ottawa. Her writing has appeared in *CV2*, *Bywords Quarterly Journal*, *The Ottawa Citizen* and is forthcoming in two chapbook anthologies this fall. She has won Second Prize (for poetry) and an Honourable Mention (for Fiction) in the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts & Letters Competition, as well as Second Prize in the Gregory J. Power Poetry Contest at Memorial University and an Honourable Mention for the 2005 John Newlove Award. In May 2005, she was a participant in the five-week Banff Centre Writing Studio.

Jesse Ferguson is a poet and musician from Cornwall, Ontario, currently living in Ottawa. He is a member of the League of Canadian Poets, and his poetry appears in various Canadian, American and international publications. He has selected for *Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine* and currently selects for the Ottawa literary journals *Yawp* and *Bywords*.

Chris Jennings teaches English Literature at the University of Ottawa. He is the author of the chapbook *Vacancies* (poetrymachine.com/believe/vacancies.htm), a number of essays on literary subjects, and a pile of reviews. He has also been an editor for *filling Station* and the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. Although his middle name is Peter, he has no talent for the news.

Anita Lahey is a poet and journalist living in Ottawa. These poems will appear in her first collection, *Out to Dry in Cape Breton*, to be published in spring, 2006 by Véhicule Press. Anita is also editor of *Arc Poetry Magazine*.

Nicholas Lea is a writer and a person who lives in Ottawa, but is not from Ottawa, so he will likely move away from Ottawa one day because he feels no deep-seated, spiritual connection to Ottawa (although, he likes it very much; better than, say, Montreal). He is disappointed with most coffee.

Anne Le Dressay has published one book, *Sleep Is a Country* (Carleton University Press / Harbinger Poetry Series), and two chapbooks, *Woman Dreams* (above/ground press) and *This Body That I Live In* (Turnstone Press). She has poems recently published or forthcoming in *Prairie Fire*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *The New Quarterly*, *event* and *Bywords.ca*. She is a civil servant in Ottawa.

Karen Massey's poetry has appeared in various Canadian literary publications and in anthologies including *Shadowy Technicians: New Ottawa Poets* (Broken Jaw Press, 2000), and in her 2000 above/ground press chapbook, *Bullet*. She received an MA in English Literature (Creative Writing) from Concordia University and her work has won national and local prizes including the *Joker is Wild* and *Jane Jordan Poetry Competition*. She and her partner live in Ottawa, where they work as artisans while busily parenting their two dynamic young sons, who were born at home on Thursdays, 21 months apart.

Una McDonnell has performed her work at readings and music festivals, on top of café tables, and on one occasion in a boxing ring. She attended the 2002 Banff Wired Writing Studio and the 2003 Sage Hill Poetry Colloquium. She has published work in *Arc*, *Prairie Fire*, *Written in the Skin: A Poetic Response to Aids*, and *Musings: An Anthology of Greek-Canadian Literature*.

rob mcLennan lives in Ottawa, even though he was born there. The editor/publisher of above/ground press and *STANZAS* magazine (both founded in 1993), he is the author of ten trade poetry collections, with two more forthcoming: *name*, *an errant* (Stride, UK, 2006) and *The Ottawa City Project* (Chaudiere Books, 2007). Working to finish a novel or two, and a book on Ottawa for Arsenal Pulp Press (*Ottawa: The Unknown City*), he is also currently editing three collections of essays for Guernica Editions: *John Newlove: Essays on His Works*; *Andrew Suknaski: Essays on His Works*; and *George Bowering: Essays on His Works*. He recently found out that ECW Press is publishing a collection of his literary essays in 2007.

Colin Morton's published work includes a novel, an animated film, and six books of poetry, most recently *Coastlines of the Archipelago* and *Dance, Misery*. A new collection of his poems will appear in 2006.

Jennifer Mulligan does most of her living in the Ottawa area. From time to time, she also thinks she's a painter and a publisher. Her highly abstract and technical day job affords her the luxury of giving support to the Ottawa literary community, where she helped run The TREE Reading Series until very recently, and co-edited the twenty-fifth anniversary TREE anthology, *Twenty-Five Years of Tree* (BuschekBooks, 2005). She started writing in January 2005 while watching CBC Sunday. Previously, her poetry appeared in *The Peter F. Yacht Club*, and *Yarp*, and are forthcoming in the anthology *Collected Sex* (Chaudiere Books, 2007).

Nick Power played on Clearview and Cowley and Ernest Avenues growing up in Ottawa. Currently he lives in Toronto and works as a special education teacher. Recently published *[a modest device]* with The Writing Space. Publisher of Gesture Press for over ten years and helped start and run the early Toronto Small Press Book Fairs with Stuart Ross.

K. I. Press did her M.A. in English Literature at the University of Ottawa, during a year she spent sliding up and down the in fact very icy Sandy Hill. After a number of Toronto years, she just moved to Winnipeg. These four poems are from *Types of Canadian Women*, her third book, to be published by Gaspereau Press in spring 2006.

Shane Rhodes' first book, *The Wireless Room* (2000, NeWest Press), won the Alberta Book Award. His second book, *Holding Pattern* (2002, NeWest Press), won the Archibald Lampman Award. Shane is also featured in the anthologies *New Canadian Poetry* and *Breathing Fire II* and recently published a chapbook, *Tengo Sed*, with Greenboathouse Books.

Short-listed in 2004 for *Lichen's* 'Tracking A Serial Poet' competition, **Sandra Ridley's** recent publications include *Bywords*, *Yarp*, *Jalapeno Diamond*, *The Peter F. Yacht Club*, and as a Leaf Press *Monday's Poem*. Forthcoming work will also be included in the anthology, *Poetry Night in Muskoka*. Always a wheat-farm girl, this writer currently lives in Ottawa.

Born in Winnipeg, **Ian Whistle** divides his time between there and Nepean, Ontario. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Lost & Found Times*, *Van*, (*orange*), *filling Station*, *The Unicorn Reader*, *STANZAS*, the chapbooks *apostrophe* (first&books) and *resemblances* (above/ground press) and the anthology *Shadowy Technicians: New Ottawa Poets* (Broken Jaw Press). He has a blog but doesn't pay much attention to it.

