

# PHOTO

## Ottawater: O.I

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# CONTENTS:

Balancing Acts: An Interview with John Barton . . . . .4	Chris Turnbull
Anita Dolman	. . . . . pieces taken . . . . .88
. . . . . Chase . . . . .17	Laurie Fuhr
. . . . . The economist . . . . .18	. . . . . under pressure . . . . .90
. . . . . Sidewalk . . . . .19	. . . . . Alberta winter gothic . . . . .92
Tamara Fairchild	. . . . . hero(i)n(e) . . . . .93
. . . . . This is the heart of the financial district . . .20	. . . . . Blake's house: July . . . . .94
Gwendolyn Guth	. . . . . love in wartime . . . . .95
. . . . . Revenge . . . . .27	. . . . . empathy in the age of television . . . . .96
William Hawkins	. . . . . outside the National Gallery 12/01 . . . . .98
. . . . . How the Dead Prey Upon You . . . . .29	. . . . . framing Riopelle . . . . .101
. . . . . Sunrise: Villanelle . . . . .30	. . . . . nineteen degrees of away . . . . .102
. . . . . Sheila Frances Louise . . . . .31	Ewan Whyte
. . . . . King Kong Goes To The Shawville Fair . . .32	. . . . . Catullus 2 . . . . .104
Matthew Holmes	. . . . . Catullus 3 . . . . .104
. . . . . Ottawa snow; come what May . . . . .34	. . . . . Catullus 25 . . . . .105
. . . . . Ghazal of a bureaucratic entrance . . . . .35	. . . . . Catullus 33 . . . . .105
. . . . . dusk to Ottawa . . . . .36	. . . . . Catullus 6 . . . . .106
Clare Latremouille	. . . . . Catullus 11 . . . . .107
. . . . . to the missing lover of Marilyn Monroe . . .38	. . . . . Catullus 13 . . . . .108
George Elliott Clarke	. . . . . Catullus 69 . . . . .108
. . . . . VII . . . . .40	. . . . . Catullus 101 . . . . .108
. . . . . À Bellagio (II) . . . . .42	. . . . . Catullus 97 . . . . .108
. . . . . À Bellagio (III) . . . . .43	<i>Fruitfly Geographic</i> (ECW Press) by Stephen Brockwell;
. . . . . February 1999 . . . . .44	. . . . . reviewed by Tim Conley . . . . .110
. . . . . La Vérité à Ottawa . . . . .45	<i>Wild Clover Honey and the Beehive</i> (The Rideau River Press)
rob mclennan	by Stephen Brockwell and Peter Norman;
. . . . . 33 lines, a stolen phrase & a short apology . .47	. . . . . reviewed by Shane Rhodes . . . . .112
An Interview with Max Middle . . . . .60	Stephen Brockwell
Max Middle	. . . . . Death of the Postmoderns . . . . .114
. . . . . b being still . . . . .69	. . . . . A Socratic Communication Problem of the
. . . . . A Creation Song . . . . .70	. . . . . Twenty Second Century . . . . .114
Peter Norman	. . . . . Bill McGillivray's Trophy Deer . . . . .115
. . . . . BOLSHEVIK TENNIS! . . . . .77	<i>tango sed</i> (greenboathouse books) by Shane Rhodes;
Monty Reid	. . . . . reviewed by rob mclennan . . . . .116
. . . . . from The Luskville Reductions . . . . .78	

# Balancing Acts: An Interview with John Barton

*this interview was conducted over email from April 2003 to September 2004*

## ANXIETY

Before I broke the window I was always on the inside looking out  
—words excised from a notebook and ignored till now, till I look out  
  
a window at this time of year, cracked panes jangling in the frame  
the frame itself jarred by the first cold wind to lift from the river  
  
winter oppressing me on schedule as it always does, these words  
flags snapping at the Turkish embassy two doors down, twigs  
  
fragmenting in the cold, the first shattered crimson leaves already  
below my window, my shadow from this lit room anticipating  
  
war, in Kurdistan perhaps, darkness cast across the premature snow.  
Before I broke the window I was always on the inside looking out  
  
thinking I had inside knowledge, thinking I had something special  
or nothing much to say about what would change how things were  
  
words cutting my wrist as I broke through the pane with my fist  
doubt lodging instant shards below the skin, and numbness.  
  
Every window that window. The anxiety. The severed nerve.  
The river below exposed as a throat, its argentine integument  
  
taut as a sail resonant with storm, dark clouds of algae flying  
to the surface, mottled imperfections swirling into whatever ripens  
  
and gets reflected back, my eyes never once clear and undisturbed.  
A child face down in snow in Kurdistan, blood pouring from his mouth.  
  
Before I broke the window I was always on the inside looking out  
nothing let in until the airless seasonal rage of the unloved  
  
lacerates destiny with sudden subconscious force, the numb  
reality of wind. If I could, in my arms I would gather up that child  
  
and run for cover across every artificial border, these words  
I cannot forget, impossible bandages for his mortal wounds.

**rob mcLennan:** From what I know of your history, you started out in Calgary, schooled at the University of Victoria, and at some point, arrived in Ottawa. After such shifts—and various travel you’ve done since across the continent and beyond—what sort of impact (if any) has the change in geography had on your work?

**John Barton:** Yes, I grew up in Calgary, though I was born in Edmonton, where my family lived until I was four and a half. I left home when I was 18, moving back to Edmonton for three years, before moving to Victoria to complete my undergraduate studies with Robin Skelton in what was then known as the Department of Creative Writing. I also lived in New York for a few months, where I enrolled in graduate studies at Columbia University. After that, I moved back west for a year to finish my book on Emily Carr, before I changed direction entirely and moved to London, Ontario, to obtain a degree in library science and a meal ticket, which brought me to Ottawa in 1986, where I have lived, worked, and written ever since.

I believe we are imprinted by the landscape of our childhoods, and because the world of a child is quite small, the landscape is similarly circumscribed, though its resonance, felt through the rest of our lives, is unending. I grew up on what was then the western edge of Calgary, near the university, with a view of the Rocky Mountains from my bedroom window. The drive from Calgary to Banff is one that will always haunt me. Every time I return home for a visit, I like to take Highway 1A west, which is a few miles north of the four-lane, much faster Trans-Canada. It is one of the most compelling, emotionally stirring trips I can make anywhere, largely, I suppose, because it links me to my childhood and the deep sense of connection I felt unconsciously with that landscape growing up. That drive is everywhere in my poems,

even if not explicitly referenced. My family would go on long, meandering back-road Sunday drives through the Eastern slopes, with me looking out the window and daydreaming in the backseat. To children, their little bit of the world is The World as far as they are concerned. To me, looking westward towards distant mountains is visceral and defines Calgary and Alberta for me. Yet, not everyone feels this way. Bruce Hunter, who now lives in Toronto, grew up on the eastern side of the city, which spreads into the flat infinite space of the prairie, a world of sunrise. Mine is one of sunset. A book of his short stories that I read several years ago is completely focused on the prairie’s dry expansiveness and on the river that flows eastward through the city into it.

I wrote in the title poem of *Notes Toward a Family Tree* (which is a poem about a friend of mine who felt a deep connection with Africa) that I return always to my first measures. The landscape of my childhood, rimmed on the west by the Rockies, with the foothills rising towards them, is the one I compare all my subsequent landscapes to—even if I make no direct mention of it in any of the poems I write about other places. Landforms, city streets, streams, bodies of water stir me deeply. I find writing about them exhumes lots of material, whether it is my personal history, Canadian history, conflicts in culture, literary history, or the history of the language itself. I suppose space is time, to border on cliché, and as I spend more time in any one particular locale, I experience it and the many connections it suggests to other things and other places—and from this experience many poems are drawn.

Over the years travel has inspired me enormously, but I have no real desire to write so-called travel poems. I love the variety of place that traveling creates, but I dislike the idea of collecting and writing about places in the way so many people collect



customs stamps in their passports. To me this avariciousness seems very superficial. I am much more interested in how a place affects me and how its history can intersect with mine, personal and cultural. Certainly, diverse landscapes provide surface variation to what I write, which is a pleasure to me in itself, but I have no interest of writing about a particular locale merely to be able to say I have done so. That would be to reduce the poem to the level of having my picture taken with one of the Horse Guards in front of Buckingham Palace.

**rm:** I love the differences of that, a prairie of sunrises against a prairie of sunsets. Still, even had you lived in the same house, with the same window view, between the two of you as writers, there would have been differences. What sort of things impacted early on in how you constructed a poem. And really, why poetry?

**JB:** Yes, Bruce and I would likely have written very different poems if we had grown up together in the same house and observed the same things. However, we might have shared a few things in common. My point was that what shapes and imprints us is very localized. For most of my formative years, my world was very small in its physical footprint, however big it was in scope. I think we are all very primitive, very tribal. I read somewhere that at any one time that we have circle of intimates and acquaintances of about 150 people. Who composes it may change but the number does not. This is the size of a hamlet. I now see the part of Calgary that I grew up in as a village wholly connected to and shaped by its environment, which was westward-looking and mountain-oriented.

**“As a small child, I was fascinated by the fact that what was written on the page was a representation of what was voiced inside the head or said out loud. That the symbol preserved the idea amazed me.”**

What affected me early on? Like many young writers, I was attracted to poetry as a means of expressing myself, a permissible way of emoting. So, my first, now lost poems were merely transcripts of what I felt, unshaped by any literary influence. However, in Grade 11, which would be in 1973/74, my English class was taught by the music teacher. Her approach at teaching in a discipline outside her own was to have us read one book per month and then submit a paper about it. She would have us read in a different genre each month, and one month she asked us to pick a Canadian title. I chose

Atwood’s *Surfacing*, which I found on a paperback spin-rack in the drugstore at the Brentwood Village Mall, near where I grew up. This particular edition was published by Paperjacks, which was an early attempt at mass paperback publishing in order to give Canadian authors wider circulation. Well, that format did what it was intended to—it

reached me, a suburban boy in Alberta. That book changed my life and made me a writer. For some reason, I felt as if I were reading something written in my own voice for the first time, or a voice that was like mine, voicing my concerns. I suppose I identified with the alienation, anger and mordant humour in Atwood’s position. She wrote about the wilderness, about things that were identifiable to me. It had a huge impact. I loved the fact that the protagonist was unnamed, so when I wrote my book report, I referred to her, as Atwood did, as ‘she,’ much to the confusion of my teacher. *Surfacing* led me to Atwood’s poetry, which caused me to browse the poetry sections of bookstores. I began to read Sylvia Plath, whose intensity and vivid imagery I loved, and then Anne Sexton. Plath

continues to be a poet I admire; both she and Atwood (the early Atwood, the pre-*You Are Happy* Atwood) influenced how I broke lines and perceived diction. Plath, especially the Plath who wrote *Ariel*, influenced how I approached the stanza and how line breaks and stanza shapes work together. Another poet whose work I came across in my bookstore browsing was Pat Lowther, whose work I first read after her death. The first book of hers I bought was *A Stone Diary*, which was published posthumously. Her political engagement and her descriptions of the natural world impressed me enormously, and I suppose I was very influenced by how she handled the line.

Why poetry? As a small child, I was fascinated by the fact that what was written on the page was a representation of what was voiced inside the head or said out loud. That the symbol preserved the idea amazed me. Even before I learned how to read and write, I would mimic my mother writing, scribbling wavy parallel lines down a page.

In *Naked Poems*, Phyllis Webb’s muse asks: “Now you are sitting doubled up in pain./ What’s that for?” The poet answers: “doubled up I feel/small like these poems/the area of attack is diminished.” I have always loved this exchange, for to me it talks of the vulnerability of the poet. I was attracted to poetry because of its containment. Poems are small, rich, and arcane, and therefore private (however open to interpretation/attack), invulnerable, complete. They are worlds that fit on the page (which is ironic in my case, since so many of my poems are long) and outlast the author. That they

are vehicles to express emotion (read ‘my pain’) attracted me initially. Now I am less interested in the opportunity for personal revelation that poetry offers. I am more interested in how poetry reveals and connects.

**rm:** As far as the thread of your poetry collections go, the Emily Carr collection seems to fall offside somewhat. How did this book come about? Hell, how did the reissue ten years later come about? What is it about this book that holds such interest?

**JB:** I started *West of Darkness* in my first year as a student at the University of Victoria in 1978. While I was growing up, my mother introduced me to Carr’s autobiographical writings—the 100th anniversary of her birth took place when I was 14 and I remember driving across Canada on holiday with my parents listening to the CBC read extracts from her work—so when

I arrived in Victoria seven years later, Carr was familiar to me already, and I found that familiarity affirming. She as a recognizable landmark that oriented me as I found my way in a strange city. On Wharf Street, there used to be a gallery of her work, which was run by B.C.’s provincial archives and located in her father’s store. I would visit it regularly and ideas for poems started forming. I had gone to Victoria to see if I could be a writer, following a recommendation from Gary Geddes, whom I had studied with at the University of Alberta, to go study with P. K. Page. She was not teaching there when I got there. So, in my first year at UVic, I was placed in a third-year workshop given by Robin Skelton. Most of the others in the workshop had already been together for two years, so I felt very odd-person-out and sensed a scepticism about my abilities as a poet

**“I suppose writing about the life of someone else saved me from the dilemma of writing about my own.”**

on their part. I had to prove myself to them as well as to myself. Carr anchored me as a poet, gave me something to write about, so over the three years that I studied with Robin (including a special study course in my last year, during which just the two of us worked exclusively on this project), I began shaping the manuscript, and my craft and my confidence evolved with it also. Robin was very much a mentor, and he believed in this book as much as I did. It took me six years to finish it, writing other unrelated poems at the same time, including poems that later made it into *A Poor Photographer*, *Hidden Structure*, *Great Men*, and *Notes Toward a Family Tree*.

Why Carr? Well, I suppose writing about the life of someone else saved me from the dilemma of writing about my own. While I was aware of my sexual orientation and wrote a few poems about it while I was in Victoria—“Enfant Terrible,” “My Cellophane Suit” in *Great Men*, among others—I was in denial about it. And when I could not ignore it, I was very anguished. Looking back, I can imagine Carr’s stoic spinsterhood and the repressed sensuality that she found expression for in the natural world must have appealed to me while I remained in the closet (though of course I had absolutely no sense of what the closet was at the time). I was also very aware that I was slowly creating a portrait of an artist, so I think the book was a way for me to come to understand my vocation as a poet—the terms, the discipline, the sense of failure, the possibilities for recognition, the struggle. A portrait of the artist that remains relevant to me as an example even today.

So, in a sense, the book was very autobiographical. You can say an awful lot about yourself via a persona

You can say an awful lot about yourself via a persona without anyone really noticing.

without anyone really noticing. Since establishing myself as a gay man and a gay poet, I have come to think of Emily as my drag persona. And as a drag figure, given her dress sense, she would be an iconoclast. No frills, makeup, and rhinestones for this girl. She described herself as a paste solitaire in a steel-claw setting. Most drag queens consider themselves to be “Just FABULOUS.” The second edition of the book was published in 1999 by Beach Holme, twelve years after its first appearance with Penumbra. In a sense the book came home to British Columbia, especially because Press Porcepic, the old name for

Beach Holme, had accepted it in 1986 just after Penumbra did. In 1998 I had discovered that Penumbra had exhausted the print run and did not wish to reprint. Also, over the intervening years between the book’s publication and its going out of print, Carr’s profile on the west coast and internationally had increased even more. She was always big, but

in the 1990s she was even bigger, becoming a minor industry, with major touring exhibitions of her work, permanent galleries displaying the permanent collections of her work at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, a living history museum to her memory in her birthplace, biographies, plays, essays, children’s books, as well as other collections of poems about her, with some of her own previously unpublished writings appearing in bookstores. Republishing my book simply made sense, since there was a growing audience who would buy it. A west-coast press would understand this better than one based elsewhere, so I approached Beach Holme, and they took it. To make the book slightly different from the 1987 edition, we added one poem that had been cut and invited Kate Braid to write an

introduction. I also wrote a second afterward. It was very satisfying to give the book a second life. And I think it will continue to remain in print—for instance, a British publisher has expressed an interest in the book, should it ever fall out of print in Canada.

**rm:** Recently, at a reading we did together, you said you were going back and reworking a number of older pieces, from earlier of your books. Why are you doing this?

**JB:** Yes, I am reworking old poems, but not ones that appeared in any of my earlier books, though if you look at “Lake Huron Variations” in *Sweet Ellipsis*, you will notice that part of it is a revision of a poem that was published in my first book. However, many of the old poems that have been candidates for revision date quite far back.

One of the pieces, “In the House of the Present,” which placed 2nd in this year’s CBC Literary Awards, had been haunting me for more than 20 years. Some of the poems had previously appeared in journals, but because I became dissatisfied with them, they never made it into a book. “Anxiety” is a good example. The original version, which appeared in *The Canadian Forum*, is constructed from short lines grouped together in irregular stanzas. I suppose there are a few reasons why I am revisiting this past work: these poems are ones I have never been able to give up on, and also, when I am not writing much new material, I find revision a good substitute. I have always enjoyed the process of reshaping. It is free of the anxiety of the first draft. Also, I find it interesting to apply current aesthetic

assumptions to older poems that have not been working. Perhaps present technical obsessions can bring out aspects of the poem that had not been susceptible to my previous compositional tricks. It is a way of further exploring my present ideas about poetry.

**rm:** What is it about these older poems that have stuck in your head, even after twenty years? And do you find a lot of anxiety in your first draft? I always considered the first draft to be where a writer had the most freedom, before the long carve, carve, carve of obsessive revision.

**JB:** I suppose the older poems must have some ember of lingering vitality that time has not stamped out. They remain in my consciousness—and on my hard drive; their presence there, irradiating me with their incompleteness, haunts and provokes me each time I open the directory of my poems. I find them as hard to

ignore as beggars in the street—and when I do, in both cases, I feel guilty.

I must suffer from some kind of poet’s thrift: waste not, want not. If I have already spent a lot of poetic capital working a poem up to a certain point, it is difficult for me to turn my back on the time already invested, even if that investment was originally made many years before. Time has long been at a high premium for me, split, as it is, between working full time, editing *Arc*, writing, and trying to have a personal life. I seem to turn to abandoned poems when the energy to write something new is in short supply. I rework them with very little expectation of the outcome and relax in the pleasurable mechanics of revision. It seems that I want to conserve my writing

If I have already spent a lot of poetic capital working a poem up to a certain point, it is difficult for me to turn my back on the time already invested...

energy for new poems that really matter. My approach to writing new work is not very casual; it has not been for many years, which may be a bit of a problem, for the poems that are the products of happenstance do not often get written.

I find your comment about the freedom you find in the first draft to be very interesting. I would love to feel that way and wonder if I don't because my new poems are always written in moments stolen from my regular life. I feel a lot of anxiety during the first draft because I am not sure I will be finish it in the time I have made available—and if I do, will the attempt be worth the effort, and if I don't, will ever get back to it? I suppose revision satisfies me so much because at some point I have decided that the initial effort was worthwhile, so I can revel in the fine tuning to make a poem better. The issue of merit has already been decided.

**rm:** The three poems that make up the second section of *Hypothesis* — “In a Station of the Tongue,” “Light Paralysis,” and “Eye Country” — seem a very deliberate stylistic shift, writing an almost semi-prose column of text. Your formal shifts aren't usually so obvious; how did these pieces come about?

**JB:** I was drawn to writing in this manner out of an impatience with the line and stanza breaks. I was beginning to feel that I had become over focused on where to end lines and stanzas—a skill more than a few people have praised me for over the years—so decided to see what would happen if I frustrated that focus in some way, to see if the poems changed.

I believe “Eye Country” was the first poem to be written in this manner, sometime in the autumn of 1999. The first draft, which was written with both line and stanza breaks, seemed stilted and reticent.

I don't know what provoked me to pour it into a narrow right-and-left justified, double-spaced column, but once I did, the poem began to flow and open up. That this poem—as are the other two—is a single sentence perhaps made it more amenable, for the energy of the comma-spliced clauses reenforced the energy of the shape. Perhaps each clause formally echos each right-and-left justified line, though the clauses are various lengths while the lines are uniform. What emerges, I believe, is a hypnotic voice. Also, to be released—at least temporarily—from the decision-making required to determine breaks gave me more mental space to explore other aspects of the poems, to push into the imagery, etc. The irony, of course, is that I became very conscious of where the justification caused the lines to break. You will notice that most lines end on either a noun, verb, adjective or adjective. I avoided breaking them on prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and pronouns, unless doing so advanced sense. Of course, I left the justification on, so that meant revising lines internally in order that they ended at particular words; also, if I wanted to preserve a particular line break, it would result in often extensive revisions far above and below. Finally, the justification forced me to start paying attention to the space between words within each line. I wanted the intra-line spacing to look and feel as natural as possible. All these technical challenges consumed me and forced me to explore these poems in ways I might not have otherwise.

Also, I have found that avoiding line breaks—or more properly, the device of drawing readers' attention away from them—gives the poems more “interiority.” I feel that I draw readers more deeply into the mind/spirit-space of the narrator. They get the opportunity to observe the process of the narrator being alive to experience. It is as if line-breaks create edges, barriers, prop up the mask of

the narrator's self-conscious persona. Line breaks are more “social.” Maybe, they demand the reader to recognize how clever the poet is at the expense of the narrator. I have also begun writing long-lined couplets during the compilation of *Hypothesis* and have noticed they possess the same deep, meditative internalized voice.

I have found this so-called “column” or “text-block” form compelling, and have written five other poems in this manner. Two of them are my CBC-winning poems; they have been collected with a third poem into *Asymmetries*, a set of limited-edition chapbooks published in April 2004 by Frog Hollow Press. The three poems in *Hypothesis* have travel themes, so I wanted to see if other themes would work in this form. “In the House of the Present,” which you can hear read aloud on the Anansi website by an actor hired by the CBC, deals with childhood memory. I also wanted to see if it could work as a short poem. “Sombrio Beach” is an example. I am less concerned that any of these poems “work” than in how they stand as gestures of experimentation.

I realize some readers have difficulty with the form. They find the combination of justification and comma-splice sentences opaque to comprehension, and even wonder if they are prose poems or simply passages of prose. Myself, I do still consider them poems, particularly because I have come to take such pains with how the lines break. Also, I don't consider them double-spaced, but composed of single-line stanzas—so the line endings are really stanza breaks—which I have come to call “singlets.” I like this, because a singlet is also a man's sleeve-

less undershirt—or ‘vest,’ as my British-born father would say. For me this is a little homoerotic joke. My Calvin Klein of forms.

**rm:** You sound as though these “gestures of experimentation” are against the normal strain of your writing, deliberately frustrating the focus of your normal line to cause a shift. How far do you see yourself taking this?

**JB:** It is very hard to say, largely because your question seems to assume I have some sense of how far off or how nearby “far” is. What I can say is that I have found the frustration of my “normal”—as you call it—line most liberating, so I suppose once that ceases to engage me, I will move onto some new obsession—or wait till one materializes to distract me and take me somewhere else. I believe the “frustration of my normal line” has allowed me to move the focus of my attention—and the reader's—away from the line-ending to the line itself, foregrounding its expansiveness and inclusiveness. I am thinking especially of the long-lined couplets rather than the singlets, though the singlets—which, through their cumulative effect, remind of watching a straight-sided glass filling with deliciously cool water—have an ability to hold a great amount of experience, being absorbent as sponges (to continue with the water metaphor). The structure forces the reader to pay heed to what's going on within the line and between lines unmediated by the break. I am very preoccupied with density, compressing as much into the poem as possible.

Perhaps when I desire simplicity's plain signature, I will move onto something else. Right now I am

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adding something else to my repertoire. I find the word “experimentation” a loaded word. What does it really mean, especially as it changes meaning depending on who is using it? “Normal” and “normative” are similarly loaded. Our culture—the writing culture even—is drunk on them. Experimental writing: what does that mean, what is its opposite? Normal writing? I think not.

I sometimes feel victimized by both sets of words—that my writing is not experimental enough that it is—excluding the homoerotic content—too normal; or, because of its homoerotic content, not normal enough. Or because my representation of homoerotic experience is too normative, not experimental enough, considering being gay is such a “social experiment.” Or maybe this debate is inside me . . . to quote Phyllis Webb: “Take away my wisdom and my categories!”

I suppose my real area of interest is to modulate the tonalities of what I would call—to borrow from grammar—the declarative voice: the deceptively simple cause-and-effect relationships between subject and predicate, and how the dynamic between them affects that voice and consciousness emerging from poetic discourse. If you look at the poems I have been writing for the last ten years, you will notice how I have become progressively more obsessed with the sentence—how to write one that is full of interest. My current innovations are merely the latest engagement with of this obsession.

**rm:** I’ve always thought “experimentation” a matter of trying something different, whether from what you normally do, or away from what everyone

else is doing. Adding something new, as you say.

What is your consideration of homoerotic content in your poems? You have more in your poems than, say, R.M. Vaughan or nathalie stephens do, but probably far less than other examples I’m not aware of (such as some of Carl Stewart’s artworks). How do you see yourself fitting within the context of other gay writing, and is this even a consideration?

**JB:** Foregrounding gay experience in my work has long been a focus for me, but not to attract attention

to that experience or to fetishize it—or to make it seem exotic. Nor have I written from a gay perspective to stand out from my straight writing peers. I merely wish to share my imaginative, not necessarily autobiographical, experience—anecdotally and aesthetically—as any other writer might wish to, though writing from a so-called minority

perspective also involves representing the experience of that marginality. That’s where the trouble starts.

How do I fit into a tradition of gay writing, and am consciously trying to fit in? Contemporary gay writing, with its preoccupation with coming out and political self-actualization, has roots going back to the late 60s, when there was a flowering of expression that coincided with the gay liberation movement. But the origins of homoerotic writing go back much farther; how homoerotic sensibility has evolved preoccupies me increasingly. Is a work homoerotic only if it is overtly so in its imagery, or are there other more subtle signifiers that suggest its pedigree? I have swung back forth between these

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approaches throughout my writing career, and often the simplicity of using imagery to make my themes evident has been very important to me. Being ‘overt’ has a lot to do with how I want to engage with my audience, and over the years, reader reaction has been quite diverse, and not always positive. I would like to think that my work reflects/embodies something essential about being gay in my own time—but there are so many ways of being gay that any one writer’s expression of it is necessarily partial. In that sense I believe I am participating in a collectivity, one jagged little piece in a very confusing puzzle.

That said, it has never been enough for me simply to think of myself as a gay writer. I have other concerns (the environment, national identities, etc.) but what I find interesting is to view those issues from a homoerotic perspective—to see how various issues might illuminate one another, to if anything new or interesting might result.

I am saddened that some readers, gay and straight, get fixated on genitalia, for example—or the lack of it—and miss the other themes that might be present in my work. For straight readers, I can be too provocative; for gay ones, too vanilla. I see such readings as tellingly narcissistic: for both, they see too little of themselves in my work. I thought reading was also about entering in the unknown and the unknowable. As a gay writer, as a writer who happens to be gay—or whatever spin I want to put on my subjectivity—I feel betwixt and between in the apparently tolerant culture we are building in Canada.

**rm:** How important is that for you, that balance? I mean, there are Canadians who think Erin Mouré is too experimental, & parts of Cambridge that consider her not experimental enough . . .

I am not sure which balance you mean. The balance to be struck between the experimental and the conventional? I suppose it depends on whether or not I feel obliged to expand the envelope of the ‘tradition’ to any degree—and that the so-called ‘experimentations’ of Erin’s sort are the best way for me to do so. I am probably a bit of a fence sitter. I like the declarative, rational voice of the conventional sentence, for example, but I want to push that the shape of that sentence as far as I can.

**rm:** I was meaning the considerations you felt caught between, the demands you feel your gay readers have on you, against the ones you feel your non-gay audience have. But, having said that, how does it feel to know that two of your pieces, with the second place in the CBC literary contest, were available to readers of *enRoute* magazine, read by two months worth of weary airplane travellers? As has been suggested, the “homoeroticism at 40,000 feet.”

**JB:** Ah, the homoeroticism in those pieces is very subtle, subtextual really. Perhaps a reader would have to be familiar with my writing to see it at work in these poems. When I was trying to decide which poems to send, I was very conscious that anything too overtly gay could be in danger of being screened out at an early stage of the judging. Such suspicions make a writer working from any minority point of view very self-conscious. Though I am sure the CBC Literary Competition is very above board, I cannot help but suspect that there are guidelines, even unwritten ones, that would be applied to weed out entries that might offend, upset, or enrage passengers. I am sure that any piece of travel writing about terrorism would be in the bin.

“Appropriateness” is much more of a force in society today than many wish to acknowledge, especially by



artists who tend to assume that their values are the right ones and are shared by the other “right-thinking,” intelligent people they routinely deal with. I know that this is not true from past experience and also know that artists themselves are often unaware of their own prejudices operating below the patina of tolerance they like to project to the world. I believe that it is this kind of unawareness—and not anything more malevolent—that could motivate a screener to weed out more socially challenging work from a contest. So I chose carefully and, as a result, during August 2003, my two poems were read anywhere Air Canada flies. Whether or not anyone at 40,000 feet realized that their author was gay or that the poems had any homoerotic valencies is anyone’s guess. In theory, I could feel that I have let myself down, but gay men are masters of knowing how to “pass” unnoticed among straights. Historically we camouflage our charged gay bodies with the most apparently benign straight drag. Getting away with it is subversive and fun, and to those attuned to receive it—a message.

To think that such tropes are at work in the world today I believe surprises many people, gay or straight. It offends their self-congratulatory sense of their own tolerance. But look how same sex marriage has stirred things up in the last six months, with polls indicating a near-dead heat between its proponents and its detractors. This is the milieu in which I publish my work.

So, going back to your question about balance, I have given up trying to balance the needs of my gay readers with the hesitations of my straight ones. I am not going to write semen-soaked sonnets to appease the jerk-off fantasies of the former. Nor will I sit down to write poems so innocuous that the latter are able pat themselves on their collective backs for being cool enough to read them as gay literature without discomfort. But I do feel caught

sometimes. And I wonder if I should compromise to get ahead, to get that GG nomination that would push me the next level of success, which might translate into a tenure-track teaching position, invitations to read, lots of book reviews, etc. There is real danger in compromise, however, because, in my opinion, it leads to silence. Compromise has no edge to it, so as poet I would get bored and likely stop writing. The other danger is to let myself be confused by the conflicting needs of a heterogeneous audience. Confusion leads to hesitation; hesitation leads to block.

I have decided that all I need to do is to be shrewd—to know when to pass for the simple subversive pleasure of it, and when to parade.

**rm:** After eighteen years in Ottawa and a dozen years at *Arc*, what brought about the move to Victoria to take over *The Malahat Review*?

**JB:** I was with *Arc* for sixteen years, thirteen as co-editor. It consumed a lot of my time, energy, and imaginative space. God knows, but it even likely took the place of family, dog, and boyfriend at times. After we launched the Don Coles issue at the National Arts Centre last April, Rita Donovan, my fellow co-editor, called me to say she would be stepping down. Because I had been harbouring my own thoughts about resigning, I was not completely surprised. Rita joined the editorial board one year after I did in 1988, so I could empathize with the exhaustion and the desire to move onto new things. The burden of responsibility can be crushing over time. We met for lunch and decided we would leave at the same time—December 2003—giving the board six months to adjust to our departure and reinvent itself. Nevertheless I found the decision to leave a very hard one to make because I love publishing and loved watching the issues take slowly shape. I often thought

about leaving before, but part of me always wanted to hang around for the magazine’s 25<sup>th</sup> year, which I did. However the maddening administrative duties involved in keeping *Arc* alive took their toll, especially as everything required to do had to be done in my spare time—or on the sly while I was “at work.”

When I moved to Ontario from B.C. in 1985 to study librarianship, I had no intention of staying more than a year to obtain my degree. However, life happens. Job opportunities came up in Ottawa, and the rest is history. Within in a year I had wormed my way into the Ottawa poetry community, which I found very welcoming. That I grew as a poet in the nearly eighteen years that I lived in Ottawa is undeniable. And the years at *Arc* are a big part of that growth. But the desire to return west never really went away, though, over the years, the urgency to do so sometimes began to seem no more than an idle fantasy.

*The Malahat Review* position came up after I had decided to leave *Arc*. The timing seemed right, so I applied, was interviewed, and offered the job. Opportunities like this do not crop up often in this country—to be paid reasonably, at least in comparison to the small honorarium I received at *Arc*, to work on a literary magazine as an actual day job. While I could have continued to lead a comfortable life as a civil servant in Ottawa and work till I reached retirement age, I knew that if I let this chance pass me by, I would have wondered what would have happened for the rest of my life. Over the last few years I found it harder and harder to find time to write. With luck in my new situation

there will be time for my own work. Accepting the job has had a lot to do with how I want to live the rest of my life. I joke that I have taken a vow of poverty, but I am sure things will work out.

*The Malahat Review* is an icon of Canadian literary publishing that was founded by Robin Skelton, my teacher at the University of Victoria from 1978 to 1981. As you may know, he died in 1997. The example he set as a magazine editor essentially shaped how I approached my responsibilities at *Arc*. Robin was a shrewd visionary, and through *The Malahat*, he helped shape Canadian literature in ways large and small. It was very important to me that *Arc* aspire to make a similar contribution. I am sure that its emphasis on the publication of book reviews, for example, stems from Robin’s own tireless reviewing in the pages of *The Malahat*. *Arc* may or may not be our “national poetry magazine”; I don’t really care if it is. But who can seriously deny it is not

now a national voice in the same way that *The Malahat* is? All I ever wanted was for *Arc* to add its voice to the dialogue, and it has.

So, to return to Victoria to edit the quarterly that Robin gave so much of his passion energy to feels very much like I am coming full circle. Isn’t that what is supposed to happen in one’s mid-to-late 40s? I can’t help but feel that I am honouring his memory and that he would be pleased. I want to apply everything I have learned at *Arc* in my new capacity as the editor of *The Malahat Review* and to build upon his legacy and the many accomplishments of his successors.

...I had no intention of staying more than a year to obtain my degree. However, life happens. Job opportunities came up in Ottawa, and the rest is history.



## Anita DOLMAN

Photo by: Don Monet



## Chase

through mildewed aisles  
 a pudgy boy dodges the rip-traps of the rubber mats  
 squeaks his sneakers against the black floor  
 flings his body around the corner shelf  
 tinned corn tottering                    precarious  
 before settling back into the thick dust  
 between canned peaches, beans,  
 soft packs of confectioner's sugar

a pig-tailed girl caroms off the chips display, gains fast,  
 digs a heel against the cooler  
 for a launch towards the door,  
 hands spread towards escape,  
 pictures the flight over the stoop,                    and leaps,  
 ignores the grocer's call, half-hearted, to  
 stop, stop that, you kids, you brats,  
 I've been telling you 32 years;  
 just once you'd think  
 you could listen, little bastards



# Tamara FAIRCHILD

## This is the heart of the financial district

An exploration of

City of Toronto Property Mapping Data Set 50g123.dgn

---

### Level Features

*This is the heart of Class*

*the financial Code*

*district Text*

*This is Level I the heart of the financial monuments*

*/district sewers*

### Level 2

*This bridge is the heart of the financial walk*

*district way*

*This is Level 3 the heart of empty*

### Level the financial district

*4 This is the empty heart of the financial district*

*This is Level 5*

*the N(orth)-arrow heart of the financial district*

*This is Level 6 sidewalks*

*Level 7 the stoplines/ heart of intersections/*

*the financial traffic*

*district lights*

*This is Level 8 the heart of the financial road*

*segments along the district edge*

*Level 9 some lines where there are islands*

*This is Level 10*

*the empty heart of the financial district*

*This is Level 11 the heart of squares*

*/the financial district patios*

*/steps*

### Level 12

*This empty is the heart of the financial district*

### Level 13

*This is the empty heart of the financial district*

### Level 14

*This is the heart empty of the financial district*

*This is Level 15 the heart of empty*

*the Level financial district*

*This is 16 the heart of no*

*the financial district elements visible*

### Level 17

*This is the no heart*

*of the financial elements district*

*This is visible*

*the Level heart of 18*

*the empty financial district*

*This is Level 19*

*the empty heart of the financial district*

*This is Level 20*

*the heart empty of the financial district*

*This is the heart of Level 21*

*the financial district ellipses utilities*

*Level 22 This text: is the bridge*

*heart of the financial house*

*district lane*

*This parking is the heart of etc.*

*the financial district text*

*This is Level 23*

*the heart of property*

*/the financial district survey*

*This is the heart of the financial monuments*

*district code 130 Level 24*

*This text: is the heart of RIGHT*

*OF the financial district WAY*

*This is Level 25*

*the heart of buildings*

*the financial district footprints*

*This outline is the heart of the financial district code*

*This 120 is the heart of the financial district*

*This code 10 is the heart of none*

*Level the financial district*

*This is 26 the heart of street*

*the financial addresses /district numbers*  
*This Union is the heart of the financial Station*

Level 27 text:  
 names of *district streets*

Level 28 text:  
*This is the heart of names*  
*of the financial district buildings*  
*(the Royal York Hotel etc.)*

Level 29 text:  
*This is the heart of First*  
*the financial Canadian Place,*  
*district parkette cloud garden*

*This is Level 30 the heart of the financial roads*  
*district rights of way*  
*This is the heart of the financial*  
*district code 90 Level 31*  
*This is the heart of none*  
*the financial district empty*

*This is Level 32*  
*the utilities heart of Level 33*  
*the utilifinancial ties district*  
*This is Level 34*  
*the empty heart of the financial district*  
*This is Level 35*  
*the heart of the empty financial district*

Level 36 rails  
*This is Level 37 the heart of the financial empty district*  
*This is Level 38 empty the heart of the financial district*  
*This is Level 39 the heart of empty*

Level *the financial district*

*This is 40*  
*the heart of the financial district empty*  
*This Level is 41*  
*the heart of the financial empty district*  
*This is Level 42*  
*the heart of the empty financial district*  
*This is Level 43*  
*the heart of empty the financial district*

*This is Level 44*  
*the heart empty of*

Level *the financial district*

*This empty is Level 45*  
*the heart of 46*  
*empty the financial district*  
*This is Level 47*  
*the heart of the financial empty*  
 Level 48 *district empty*  
*This Level is empty*  
*the heart of 49 empty*  
*the financial district Level*

*This 50 is Level 51*  
*the unknown he art of the financial district ellipses*  
*This is Level 52*  
*the unknown he art of the financial ellipses district*  
*This Level is 53*  
*the heart of empty*

Level *the financial district*

*This is 54*  
 empty Level 55  
 empty Level 56  
 empty *the heart of the financial district*

*This is Level 57*  
*the empty heart of the financial district*

*This is Level 58 the heart of con*  
*the financial tractors*  
*/district names*  
*This curb is the heart of stones*  
*the financial /district dates*  
*This is etc.*  
 Level 59 *the heart*  
*of the financial legend/*  
*district sheet includes text*

*This is Level 60*  
*the heart of parts*  
*of the financial district plans/*



*This is the heart of the financial right  
of district ways/*

*This is the heart of ease  
the financial district men*

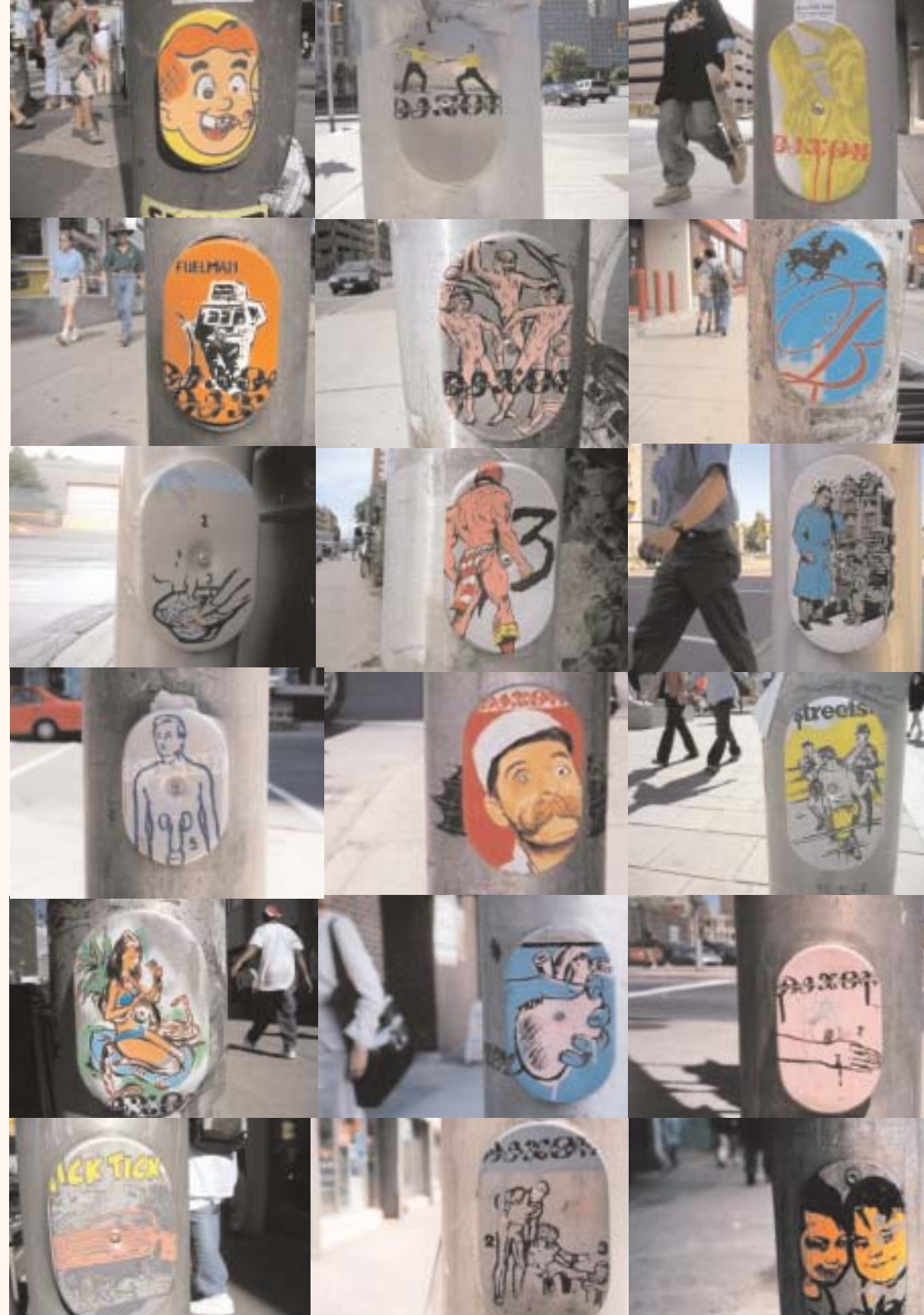
*This ts is etc  
the heart of inc  
the financial district ludes*

*This text is the heart of Level 61  
the empty financial district*

*This is Level 62  
the PATH  
SUB heart of the financial district WAY*

*This is Level 63*

*the heart of street  
the misc. text,  
financial elevations  
district values  
some unidentified lines*



Post Covers by dixon

## Gwendolyn GUTH



Photo by Don Monet

### Revenge

Dead rose bushes are hard  
to kill. Betrayal of brown stalks,  
hollow spiked flutes  
of bygone bee music.  
They sense your  
fury, scoff at that  
insufferable prima donna  
sun coaxing grubs  
from black loamy beds.  
Done with roses forever,  
or so she thinks.

Blunt and  
brutish they look, beside  
the chartreuse points of iris  
*qui poussent, qui poussent—*  
Bulbous their roots, big  
as thighs wedged in earth.  
The hoe bends and snaps off  
clean, and still  
the roots grip, hissing  
oaths, malevolent.

Who would have thought that beauty  
could come to this:  
your desperate  
hack at the hollow stalk,  
tears of rage, grime  
in the corners  
of your eyes?



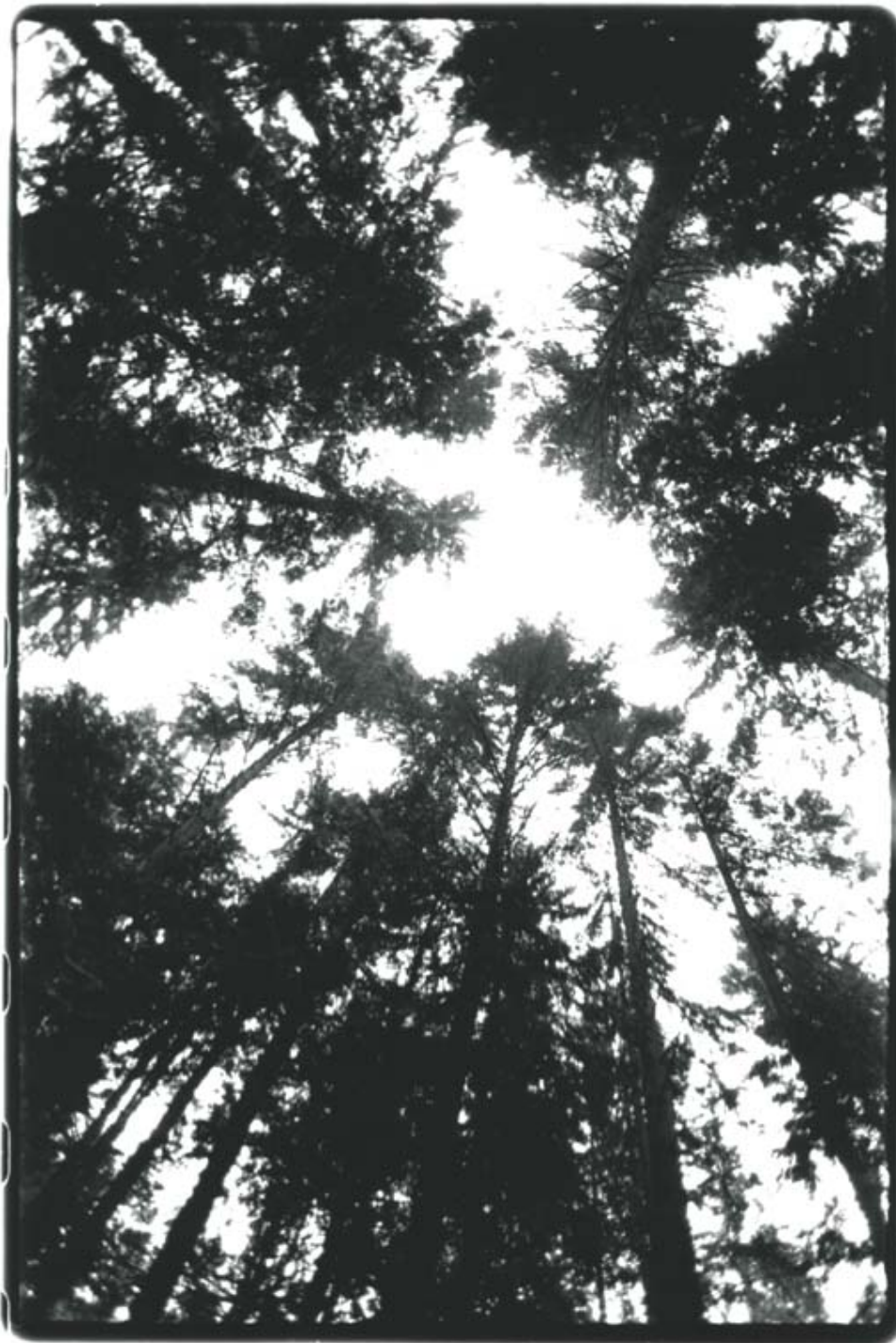
## William HAWKINS

### How the Dead Prey Upon You *(For Ottawa)*

You and yr past, & re-incarnation, of  
all things,  
giving you mysterious & yet specious  
rights of ownership to a long  
catalogue of disgraces  
& circuitous lies.

Why not refute the past  
and struggle into the future?  
You won't have to mix—  
stay inside, it is all on TV—  
edited for family viewing.  
And just like heroin  
about five per cent real.

Photograph by: Jeremy Reid



### Sunrise: Villanelle

Day break me a day of no regret.  
 Make slow or stop the flow of fear of years.  
 Day break me this day for I've not loved yet.

Can't we as boys and girls—just islands—  
 Have no great griefs in our brains and time.  
 Day break me a day of no regret.

Gladsad street child wanting to hang loose.  
 Needing a child of morning to love and lose.  
 Day break me this day for I've not loved yet.

I say sing our songs till our songs send us down.  
 Where we can lay and listen—hear new sounds.  
 Day break me a day of no regret.

And that's jazz, you sweet old mother of mine.  
 High-rolling son of stone-empty pockets.  
 Day break me this day for I've not loved yet.

And go, planets! go on and twist about,  
 Children die. Mothers cry. None know why.  
 Day break me a day of no regret.  
 Day break me this day for I've not loved yet.

### Sheila Frances Louise

I keep my divorce papers  
 with my underwear, top drawer, in fact,  
 so that each morning while dressing,  
 I resolve again,  
 to stop following my prick around.

No offence now...



## king kong Goes To The Shawville Fair

O I went to the Shawville fair

Hoping to find other Beasties there!

Alas there were none

But still I had fun

Getting drunk with raccoons

On stale beer.

2004



John Deacon 2/7

*Ottawa snow; come what May*

This night too far forward:  
 spring cherrypicking winter early,  
 post-season hockey keeping ice  
 glancing blue off the walls.

The ideas of movement—looking  
 out from here, leaving  
 another city, taking  
 another with me.

This coming summer, the time between  
 already passed  
 before we've reached it.

By the time you get home,  
 the snow is gone, except  
 for the place in the back yard  
 where tree and fence hide it  
 grey,  
 post-season.

*Ghazal of a bureaucratic entrance*

walking to the bus corner  
 I clench my gas, nearing people

no breakfast, only coffee—  
 feeling a june bug gut: red, brown

my eyelid begins its twitch  
 I plan the aesthetic of my face's slant

enter the day's email with the building  
 a friend has sent poems describing her lovers

bus sweats and musky for the night's drinking  
 I apply the smell of an acceptable demeanor

walking to the first meeting  
 I test my tongue, burnt by coffee.

dusk to Ottawa

I don't see letters in the trees  
or road lines; hills

but shades and brambles bronchial:

the sky underlaid,  
the sun underground

clouds with eyes made up for the night—

the moment the woods settle  
into solid space,

writing horizons.



# Clare LATREMOUILLE

## To the missing lover of Marilyn Monroe

I was born on the cusp of summer, breathing in hospital green, ether blue,  
 every breath another candidate for smothering;  
 nothing prepared us for this later dream.  
 My charm, I fear, is this  
 mirror that frames eyebrows plucked from a woman I don't know, her eyeballs  
 pressed in an album, her vision fazing fast fast fast squinting back  
 at someone I don't know - I am not Marilyn fucking Monroe but then  
 neither was she, both unaware of our drifting and our eyes buried deep within  
 a jar of gartersnakes and leaves punched with airholes and no other rules, buried like  
 treasure  
 deep  
 under layers of flesh and pain, deep below summer leaves and falling winds, deep  
 where the jewel-eyed toads cluster and wait for thaw, the secret places under  
 warm boards and complicated lies and arms too tired to hold you any more, where gods  
 sip  
 celestial seasonings tea and compose  
 trite poetry for a love gone sour. Here are you -  
 at the end of my universe, dancing still, looking like Bryan Ferry and holding  
 a gasp of summer air in the palm of your hand, waiting for me to thaw,  
 and this goddamned typewriter will not dance - here are you, crying in the wilderness...  
 In the space of this vision I have already forgotten many eyes  
 coyotes howl around our hospital, salmon dance up the sides of cold concrete  
 headstones, and I still don't know where home is (Marilyn smiles,  
 lost as Mona Lisa, and just as short of breath) - How do toads breathe, we wonder, under  
 mud,

under no flies to sing, under no autographs to collect, under no ulterior motives to bring  
 home to  
 Mother? (there, I've said it) M is for the many things she gave away, and I am still made  
 of that tiny flesh, screaming on a steel table with all of my arms, but no vision - the darkness  
 of that tunnel is the darkness of pavement, of eyeshadows, of trains rolling away, of this story  
 I keep telling myself, this documented link to the civilized collective, my consciousness  
 elsewhere, running through tumbleweeds not yet ready to, pulling off scab after scab  
 after scab  
 but finding no skin under - under is the darkness  
 deeper and deeper until there is no bottom,  
 only the glittering gold eyes of dead women, encrusted in the walls,  
 bunched in symmetrical hexagons, breathing without air, without hope of air,  
 all waiting for you, holding one perfect vision  
 which none of them can see:  
 I have saved the best guilt for you,  
 not for anything you have done, or ever meant to do, but for all lovers  
 all lairs  
 all prophets and popes  
 all weavers of tales all dancers all doctors all boys with small nets  
 all sellers of snake oil and jewels we know  
 you are there, and we see you, with our perfect, uniform  
 blindness: man,  
 beyond skin and hair, scent and sin, penis and asshole, hand and eye - only a godhead  
 collection of mirrors turning for us to look:

reflection of golden eyes, needing  
 not the summer air, or even  
 breath  
 to be warm in the knowledge of a coming spring.



## George Elliott CLARKE

## VII

Mid-September in Annapolis Royal's Historic Gardens,  
 Junked apples rot beneath model trees.  
 The Imperial Rose Garden and its lush, jungled flora  
 Imitate what Sappho loved — this red, blushed  
 Majesty, cascading dastardly in patchwork patterns  
 That mirror triangulated, assassins' gunfire.  
 Magenta, scarlet, fragile pink, *noir*, and white,  
 The roses mass perplexingly complex in tinge —  
 Like a political party of Machiavellian intent.  
 But forget policy as *Rose Chinensis* prefaces  
 Hybrid Teas crafted by hand pollination, a process  
 Once thought anathema, but gleaned from Chinese  
 Buddhist science, "Healthy with a capital H." And so,  
 Enjoy the luxury of the rose-washed air,  
 Smelling also of perfumed decay like a bordello,  
 Like stench of bed sheets after coitus  
 (Rank sweat and drool, ointments and condiments),  
 Amid dog hair strewn like strychnine to scare off  
 Impressionable deer, and the light sluicing down  
 Like loose juice, a jetting of drenching spunk.  
 Jewels of insects sparkle amid the pulp and juice  
 Of russet pears, sapped, crushed, but teeming  
 Also with maggots as fierce as asps. Nearby, bees  
 Burrow into the fragrant, pouting vaginas  
 Of impious flowers, dousing themselves with nectar,  
 Delicious, sopping, until they resemble  
 Lavishly lolling lovers, busy with cunt-moistened  
 Faces. Leave them and go down the plank walk  
 Among the elephant grass (or Norfolk reed) to spy  
 The dead railroad bridge — all rusted iron and  
 Rotting wood, a Canuck Stonehenge, a paean  
 To the decay of Confederation. Look! A gang  
 of crows parliaments the telephone lines. They are  
 Like honourable members nodding stolidly  
 At each other, "ahem"-ing and "amen"-ing about  
 Their ingenious and endless pension plans.  
 The sky is sapphire broken by grey-white shards,

But the ground stinks of dying fruit and leaves,  
 Smelling much like March and April with their vernal  
 Muck. A mosquito attacks me among shadowy,  
 Gold-streaked, man-tall, zebra grass clusters, while I'm  
 Watching bulrushes salute overbearing,  
 Sky-fucking trees such as the *Populus Caroliniana*  
 (or Carolina Poplar), which looks nine-storeys  
 high, at least four-feet thick, and now, where this ink  
 Is smudged, that reckless mosquito lies wrecked.  
 I pass a pond, no fresher than it was three years ago,  
 Unlike the fresh ejaculation of a line.  
 Falling leaves detonate the silence, save for the *fizz*  
 Of the miniature waterfall, almost as quiet  
 As lethal flowers that have no scent. Here is a new  
 Dragonfly, navigating purple-blue among  
 Green-and-gold lily pads and lofty, saw-grass spears.  
 Time is aging, time is aging, and is ageless,  
 While tree limbs rake upward like algebraic formula,  
 Composing a jazz of randomness — just like  
 Our never-finished lines, leaping from direction  
 To direction: a sonnet architecture.  
 Again, now, the reek of decay under a thrusting tree —  
 The scraggly, straggling, bedraggled arches  
 Of a flouncing, hydra-headed tree. The sun mirrors it,  
 Projecting sprays of light, lancing, almost,  
 The obdurate, darkening clouds, as it surrenders  
 To the minor daggers of incensed mosquitoes,  
 Jabbing us like pens jab paper, pricking, pricking,  
 Until blood runs like ink.  
 A gardener in a graveyard, that's a poet,  
 Indulging culture, sucking its nectar,  
 So you suck this poem deep into your skull.

## Bellagio (II)

Above mountain-coloured water,  
the preposterous sky is so on-and-off chilly,  
usually sun-stroked Italia feels  
just like Nuova Scozia,  
that brilliantly gloomy, Latin Hades.

Plunked under olive-shade, grape vines —  
and *lapis-lazuli* grapes overhanging  
a hung-over carafe of yellow-white wine,  
I take ten thousand drags of this plonk  
until my afro is ten thousand tarantuli.

Five years gone, I sat here in Pescalo,  
by this mountain-unscrolling water,  
and scrawled “À Bellagio,”  
while a man screamed at his dog, “Basta!”  
I’s still a black bastard bastardizing English.

There is no freedom outside *Poetry*,  
and its monarchical black ink,  
dictating what’s what and what ain’t.  
What any poet offers be  
ugliness set to music and set free.

Now dusk is sweating light,  
a fervent, fulvous gold.  
The zebra breeze canters warm, then cold.  
Intellectual finesse peels to feeling,  
pure, untutored feeling.

See light diving in slanted salvos, ovals,  
scuffing, buffing, the olive grape leaves.  
Being as blind as a photographer to what ain’t visible,  
how must I express interpretation,  
but as an imagism of feeling?

The sun glances gold — like a blow —  
across this page, descanting  
as it descandies.

Its ostentatious gold oratory  
glints, sets fire to this paper,

Wasting everything to glittering waste.

The day unleafs, its gilt flakes off,  
in leaden, pewter, dismal darkness.  
Plus a shadow-dragging dog barks  
at flapping, fleeing ducks.

The moon overtakes the mountained lake,  
its pulsating richness like oil —  
its flux of dark light,  
while I feel the fluctuation of impulse  
among these five lines of poetry.

Let me order a *negrone*  
(*Campari* plus vermouth plus gin)  
as if the yelping dog  
were a sign from God  
that black is the soundtrack of white.

See how the pouring ivory moon  
is articulate white wine  
among *cassis*.  
Now let’s rhyme *cassis* with *chassis* —  
if every poem be *Invention’s* oasis.

## Bellagio (III)

Now I must say goodbye olive trees,  
goodbye rosemary, goodbye *pasticceria*,  
goodbye *gelateria*, goodbye white-black butterfly  
with the brown stripe, goodbye Villa Serbelloni —  
with crooked doors and craquelured paintings,  
goodbye to that book of Chinese characters  
with its full-colour images of green plants  
or yellow or pink flowers,  
*ciao* to all the extraordinary women,  
and goodbye *Campari*, gin, and vermouth,  
goodbye to *grappa* & *negrone* & *limoncello*,  
goodbye to the blistering roses,  
goodbye to the great books, the greatest books,  
and goodbye to that black scorpion.

## February 1999

The sun is slipping, angular, gold,  
 Behind the black needles of pines,  
 As our train passes the copper-roofed Dorchester Penitentiary,  
 And the mudflats, caked red-brown, ochre, with quarrelsome ice,  
 And, in the fields, all straight and brown,  
 Little, brittle lances of blue-black water,  
 While I am reading of Clinton's acquittal  
 And of limbs hacked off of Chinese civilians  
 On the wrong side of a civil war's machetes —  
 And the sky is still a blue-powdered white  
 And I'll read *The Autobiography of a Cuban Slave*  
 As we pass mounds of crushed cars.

Now the sky is a Turner, burning blue and pink-white —  
 Like the Houses of Parliament,  
 And we come grinding into Moncton, New Brunswick, like a slave coffle.  
 A librarian — Beverly True — told me it's true:  
 In Amherst, they've found the unmarked graves of slaves —  
 Black bodies flung pitilessly into the marshes  
 To decline all identity;  
 Their masters: expert mass murderers.

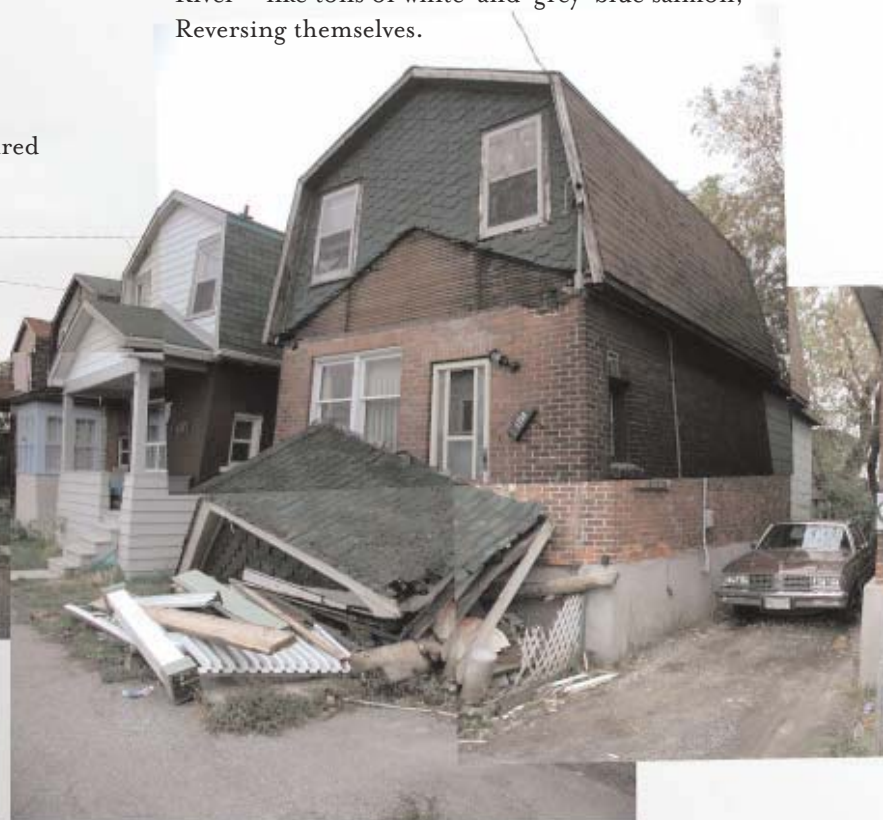
Now, here is Moncton, with dusk looking massive,  
 Its dingy lights streaking filthy water a luciferian orange —  
 Like a series of tarponds, oozing bitterness,  
 Or liquid hearts of darkness, pungent with poison —  
 And an ungenteel cancer settling in,  
 Breaking song into tears and dirtying everything with history.





## La Vérité à Ottawa

First there was a fragment of Weymouth Falls landed  
In Aylmer, when unstable Billy snagged his ass in jail  
And beautiful, unstable Judy had drifted home,  
Thus allowing two fresh-exiled Scotians to arrange  
For an apartment and the \$400 up-front rent  
At 59 Elm Street, its name tapped from a tree,  
In Afro-Arab-Asian-Italian Lowertown, the Coloured  
*Arrondissement* of Ottawa.



And then, later, April

Came thundering-and-lightning in, with snow,  
And surprising rain drapes, cascades of cold wet,  
And sodden chrysanthemums out of nowhere,  
And the shock of purple-and-white crocus daubing  
The southeast slope of Parliament Hill, by the canal,  
And then the surge of sun, lemony, cantankerous, warm,  
But still also sprays and squalls of recalcitrant snow,  
So that the canal swelled and seethed with gobs of ice  
And brimmed, heavy with cast-off cold and weight,  
Pouring through the Rideau Locks and into the Ottawa  
River – like tons of white-and-grey-blue salmon,  
Reversing themselves.

Crossing the Eddy Street Bridge,  
Into drab, bureaucratized Hull, its fat, grey edifices,  
And Tijuana-raucous bars, you'd see, on your left,  
The frothing falls of the E.B. Eddy factory, the clean  
White energy of the water charging into channels  
To electrify turbines and generators, with the Peace  
Tower behind you, in the rear-view mirror, thrusting,  
Marvelously erect despite all the eunuchs droning  
In its bowels.

You'd absorb all this beauty, but also  
A marriage fraying because of your unreconciled  
And unrequited desire, that acidic love that seeped  
Into all the sutures and silences of the marriage  
And corrupted it.

In Ottawa, you were never able  
To forget a one-sided, wasteful, self-hating love,  
A record of cold kisses, unhealthy, and so you  
Tumbled out of love with a body, the Arctic cold  
Axing your lungs, while the barren, spindly trees  
Before the Château Laurier put on stalactites or daggers,  
And you fell between wedding and divorce into  
A warm nest of treasons.

Next came the bitterness  
Of coffee, newspapers, Mulroney's treacherous  
Tories trashing the treasury, the upper-class defecating  
Their taxes on the lower orders – the rest of us. There was  
The skirl of leaves in autumn and the skitter of whores' heels  
In the always summery Byward Market, and the knowledge  
Of weaknesses that remained weaknesses, and, on Albert  
Street, where it lunges down to LeBreton Flats, there was –  
And is – an orange-yellow metal carousel jutting off a stone  
Cliff near the great stony, convent-looking hospital,  
And storms always brooding just above it,  
Shedding either lightning or snow,  
And, also, the molten memory of failure –

Oh God, I was broken,  
Corrupted, by a love that was Druid and lurid and Gothic,  
So befitting Ottawa, city of fits and paralysis and analysis,  
Where nothing could help me or save me from lonesome  
Strutting along Parliament Hill and gutting  
An original – virginal – marriage with aboriginal lust  
For an Afro-Sino Jamaican, fluent in French and English,  
Equally official under the Constitution.



## rob MCLENNAN



Painting by: Juan Carlos Norra

**33 lines, a stolen phrase and a short apology**

"I will do anything to avoid boredom. It is the task of a lifetime."

- Anne Carson, *Short Talks*

**the line that mentions the emptiness of snow**

this is a learning of seasons, the un-avoidability of such. we grow in our boots & learn quickly the basics of mathematics.

we know little. the fullness of the drifts.

**the line that mentions andy weaver**

the reading we did in Vernon, B.C. last summer, reading poems of hanging out drunk w/ Andy, & Andy reading poems abt rob being drunk.

**the line that mentions the rocky mountains**

Edmonton in November, I dont remember anything that isnt snow. I only remember snow.

**the line that mentions \_\_\_\_\_**

its easy to say that \_\_\_\_\_. where \_\_\_\_\_ did \_\_\_\_\_ go. I do not recall \_\_\_\_\_. the ways. the ways

in which \_\_\_\_\_. we all did.



Painting by: Juan Carlos Norra

**the line that mentions the old power plant**  
in this empty pub, I am but one man  
writing outward.

**the line that mentions another prairie**  
the wrong end  
of a too short road. her

red red car.

**the line that mentions the town that wasnt**  
when the rail went down, what started.  
towns being born. where I started,  
a village birthed & how many others

bled dry. Dominionville, Tayside, Athol.  
a radius. lost names, w/ some, not even

a sign or house to show.

**the line that bears repeating now**  
the wrong end  
of a too short road.

a break, there,  
in the middle.

**the line that mentions travel**  
the stretch of a month, tracing the same path.  
repeating. memorizing stations  
& the similarities. the cross

of Canadian rail. a story of betrayal,  
penance & salvation. east heading west. I am

going in the wrong order. I had already  
been saved.

**the line that mentions home**

where I hang my, what. the planet earth.

textbooks from the 1950s w/ my fathers name,  
address moving out. country, continent,

planet, solar system. how lost  
did he get. him or his books. hardly  
any in the house right now.

**the line that mentions tradition**

all narrative is artificial. he knows. a tale told  
in the smoky pub, where the speaker  
decides to begin, & where he ends.

or simply stop. a tickle on the page.

**the line that mentions the sports final**

it goes from a central point, one plain  
against the other.

a cheer, as a roar. a roar as the  
prime reaction.

**the line that mentions the city**

in Calgary, Andy says, this town  
is seriously mall-deficient.

back in Edmonton, the bar is ugly  
& upscale. bad food overpriced.

the staff & clientele are young,  
& attractive despite.

every space has its own age. every block  
its own mall. every street

another highway out of town.

**the line that mentions her fire**

I havent worked on my novel in weeks, the one  
that begins in an apartment fire. the same week,  
I discover, that kath had hers. living

a month in a hotel, thanks  
to the insurance. bits of ash

that still fall out of her books, the ones  
still left.

a scotch arrives, on ice. a foreign rain  
burns down.

**the line that mentions the wild**

the horses are slow to come over the hills.

one might say.

when to steal a mans horse, was as good  
as killing him.

four hours to drive, just to get  
to the water slide. the next motel.

**the line that mentions the strathcona hotel**

history is both knowing, & unknowing. the  
unknowable. a hotel in town where my

favorite pub lives, bar. the hotel remnants  
in Vancouver downtown east, w/

the same name. are  
there others?

a track that Lord Strathcona left  
as he travelled, west. as everyone

said hi.

**the line that mentions my horoscope**

not that I follow. today,  
not to be held to self-pity.

all the young people in this province  
seem to smoke, at least

at the bar & grill.

Jason remarked on it, the price  
of cigarettes, between here

& Ontario, & back to B.C.  
that he should have bought a carton  
in Toronto

when he had the chance.

**the line that mentions the swedish superstore**

I expected more umlauts. a table  
you assemble yourself. chairs made

of a single vowel.

the staff, entirely, blonde. it was good  
to see.

he remarked, that they had  
a full birken

stock. what exactly that means.

**the line that mentions the last time**

the long drive to Banff. slow mountain peaks  
near the foot of these hills. her

hands were miles, away.

**the line that mentions the wind**

warm, down from the peaks. my lips  
still dry w/ the breath.

I have not driven through the rockies in  
two years.

**the line that mentions the convenience store**

the best shawarma in the province. I bought two  
but didnt finish them.

Jason remarked on a jar of guana jelly  
& I thought abt bat droppings.

I think thats guano. another word  
for waste.

so long under shore. the whole time  
derek wasnt home.

**the line that mentions discovery**

the beginning of an empty stage.  
coming apart in stages. left  
& then left.

glasses clink,

& get emptied. the hour neither  
happening, nor so brief. I do not mean

to repeat myself.



**the line that mentions deliberate fires**

from the summer, barns burnt for weeks, to  
the ground. to what the land must  
have been w/out. do

you remember the land. when  
there were only trees.

**the line that mentions cartoon logic**

to compare the end of days  
to a rail line, or a cave. the thin  
pinprick of light, growing bulbous.

this is not a rose, nor is it  
the sun outside. it is Wile E. Coyote

being tricked again, the flashlight  
in the Roadrunners mouth. the painted wall

jet black he thinks he can escape through.

**the line that mentions the cold prairie**

Saskatoon in November, four years ago. a dry  
dry cold. the blood from my broken lips  
half down my chin before I noticed. knew.

**the line that mentions the damage done**

where there was not but a kiss, a near  
& constant threat. two drinks

between, & the touch  
of a hand.

**the line that mentions the distances traveled**

born of a place, & there you stay. to do otherwise  
would be to disappear. not return. to come

to another point, not here, & so remain. to  
a place, to a man.

**the line that mentions the camera eye**

when they found her, she had, what she said.  
nine photographs of God.

**the line that mentions the matter of the one-night stand**

but to live in a moment. a series. desire  
is never spent, it always replenishes. but when

it doesnt. a hook  
that then goes. wont let go.

**the line that mentions her again**

the one-night stand that lasted five days.  
what is the word. industrial turns

against brick. when desire is spent, & she asks  
for her change. the end of the road.

the end of the line. her moving tongue, dart  
through your mouth.

**the line that mentions wine delivery**

& the bottle that came out of nowhere, as  
we sat by the fire. Courtney  
on the telephone, & the last

of my money. an old guitar. Aaron shivered  
in the yard.

**the line that mentions a short apology**

would that this be, what it was,  
instead of this.

zen moustache, helping me see  
what things cant be changed

or can. a phone number.  
her card.

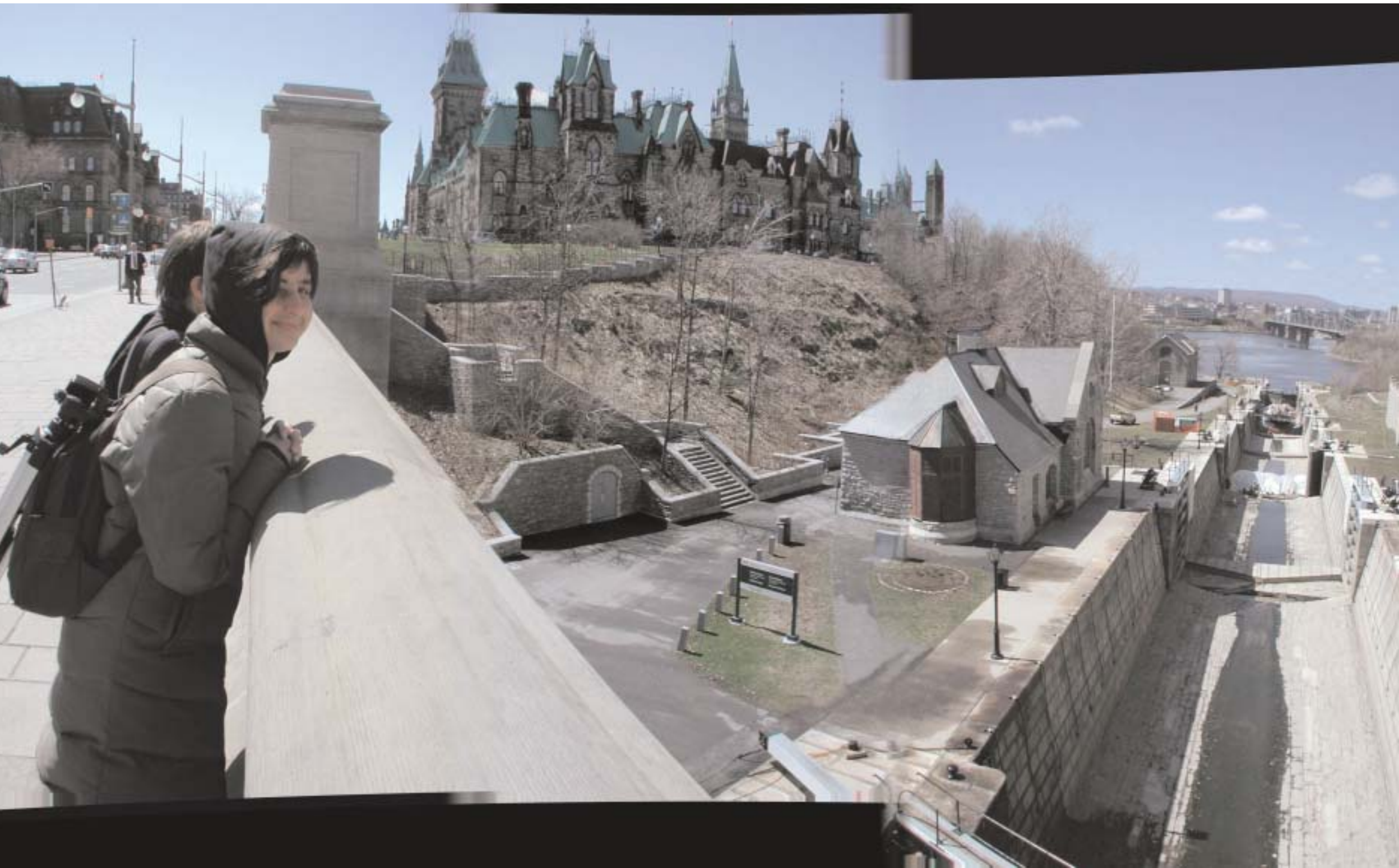
**the line that mentions clouds**

when you see them.

will you.

let them.

pass.



# Sound and Fury: an interview with Max MIDDLE

*This interview was conducted over email from August to November 2004.*

**Max Middle** is an Ottawa based poet, performer, musician and photographer. He is not easily charmed but loves magic. In his spare time, he enjoys swimming, watching snails gallop, eating green vegetables, sleeping and dreaming. Recently, Max has been conducting investigations into sound poetry and improvised music with some very talented collaborators. He is a founding member of the musical and poetry performance experiment, The Max Middle Sound Project, which performed this June as part of the Ottawa International Fringe Festival. In 2004, his chapbook, entitled *A Creation Song*, comprised of one long poem, was published by above/ground press, and a second title is forthcoming. He hopes to soon be able to update his web site with all kinds of audio and video files.

## vacuum

vacu u u um  
          down  
thte.he hall dam if up and  
  visk? vying for vim  
a quip nicked. & clean  
  tiggles shaven  
shaking up the leaves  
  swish of it stretching  
yawning smell of a cat  
  in depredator shell!



**rob mclennan:** How long have you been writing?

**Max Middle:** Wrote from mid-teens to early twenties. Poetry/journalism published in high school publications. Participated in a grade 13 Ottawa high school poetry seminar. Read work on a literary radio show.

Got my wits back about me and started writing again in the last four years, 'seriously' writing for the last year and a half.

**rm:** When I first met you, probably around 1994 or so, you were hanging around Rob Manery and Louis Cabri's N400 series of readings at the Manx Pub in Ottawa. What was it about the writers and writing they were bringing in that attracted you?

**MM:** I attended just one of the N400 readings at the Manx. It was a performance by poet Aaron Williamson. I believe that was '94ish.

By '94, I was well into an extended period of travel, which brought me in and out of Ottawa and kept me distracted from matters relating to writing. I had attended their [Louis and Rob's] readings starting in the spring of '91. At that time, the readings were being held in the old Gallery 101 space on Lisgar St near Bank St. They called them 'The Transparency Machine' because the poets would give an informal lecture using overheads on a transparency machine. That would form the first half of the event. The second half would be comprised of a conventional reading. One of the first 'Transparency Machine' talk/readings I saw at Gallery 101 was given by Jed Rasula. I seem to recall that not all of the readings incorporated a talk. I attended a two reader reading in June '91 given by Jeff Derksen and Deanna Ferguson. I'm not sure if they gave a talk

before reading. By the autumn of '91 or winter of '92, Rob and Louis were holding readings at Arts Court in Ottawa. In that venue, there were readings given by Charles Bernstein and Erin Mouré amongst others. For the readings at Arts Court, there were critical and other texts employed. I recall a Steve McCaffery reading at Gallery 101 given under their auspices around that time again without the transparency machine.

The 'Transparency Machine' readings were an excellent opportunity to learn first hand from some very engaged writers about the writing process. The writers they were bringing in were generally of the sort that was attempting to innovate. They tended to have an association with language poetry. At that time, being a young feller, having to that point limited exposure to innovative poetics, I was fascinated. Here were poets expanding the parameters of what I understood as poetic form and talking about how they were approaching their work to boot!

**rm:** That's interesting. I actually remember being in the audience for the Aaron Williamson reading, which was absolutely amazing. I mean a deaf sound poet? I remember he had to do an hour of vocal exercises at Rob's apartment before he did his performance. Some of Rob's neighbours apparently thought someone was being slowly and horribly strangled.

With the influence of all this writing and poetic happening to you so early, where did you go from there? I mean, I remember you from the audiences in Ottawa, later seeing you in Victoria, B.C., but it wasn't until you were in Edmonton only a couple of years ago that I

**The Transparency Machine, readings were an excellent opportunity to learn first hand from some very engaged writers about the writing process. The writers they were bringing in were generally of the sort that was attempting to innovate.**



even know you were writing. What were you doing in all that time?

**MM:** It was a good stretch of time, lots to cover. Thinking back, I realize I did a lot of stuff! My activities during this time spanned the gamut from studying Linguistics in university to biking about Europe and squatting in London. It was somewhat chaotic but never dull and I'm all the better for having found out about things.

I was enrolled in the English program at the University of Ottawa during the 1991-1992 academic year. Attending Rob and Louis' readings at the same time was a great complement to the studies or perhaps the studies were the complement to the readings.

In the summer of 1992, I started to travel a lot, first in western Canada and then in Europe returning to Ottawa before heading off again. It was during one of those returned periods I heard Lisa Robertson read in Club SAW, January 1994. Besides these 1994 appearances by Williamson and Robertson, I didn't attend a whole bunch of readings in Ottawa until last year.

I lived in Montréal from September 1994 to June 1995. During that period, I attended a few readings mostly part of the series 'Enough Said.' I heard Bill Bissett read as part of that series. I was a Linguistics student at Concordia University during the 1994-1995 academic year.

The Linguistics studies have recently helped inform my approach to doing sound poetry. The studies in phonetics helped sensitize my ear to speech sound. Linguists for the most part are

interested in understanding language as it is spoken. Writing is of distant concern unless you're a semanticist or something. Then of course there are all these intellectual inter-disciplinarians who employ the discipline of Linguistics in their theory. For a lot of linguists, written language as a field of study is almost totally irrelevant.

Between 1990 and 1995, I went to the University of Ottawa off and on, bouncing from program to program: from Sociology to English to Linguistics to Visual Arts. After all the program changes, my academic advisor said, hey, you know you could graduate with a BA General if you'd like. That was in 1995 and I decided to take his advice. I took a bunch more Linguistics courses at the University of Alberta starting in autumn 1999 as part of an Education Diploma in Teaching ESL. After finishing that program, I completed a BA Honors after degree in art history. I had a 'formal studies' block to fill. I chose a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Linguistic morphology course. In retrospect, Linguistics seems to be a consistent thread running through a diverse education.

While I was taking the courses for the Diploma in Education, I took an art history survey course on the history of photography with Colleen Skidmore and was captivated. I'd been making photographs for a long time but didn't know much about the history of the medium. It was the first art history course that I had ever taken. A year later, I'd be a full time art history student. For the academic years, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, I was enrolled full time taking almost entirely art history courses, save for the odd morphology course and such. In the first year, I took a seminar taught by Allan

Antliff entitled 'Anarchism and Art' not knowing what to expect. The first half of the course was based on the proofs for his book since published, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde*. He's since gone on to a position at UVic.

It's one of those confluences you know that changed everything. Antliff suggested the Living Theatre as a subject topic for a paper. I'd never heard of them. The Living Theatre, an anarchist theatre troupe, was founded in New York City in 1947 and still exists today. One of two founders, Julian Beck, died in 1985. Judith Malina, the other founder, is still alive today. With the Living Theatre there is this whole realm of radical thought, thinkers and histories that coalesce: Artaud, Brecht, Wilhelm Reich, Thomas Buber, Paul Goodman. And then another of my enthusiasms is the Situationists but that's another story.

In another seminar course with Allan Antliff, this one 'American Modernism in the '50s, '60s and early '70s,' I wrote about John Cage, also an anarchist. I didn't know much of Cage before writing about him. Reading about him was like a prolonged a-ha moment. I was astonished. The idea of getting the individual ego, taste out of the way of making art and chance methods as the means to do that, allowing synchronistic events to occur and so on. It was like the key that opened all these doors. Cage is sort of like an angelic provider; here are the keys, now go and see what you can find.

During the time in Europe in the early nineties, I had been squatting in London, seeking out

'intentional communities,' educating myself about ecological farming practices, permaculture. I was seeking out similar things in British Columbia. These were decisions I arrived at not based out of a political program, but rather out of curiosity. I had begun to identify as an anarchist around that time, in the broadest terms as anti-authoritarian. I've always found authoritarian leftism, oxymoronic and repugnant. It's not as much of a concern today with the collapse of the Soviet Union and disappearance of Stalinism.

Besides all that stuff mentioned above, I spent time in Korea in 1997 teaching ESL. It was an adventure; I developed a lasting fondness for Korean food. Toured around France and England in 2001 this time in search of art in the museums and churches. In Edmonton, I attended a good number of the Olive Reading Series readings in 2001-2002. I was there on

September 11th, 2001 when Tim Bowling read. As you know they run September to April. I was also there for some of their 2002-2003 readings. Most recently taught ESL in Edmonton. Got tired of the latter, tied things up in Edmonton and came back to Ottawa in early 2003 and have been writing, initiating the Max Middle Sound Project, photographing and otherwise implicating myself in things cultural ever since.

**mm:** When I first even heard about you writing was, I think, when you were living in Edmonton, when I'd see you at the Olive series. Were you writing all of this time and simply not telling anyone? What finally brought you out of your shell?

**My activities during this time spanned the gamut from studying Linguistics in university to biking about Europe and squatting in London. It was somewhat chaotic but never dull and I,m all the better for having found out about things.**

**"For a lot of linguists, written language as a field of study is almost totally irrelevant."**



**MM:** As mentioned in the first answer, there was a long period from the early nineties until around 2000, when I wasn't writing much, if any, poetry. Started making the first tentative steps back to actively writing poems beginning sometime in 2000. It wasn't until spring 2002 that I started to read in the Olive open mic set, though I'd started attending the readings the previous fall.

Up until April 2002, I was immersed in art history studies. When I finished the art history degree, I started researching the history of the Lac Ste Anne pilgrimage. The latter is a Catholic pilgrimage whose pilgrims are overwhelmingly aboriginal. It's one of the biggest aboriginal events on the continent. I spent the five days of the post-peregrination annual event on site, on the lake shore. I stayed with a local Metis family and photographed. The resulting writing and photographs were published in *Legacy: Alberta's Cultural Heritage Magazine* the following winter. These things kept my mind quite occupied. I was also teaching ESL.

To summarize: I was quite busy with stuff, writing some poetry when I could but the poems were fairly sparse. By the time, spring 2002 rolled around, I had enough poetry written and was ready to hit the Olive open mic!

**rm:** What was it like, after writing in solitude for so long, to finally start reading your work in public? Was the aural a consideration of your work before? Was there a shift in the writing because you had started reading it out loud? And what was the reaction?

**MM:** Certainly, I was thinking about the poems as poems with metre, rhythm, assonance, dissonance. When you read new poems in public, you get an intuitive sense for what works and what doesn't. The work has matured since I started reading it during open stages. Certainly, the experience of reading in public helps to make one more aware of the work's weaknesses and strengths. The reaction tended to be very positive and that of course was motivating.

**rm:** Lately, you've been spending a lot of time with the writer and publisher jwcurry. Considering the sound and visual work you've been doing, how has he helped with your writing, not only as a friend, but as a resource?

**MM:** I have learned a lot from curry: about sound poetics, visual poetics, Canadian literary history, small press in Canada, bpNichol, printing, small press publishing. Being able to see some of the works in his collection has been a real privilege. Talking to him and seeing some of the visual poetry in his collection has expanded my understanding of visual poetry. Viewing visual poetry by Shaunt Basmajian, David UU and bpNichol has given me a sense of the different ways in which visual poetry has been and can be approached. The visual sequences in curry's book *Objectionable Perspectives* have been enlightening.

It was a rare and edifying experience to see/hear curry read with Maria Erskine last February as part of the Poetry 101 series. The reading strategies, like reading above the audience on a staircase, reading into water, wrapping himself up in a sheet, which I found theatrical but which curry denied having any theatrical import were highly

inventive and brilliantly executed. It was the first time I heard curry read sound poetry. His method of reading visual poetry, taking a text superficially 'unreadable' and interpreting it in speech and sound is one that yields fascinating results. The essay that he read was highly informative. Dorothy Howard, editor of *Raw Nervz*, sent me a copy of the issue of *Raw Nervz* in which that essay was published.

**rm:** I remember the party in the backyard I share with jwcurry when you first started playing the shovel, but how and when did the Max Middle Sound Project come into being?

**MM:** Well, the shovel was discovered in your backyard that night. I was just looking for a percussion instrument with which to make rhythm. There weren't any instruments intentionally made to be percussive lying about. So I found the shovel and some sticks. The sticks were pieces of kindling as I recall. Thoroughly enjoyed the jam and the party.

The first MediumRAW event had occurred just 10 days earlier on July 9<sup>th</sup>. Me and Mark Adornato co-founded the event series. We'd met in the spring of that year, 2003 and had discussed the ideas that would inform MediumRAW. I had the impression from people at SAW that they were interested in doing something different with the Club SAW space, something besides the punkottawa orthodoxy. Ultimately, we found out that people in the SAW bureaucracy didn't mean what they said about doing something different with the space. In the end SAW wasn't very supportive of our endeavor. It was exorbitantly expensive to put on an independent arts event there, not to mention all the administrative hassles, things like finding a sound technician, things that are taken care of in conventional venues. They said they wouldn't be able to sponsor the event unless we paid the performers CARFAC rates (which are very high!). That meant that without charging

huge amounts at the door or without funding, we wouldn't be able to pay those rates. Finally, something small scale, underground, independent, multi-disciplinary proved to be a non-starter at SAW. It is ironic given that that's why artist run centres were created in the first place (and hopefully why they're still funded — to support local artists doing stuff that's not necessarily going to be immediately received within more 'mainstream' venues). We moved onto Café Nostalgica turning into the Max Middle Sound Project along the way and did a run at the Fringe. We've now performed twice at the Universe City Lounge, a student run venue, in downtown Ottawa.

The Max Middle Sound Project is now comprised of six multi-disciplinary artists, accomplished in music, visual art and literature. These artists met during the MediumRAW events. The series was initiated in order to create a laboratory in which a variety of art forms could be combined in an improvised setting. It was a means for collaboration between artists seeking a format for multi-disciplinary artistic improvisation. MediumRAW environments facilitated the integration of several art forms: music, sound, poetry, sound poetry and performance art into a single performance.

At the first event on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003, an open stage of poetry and music was followed by an extended musical improvisation. MMSP members Marc LeBlanc, Marc Adornato, Mike White and myself were present. I improvised vocals to instrumental music.

A core group of artists coalesced during the MediumRAW events. It is this nucleus that now forms the membership of the MMSP. After the last MediumRAW event in December 2003, I applied to stage a series of performances that would incorporate musical and literary improvisation at the 2004 Ottawa International Fringe Festival. The

application was successful and a series of nightly performances were planned between June 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

As a venue host at the Ottawa International Fringe Festival, the MMSP featured a diverse group of performers. Musical guests included a rock band, a group of classically trained musicians and a jazz band. Improvised music and sound poetry linked the performances thematically. At each performance Middle read poetry and vocalized sound poetry. Music was improvised by the evening's guests. I performed sound poetry with each group of musicians. A strictly musical improvised set was also performed nightly. The six performances at the Ottawa Fringe Festival were a huge success in terms of attendance and in the presentation of a variety of musical and literary art not often seen at Fringe festivals.

Of the six performances, there was only one that did not include music. An experimental literary performance was staged on Tuesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004. The readers were Melanie Little, myself, Peter Norman and Wanda O'Connor. Amongst other investigative reading activities, a found text was read simultaneously at fast, slow and usual speeds.

The final Ottawa Fringe performance was given by current MMSP members, Adornato, LeBlanc, Middle, Sonier and White. Following the Ottawa International Fringe Festival run, Adornato, LeBlanc, Middle and White performed as the Max Middle Sound Project, the featured musical act at the Café Nostalgica in Ottawa on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The entire MMSP membership, Adornator, LeBlanc, Middle, Sonier, White and Wilkinson performed in Ottawa as the featured act at the Universe City Lounge on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004. We're performing this Saturday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the Universe City Lounge.





Print by: Jennifer Kuong

## Max MIDDLE

### b being still

beauty can be found  
 b being still  
 stood outside the gate  
 ages did was too shandy  
 meant much from the high place  
 wants mountain makes tea  
 mould can be lurching  
 ice ovr a little told  
 tells skimming in a float plane  
 slicks picked unsanguineous  
 safe to raise that arm again  
 the one with the pen in it  
 a tattooist decrees left to right  
 countermand stuff of crime  
 graphemes extracted simmering  
 man while manshie d d flew

faced me the reflection floats  
 in here this side of mirror  
 said i heard stood what was stolen  
 poondle basha full trash na go  
 alright i said fistula  
 genria janria chip kelta  
 stiff off the surface stick  
 stooshing mouth off walk  
 smooth schnorkel pipe smoker  
 strokes the shimmering water  
 a face stoking through the gate  
 pillows a sail on a rise futuring

## A Creation Song

Before night absorbs the last shades of day into its cloak  
and feet begin to chatter across a known typography of clocks and brown air,  
the first airy morning of a new universe dawns  
with the mouth of darkness disgorging its pigment on a scintillant cosmos.  
The earliest stroke of daylight smells of chaos; rivulets of sap break the ground.  
And loosed from the marrow of night, an egg adrift chaos is ablaze:  
light separates from dark, sun begins its journey across the sky.

The aether is a door invisible in darkness.  
The hand on the door is first sanguine,  
then it slams scintillant S fits doorways.  
Or, S sense shiitake blam palo alto pall tree lap thud.  
Out of E there, poultry flutter of wings,  
lacking all, all that a flaccid ant eater could.  
Flopsicle easer kicks the keeper's shackles, picks a pal  
eager as straphic, traffic stalled as afferestic,  
analeptic to a papa point of paratchik paparazzi,  
loftitude, a stratospheric let down into a slide of  
laughed a lot when lancelot's allotted lands doubled.  
Hopscotch to take on a chance leashing it to fermentation.  
Alone best left on a pot to boil out the trouble.  
An hour steamed soft tall ships afloat left ticking  
aloud on clouds, salt crumbs and balloons.

Yesterday on the bus, somebody asked what was ready.  
Another person asked what was being read;  
Today they are both asking what are you writing?  
What are you doing? How the fuck are you?  
Taking the grease to chance and finding it in there,  
without station walls or limits or tacked up posters or  
starvation lacking victims or lurking predators without prey.

new snow puffed louder peeled on the purchased affluence of  
powdering a powerful person on the nose on the loose.  
Because a pastime crimps a boiled plant to toughness  
and it's off the fuffle, now that the stink is gone and the best  
of the plant eaten or planted stuffed became the rest,  
flaccid afloat and laughed a lot like a smile in the tackle berries  
with alotta rolla hopscotch taking a chance leasing it to cherries.

A lotta roll around Tony with the Rolex  
made with how much chance heated in a litre  
of went ditched with pieces of hose mixed upside.  
You want to get in but nobody will mind your absence,  
just note that you might get in, but never mind that,  
fade in and isolate the apparatchik learning new dance steps.  
Never mind trancing, the brain is just smelling its chances,  
chucking loads of procPsverbaux into a procession.  
'Cause lotsa rolla gotta letta prole up to the window,  
into swinging pictures before the roll over of 1789.  
Get in with the right crowd and swing a lot to the better letters  
with cut in half pop songs, gotta bell ramp in elle B la  
'cause cut halves don't make right singing mindful soup spoons,  
full of suspicion, just in the happy hemispheric hunt for trip  
and trap and happy flopping Shakers in the shadow of Cathars.  
In that lap, nobody remembered, the other sex, in your quarters,  
at night, Fra Angelico crackle on, patron saint of artists.  
In the monastery the same sex may be mindful of the way you feel  
although they are a ship full of streamers cascading across fields of flowers  
and crowds of flags waving war makers on and on and on.  
Gotta make it across the hunt lotta bella, gotta mind it wisely,  
chucking loads of flags on the way rolling humble in hemisphere,  
alongside hunters and saints going to meet their ends with thunder in the brine,  
back to the same place the blood goes night after night,  
and we say we eat the same way every day, walking, talking streamers  
to my own ship full of streaming, say we can stand without the flags  
and the tears and the on of off is turned on to the point that it's just



out of a lab with lots of chemistry and the roll off of perspirant.  
 Much hope bouncing in a litre of shake a chance too iffy  
 to get in first nobody will mind your absence,  
 just note that you can't get in but never mind that,  
 the blood is the same in the ocean is all round humming to  
 human feelings, plant animal, shelter generating why outers if  
 cuffed to get in with the right crowd and swing a lot to the letter,  
 suave and coiffed, angel bright angel stars, of the hungry ones:  
 wait for the hungry ones, crippled against rage, filling the night,  
 without a sound for the sleepless can drink from naked form;  
 that shelter is ocean is gut plant fibre outer of leaf of Ahab wave awe.  
 Take whirling dolphins and their numbers slacken the how from slavery;  
 at land's sight all the beast and bulrush come chiming through the nose.

Head conscious again, taking shelter off the ocean, the sea obsession:  
 in dwellers by the fire comfort war machines airplanes factories,  
 forcing the man made shackles; waging war airplane factories.  
 Never mind if you can't get in because this is the outer limit of profit chance;  
 was profit was a chance became a profit became a number mimicked nose  
 and smelt a lot like worship or the burning of birch, freedom of worship  
 left a lot to roll around rollers, fiddling with how much chance,  
 freedom from worship like the burning of birch comfort nose.  
 Airplane factories flagging fugitive the social make up of in between.  
 Control tucks Tim in and comfort is all the rest he dreams between the sheets  
 extant.

Abo abo avo above errant exit of F fry.  
 A F fry cans how much chance, how much more hope  
 U O you ought to know you let the cat out to the UFO  
 and the Pluto fakes but that's how it mines the absence,  
 tickles the outer limits of chance for profit,  
 hacks comfort from war airplanes' trance.  
 Tim is now many miles underground in the mine, above,  
 spitting out of the spent dust, the orphaned offspring of chaos emerge.  
 Combustible sputter of phlox, firefly and phizogs turning in the fog:  
 fire in all living things issued from primordial ground being  
 chaos the birth tattoo charting the life cycle of a chastened cosmos.  
 Flares, fizgigs and star needles combing night's abstinent flesh;  
 flames welling the mined fissures; crows cawing for the ghosts of freedom.  
 The folks back home never signed the treaty, never saw the soldiers.

How many beer cans did it take to make an army?  
 Not enough to fit in the cave with J Tipping Wad who shook a fist, wagged a finger,  
 to let you know he never had any stubbled scar tissue needing shelter.  
 Only touched you to see if you're still there.  
 In the dirt above shelter, liberty was never achieved and bargained away.  
 Did someone ask why? and Tim's been down all the while,  
 asking for up drunk, drunk on amour fou, just for that moment  
 when you saw him through the floorboards,  
 splashing through a thousand drunk tanks.  
 Anemone, purer than the clearest sky purring,  
 perennially ready satellite, further than any late 20th century efforts  
 and deaths, who can remember who or why they fed themselves to the cameras or  
 earlier to the 1st world war trenches.  
 Just J being Jake in the nib of now being benign:  
 take what you want because he'll take with him what he needs  
 when he comes up the ladder from yesterday,  
 absconding with his twin brother's blessing.

Plant has gone to factory getting harder, holding fire.  
 A scorpion grows in shade of shiny steel.  
 Heedless, a panther stalks prey down a throttled engine  
 and downtown she finds a helpless clutch of engines quaking.  
 She feeds with a full appetite to static background  
 in a time and place with ladders opened up to a cracked ceiling  
 the stagehand forgot yelling for more rope, gone but promised  
 a salad he longed to scratch the fibre from.  
 Known because under a recorder remorse was found.  
 A mouse remounting desire aloud, unlidged, wrapt green, jungle platter, near  
 end tea colour:  
 the scene thought through with paralinguistic details everything from um and ah to  
 sighs and screams to some interjection, grimace or shuffle.  
 But nobody cared for the loss, nothing written note  
 crowd callouses show little of a knitted late 20th century  
 wrapt green in a shallow grave without a funeral but for up it went, it went with the  
 sputum that it made becuddling its elder brother before he went off again  
 and wagered his stakes to the aether.  
 Built on the all again of legging that made it just plain,  
 played like a game with all the nations waiting in line  
 to emulate an older sister who is everything just released from night,  
 a player in the original act of creation.  
 Riding out on rip tides of enthusiasm,  
 in love with their own hair, nationalism, smelling of urine.

Waking up welcomed to i wasn't in love for the sake of it or the dream or a body or making again or any such thing that could be remembered. Just imaginable downtown with an engine left on combusting a jogger, passing a coiled anaconda on the riverbank, redolence of ardour and assimilation staggers off from the limits of Shakers who intentionally communed, imagining a community with all its members seeking homeostasis, too much water and the sisters and brothers are in search of salt, swimming downtown only to find the streets closed to Liberation Square, demanding paradise and returning without groceries.

In the most extreme case of circus mania an acrobat extracted me, blue tinged, from a fish hook locked deep inside a drained lake in deserted night.

The following day after swimming or jogging not remembering which, i was at home alone.

Downstairs an exiled cricket chirped at perfect intervals.

The morning chaos appears afloat a new dreamt universe, sails are unfurled in darkness and rivulets of sap trill the ground: oil slicks a puddle; a flag is folded and left on the shelf.

An egg adrift the marrow of night is ablaze and hatching, sun begins its journey across the sky.



# Peter NORMAN

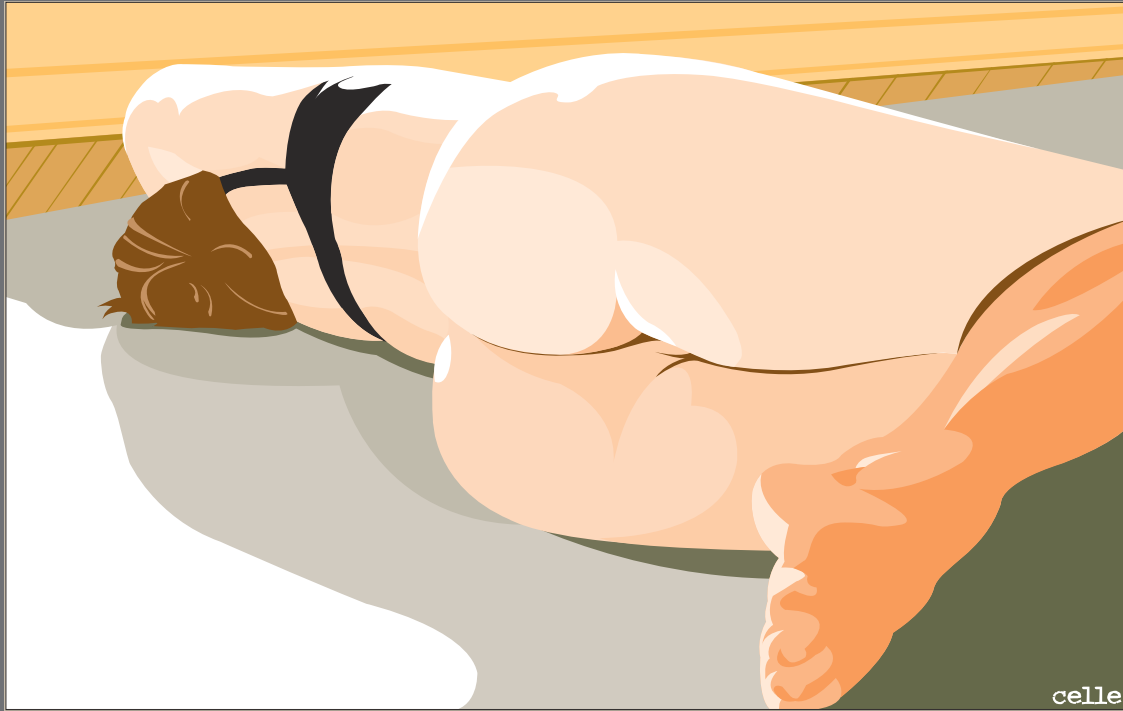
## BOLSHEVIK TENNIS!

Haul down the nets. Erase the painted lines  
That separate the people from the court.  
Blot out every logo: thwart the designs  
Of those who would make profit of the sport.

Let service serve; let ranking be repealed.  
Cast off your bourgeois white; dress up in red.  
Put down the racket you were taught to wield  
And raise the racket of revolt instead.

Dethrone the umpire and his random will—  
His proclamations have been foul indeed!  
Let each man play according to his skill;  
Let each man score according to his need.

And some day yet, we shall be free of score:  
Love will serve love—game, set and evermore.



# Monty REID

## from *The Luskville Reductions*

Birds winch into the sky

the heart on its pulleys

the hinges of winter

all the beautiful machines

stop.

stop.

Does the weather  
move to some kind of resolution?

Not by itself.

Mid-March, and the river-ice undoes itself  
the ideology of water  
lifts it

slow groan in the limbs, deep  
in the run

low-resolution  
faults tromped into the structure

directly under your feet  
although they sound as if they  
were miles away

and they are.



Yes the faculty of language  
is the condition a priori *de tout genre de discourse*

but being alive in the world  
is the condition a priori *de tout faculte de langage.*

Consider: hinged beetles  
yes, hinged beetles

eat the world.

Spackle  
of cherts and quartzite

a granite wall  
for a backyard.

Perhaps they outlive us.

Evidence of heat  
outlives the heat.

If you don't have flesh  
then not having flesh

will have to do.

Does anyone need boxes?

I've got hundreds.  
And can't stand  
the smell of cardboard anymore.

The space  
that was in them  
is still a space somewhere

but these boxes are empty.

I pulled them apart and calmed down  
all those loose flaps  
and flattened them

for the dumpster.

But there is always  
the available volume of the world.

And more boxes.

I couldn't stop

but now  
I've stopped.

What is the suitable distance  
between stopping

and saying  
you have stopped?

Between writing  
and saying you have written?

It's not the fall that kills you.  
Say the falling.

The new roof  
attracts the spring rain.

Stains  
appear again on the ceiling.

This is how the dream-life of rain  
gets interpreted

the outside leaks in  
and someone explains it.

Whoever has to fix  
the roof again just

stops dreaming.

Color of April.  
*Les chutes* roared

falling down the hard stairs  
of the Gatineaus  
overflowing the creek

and flooding the  
only road in  
for a week.

We got to work at home  
for a couple of days  
then it all subsided.

The moon, which  
had been reflected  
in acres of waterbound cornfields

makes do  
with something less

the claim, for instance  
that there never was any reflection

and the claim  
that it was working all the time.

A fine blue mold  
with delicate struts  
and fires

has appeared  
on the partially-squeezed  
lemon you left in the fridge.

To survive  
it doesn't need much

but it will never  
be satisfied with survival.

It wants everything.  
Everything in the fridge

and then some.

What descends  
on all the things  
of my lifetime

and makes them inexhaustible.

Was it just your kiss?

On the seams  
of all the things

just the loneliness  
of your mouth?

What enters?  
What escapes?

Desolate  
countable stars

shine.



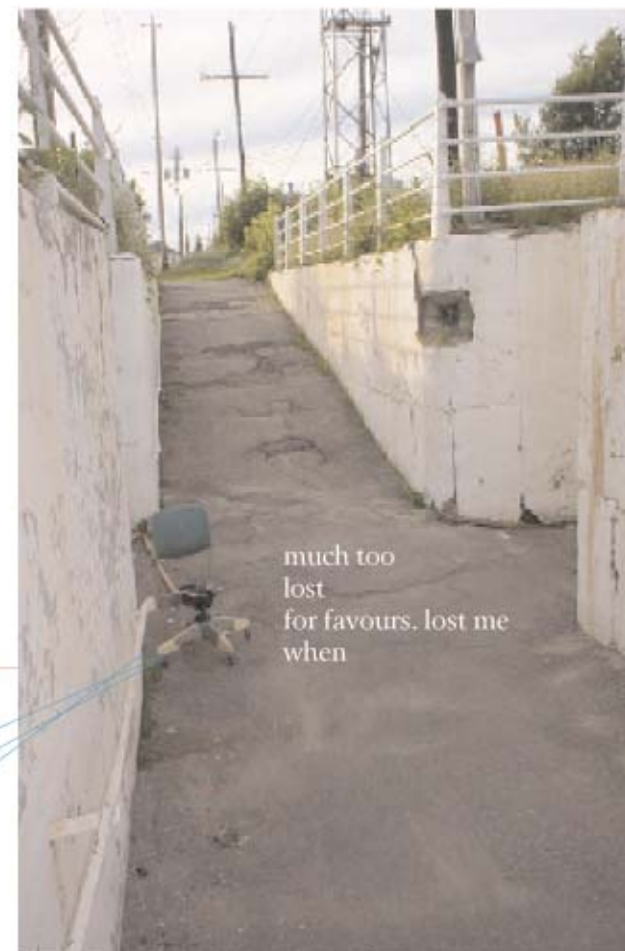
# Chris TURNBULL

pieces taken

(walls of their lights and brackets

an itchy dust in letters  
when they fail. it is prime  
laqueur, spackle in their finish;  
it is descent  
reforming when abducted  
for chisel, pressing, materiel.

o  
r  
e



much too  
lost  
for favours. lost me  
when

warp when  
bend-hazard. yes, like  
that,

& I

under pressure

as for the bouffant hairdos still being practiced

in the beauty shops of the West,

for the questionable masculinity of the ozone hole over Edmonton

and the extent

of known drift: chemicals skied, worn, or transported

in the pressurized containers

of bodies

I can only tell you the label says 'explosive' /

the women must be hot, they take off their blouses /

the blue edge, pursed tense

then rapidly undulating cartoon labia

Pink Floyd-grotesque.

if butterfly wings do storms — what this in Japan?

the PM won't declare a state of emergency — too male, too Liberal.

Toronto's upgraded Terror Threat Level to Yellow/Elevated — fashion police standing by.

II.

as CBC timefiller, Emergency Preparedness Canada warns 'Prepare for Tomorrow Today.'

I try

but tomorrow turns into today and there's no siren. 7:30 in Newfoundland

the fish are finished dinner; Alberta they're just getting hungry. the people are hungry

all the time. Ann-Marie at Tangles 50<sup>th</sup> could tell you

breathing spray all day the back of

your

throat, sticky, feels starved. or Grandma Britton owned the Churchill Beauty Salon

of Saskatoon did Joni Mitchell's mom's hair, six-degreeing us to another's fortune greater

than our immediate-degree women will ever get but where's

a song for her,

perm solution chemicals pressurized

the contained space of the basement salon,

of her lungs

the oxygen tank forty years too late

connected to her nose

not a building's exhaust system.

food the only pleasure now and only the pleasurable food

air supply won't fit the size of her container stupid doctor says

go ahead the open flame, too late, let her keep smoking. one day soon

in Summerland seniors' apartment complex Winnipeg, whatever season

(*under pressure cont'd*)

the perpetual summer sun of artificially lit atriums will explode,

University Crescent

light up the rest of its moon a moment

a new hole tear in the feminine-open Manitoban

sky

blouses blow off along with their shadows

and everyone's nearby head proximity-bouffed.

III.

who or where you are, Alberta's coming for you.

in L.A. Joni prepares to release an

album of prairie-

girl songs she'll dedicate her Little Green, daughter she gave up for adoption

never knew living clouds above Maidstone, Saskatchewan license plate motto come to life/

became a citified model.

in Cold Lake I'm saving money, taking

my license-

test with a new used beat-up pickup truck, thinking my way East

to you, thinking West

at you getting there

slower

than Greyhound Canada eternity (locomotive process

begun in mind not diesel

but getting there.

## Alberta winter gothic

walking in the milk-draped provincial park  
 birch bark wind-peeled in transparent strips reveals  
 more colours than every missing leaf my boots  
 trailblaze deep for your shoes, prints chill your feet

watching silent as disaster surveyors the broken-tree  
 sculptures one like a boat builds itself out to dock  
 with a sky turned bluer steel than snow for eyes  
 in it long enough, shade of lake ice scraped clean

to the drifted-in amphitheatre, breaker ship cutting the park  
 with capacity-audience of bench snowpiles captive til thaw  
 knees me deep in stage. you listen to my memory poem,  
 think how it isn't for you like so much else

while gazing long darkening treelines for creature  
 hunger sensed there. but the French boy who lurks in his poem  
 stealthy as the ghost of a deer heavy as a dreaming bear  
 steps further into the bush. on entering your ears  
 my words and I only ever been yours.

## hero(i)n(e)

he couldn't believe me about herons unnamed  
 in the café coffee table book: one Great Grey

one Great Blue searched each page  
 for labeled ones speculated  
 each long-necked wrong-coloured bird  
 could be the same. what does it mean  
 he can't trust me about those

beautiful birds, can't trust me  
 about beauty, my own he says is there  
 that without label I can't name and disbelieve him

rifle through books for my long neck  
 my beak, needing to know what I'm called —  
 but the books are mirrors and magazines, my  
 GreatGreyGreatBlue eyes aren't there

I fly different. pictures in a book don't do  
 justice, he prefers his herons his heroines  
 more fabulous how close up in person

at Wakaw Lake, one Blue sighting per lifetime  
 is handful of feathers brushed across your palm  
 when you point its trail across the sky, air  
 getting softer confused by point of view effect  
 through its clear lens, breeze

blowing tiny hairs back of your hand  
 so fingers ride enigma wingman, delicate shotgun

## Blake's house: July

weird global warming north Alberta summer so humid  
 everything sticks together, sugar salt parmesan  
 so days have more flavour we get too close

and stuck together down your basement, cool damp  
 skin sings for warm contact and the top sheet,  
 Van Morrison sings about T.B. Sheets dust on the needle

crackles him up from basements of vinyl grooves, iced tea  
 slipstreams slow caffeination, electrifies light through green  
 Venetian slats from white stormclouds skimming top

quiet cottoned in, dragging soft subsonic friction  
 of a bath towel your finegrain cheeks, my latenight legs  
 dripping from the shower drying each other off our

fog mirror reflections candle-bled we share one skin,  
 listen for voices out the door before we run for it grab  
 our mixed-up scattered clothes, our one-skin clothes

and streak

## love in wartime

standing in the nightpark under full moon,  
 over snow packed by the footprints of children  
 light from above and below meet in your face:

you are mostly reflection. outside Iraq  
 the troops are landing. I ask you to make it stop  
 and you do like god in a dream tends to comply

you do, but you've only made me forget.  
 love in wartime is imperfect, can no longer solve all.  
 this love I feel is my rejoice for the world until I realize:

guns are still being loaded in the backs of army trucks  
 while the road bumps with the jolt of tomorrow's recoil  
 in parallel time. startled by the sound I slip on ice,

grab for the hand that was almost there.



## empathy in the age of television

statistic-zeros    mouth

the collective scream  
of worldwide dyers and grievers,  
we strain to hear or shut

rake

muscle fibres and sinews back  
to collective-unconscious past,  
caveman-immediate recognitions

and then

no escape from feeling the sound,  
nerves exposed and ended, frayed /

sound like salt on a wound,  
salt on a slug    the meaty heart,  
the heart ripped out to air  
by the opening-wide stretch  
and teeth-rend,  
doubt caught in the gnashing.

we cannot “grasp the concept”  
(as it’s said of all that death) but

when it all screams together  
surrounding us,

the round world curves  
into a mouth bloody with screams /  
secret tremors jitter out from zeros  
(both statistic and ground), and ripple

to every living man, travel spines  
to ring each vertebrae one-by-one  
up the column

until the heart rattles painful,  
(*empathy in the age of television cont’d*)

a rung bell,  
funereal,

innately understanding /  
nearly killing itself to feel

## outside the National Gallery 12/01

because we look through your tinted sunroof  
the sky turns around itself clouds inside-  
out their shadows surface

sky brown-green  
colour of tornadoes :wind in vertical flags  
sounds drama classroom thunder. we climb  
the tank

embrace stillness silent storm  
descending dark, lowering readymade thunder —  
silver-spined cathedral / stone buildings / concrete  
wind, your black coat against it all solid  
unmoving me hanging on molds you an anchor  
this boat above roiling sea below pavement  
sky flagpoles and flags: masts and sails: cars  
float by —

II  
your black coat against it all solid unmoving  
:carves you statue shapes me sculptor / tank  
a headstone, masts gate sentinels (cathedral doors  
St. Peter waiting) / storm-sky hell or limbo / wind  
urging decision

(afterall for us to make

III  
your  
black wool coat against it all solid you the one  
unmoving in dreamscape, shifting with lava  
cloudfloe in wind / cathedral spires erupting through  
their silver / window fissures / pavement: techtonic,  
cooled sky / this country the island spread out from it /  
flagpoles: tallships buried (evidence: water once) /  
sky billows smoke and ash not ready (yet) to rain  
but rising pressure felt in ears / pounded out by churchbells  
ringing six o' clock / time forms real /  
bells ring us back to real /

IV  
we drive away  
your red car you your black coat against it all  
solid only real thing kept you real / holding on you  
kept me corporeal kept the world from splitting up  
into storm / ocean / heaven / hell /  
cemetery / volcano / apocalypse  
(*outside the National Gallery cont'd*)

peaceful, we, against it all

on a tank  
our cannon pointed  
all potential targets :silent open mouth  
waiting for the kiss

that later  
(in your new apartment)  
won't go off

[last second sensing  
danger (a cannon could fire any moment,  
could explode)].



Photograph by: Don Monet

## framing Riopelle

two weeks before he died, one  
week before you were dead to me  
Madame's giant Riopelle lay  
on the floor of Market Gallery,  
black splotches like the close-up  
of a gnat landing pad.  
I helped you frame it,

held down corners  
and it was you holding me down  
through my own hands. I was a flea  
on the painting of your life,  
an unwanted fly on your wall.  
somehow I think we killed him,

that he couldn't breathe behind  
all that museum glass we cased him in —  
I couldn't breathe there either.  
glossproof detours the welcome glare,  
blinds out part of the total picture,

plasticizes the natural scene.  
lets the specimen fly away  
from a cage of woven light  
dripping ink that turns  
to shadow on contact.

## nineteen degrees of away

alive in what happened after,  
 what came before — now gone  
 missing — hippocampus unanchored  
 the memory set adrift, the  
 stubborn remembering — brain matter  
 that housed it, burnt down — selective  
 selection unmade — songthreads untied,

let fall into a room only quiet still  
 in my head: top of the stairs, and straight  
 you picked up and carried me  
 cross another bride's threshold,  
 unthresholded by holding me — white petals  
 from her years-ago bouquet, her  
 gathered bunch of longstemmed years

drip out of brittle air, land under  
 your feet going black — looming faces  
 of the wedding party fade back  
 each step — misplaced eyeless smiles  
 don't recognize a wrong daughter  
 cherished in your eyes. am I

wearing her body now for you — is she  
 stretched over me like new skin  
 on a drum of heart heard  
 through yours, mine amplified —  
 who do you see in my face  
 when you want me, her hands  
 from my arms holding your neck  
 only not to fall, knowing I shouldn't trust

but I do, and on your wedding bed  
 you *lay me down to*  
 like the first man, the first woman  
 but she's Eve — stoned prophet  
 wrote me in a wrong chapter.  
 the verse of your heart drowns  
 mine, speaks louder — not prayer  
 but bare hymn, breaking bleak  
 on the octaves — unholy music,  
 untruth by notes — a backwards  
 hallelujah — but when I sit up,

before instant distance almost as far  
 as now, having left the country  
 the naked look in your eyes  
 feels honest, true, holy,  
 impossible how — did you see  
 what I wanted and couldn't

not want for that fraction, *right*  
 and *wrong* digress — two energies mingle  
 on a fleetingly anonymous bed  
 trying to draw close the bodies  
 they belong to, action at a distance

then clearer than ever,  
 winter sky when the cold hits  
 I move away from you, I move away  
 from the bed the house nights this night  
 from days today weeks this one months  
 years cities soluble provinces an ocean of  
 countryside

to the general beyond-your-life,  
 universe of space and headspace — to  
 the zooming-out limit of light  
 where the shutter-eye of a god  
 imagined as a girl, spying on me all times  
 blinks final and looks away.  
 if nothing else you taught me

what I thought of as god is my conscience,  
 the only angels are snow.



## Ewan WHYTE

## Catullus 2

Sparrow, my Lesbia's pet  
 that she holds between her breasts  
 and lets flutter in her hands  
 and on her head  
 laughing as he chirps  
 coming to her again and again,  
 she teases him with her fingertips  
 earning stinging pecks to her delight.  
 I wish I could dampen my desire  
 of her by playing with you, little sparrow.  
 I would dream of her naked smell  
 through your pecks to quench my miseries.

## Catullus 3

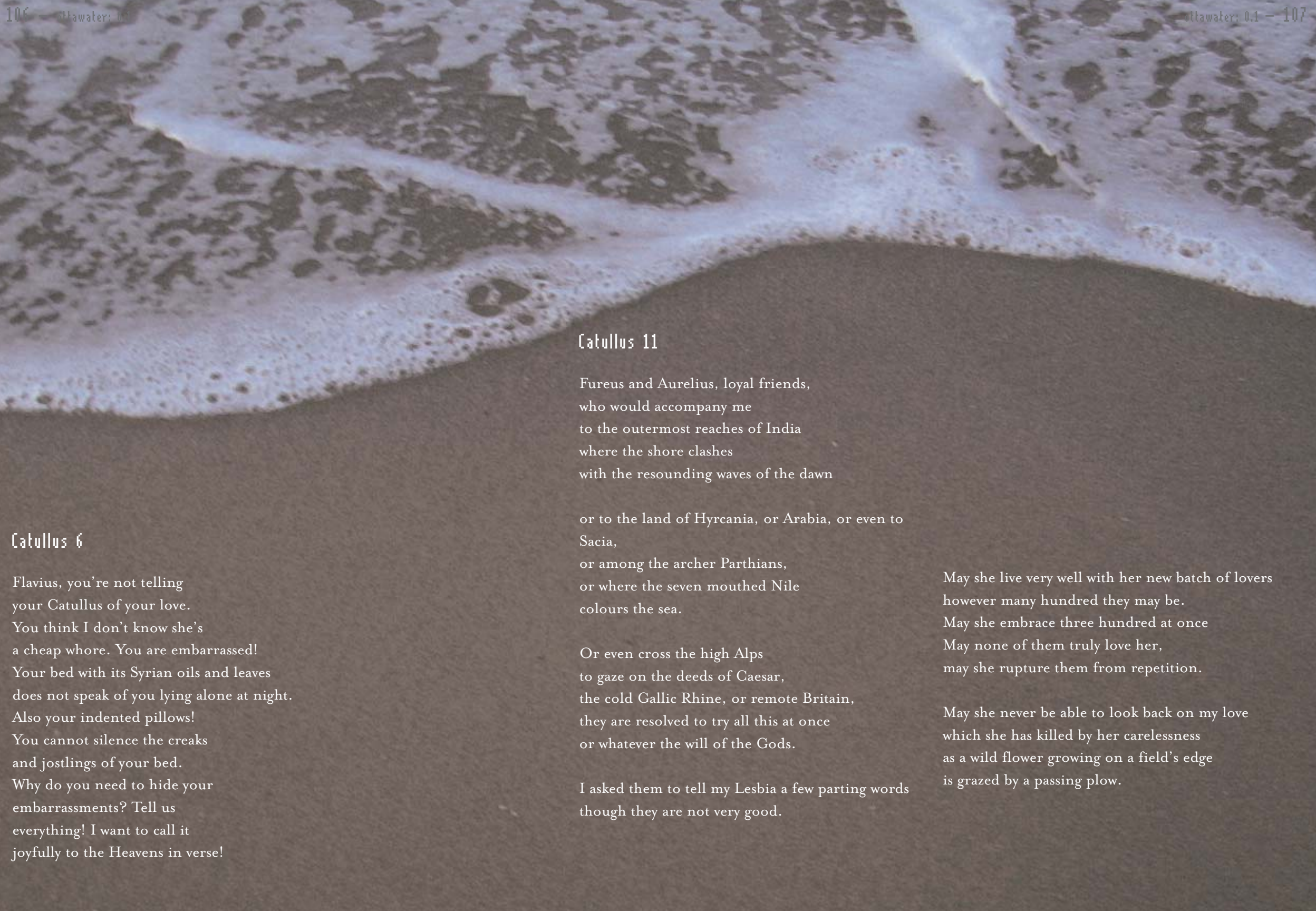
O Venus and longing Sorrow  
 my Lesbia's sparrow is dead!  
 He was her delight.  
 Tears are wetting her cheeks  
 for she loved him more than  
 her eyes, for her he was  
 sweeter than honey.  
 He thought she was his mother  
 hopping on her head  
 playing with her hair;  
 now he has passed  
 to the dark shadows  
 where there is no return.  
 Orcus destroyer of all beauty  
 has stolen from me my beautiful  
 sparrow and now my Lesbia's eyes  
 are swollen red with tears.

## Catullus 25

Thallus, you nasty little sodomite,  
 you're softer than rabbits fur, softer than goose  
 marrow  
 or the gentle flesh of earlobes,  
 you're softer than an old man's flopping penis  
 and the spider webs growing there.  
 Thallus, you're greedier than the wind in a fierce  
 storm making off with whatever's not nailed down.  
 Give me back my coat, my Saetaban napkin,  
 and my Thynian tablets that you cart around  
 saying they are your family heirlooms,  
 or else I will thrash your grasping hands  
 and your fat little ass 'till you twist and turn  
 like a small boat caught  
 in my great storm on the open sea.

## Catullus 33

Vibennius, most grasping of bath house thieves,  
 stealing even the clothes of the unfortunate.  
 Even your son has inherited your grasping instinct,  
 but  
 he clutches only with his buttocks.  
 Both of you ought to go to hell  
 or at least into exile,  
 for the people now know what you are up to  
 and your son is so ugly  
 he can't even sell his hairy ass for a meal.



### Catullus 6

Flavius, you're not telling  
your Catullus of your love.  
You think I don't know she's  
a cheap whore. You are embarrassed!  
Your bed with its Syrian oils and leaves  
does not speak of you lying alone at night.  
Also your indented pillows!  
You cannot silence the creaks  
and jostlings of your bed.  
Why do you need to hide your  
embarrassments? Tell us  
everything! I want to call it  
joyfully to the Heavens in verse!

### Catullus 11

Fureus and Aurelius, loyal friends,  
who would accompany me  
to the outermost reaches of India  
where the shore clashes  
with the resounding waves of the dawn

or to the land of Hyrcania, or Arabia, or even to  
Sacia,  
or among the archer Parthians,  
or where the seven mouthed Nile  
colours the sea.

Or even cross the high Alps  
to gaze on the deeds of Caesar,  
the cold Gallic Rhine, or remote Britain,  
they are resolved to try all this at once  
or whatever the will of the Gods.

I asked them to tell my Lesbia a few parting words  
though they are not very good.

May she live very well with her new batch of lovers  
however many hundred they may be.  
May she embrace three hundred at once  
May none of them truly love her,  
may she rupture them from repetition.

May she never be able to look back on my love  
which she has killed by her carelessness  
as a wild flower growing on a field's edge  
is grazed by a passing plow.



## Catullus 13

Fabullius my dear friend in a short time  
 you will feast with me in my own house  
 if the gods will allow it. But you will  
 have to bring the feast and the wine  
 and the beautiful girls and the laughter  
 and wit that is brought by their presence.  
 My feast depends on this since  
 the purse where I used to keep my coins  
 is now home of a spider, but  
 at your feast I will present you  
 with a lotion from my Lesbia  
 which was given her by a priestess of Venus.  
 When you smell it Fabullius,  
 you will wish to the gods you were a giant nose.

## Catullus 69

How can you be so surprised  
 no woman will embrace you Rufus;  
 even when you tempt their virtue  
 with rare gifts and beautiful clothes,  
 even when you give them valuable stones  
 they shrink from your naked embrace.  
 The reason is that you smell like a goat,  
 And when you lift your arms  
 you smell like the whole herd.  
 But you are so used to it  
 you can no longer smell it.  
 So get rid of your beast  
 and stop asking why  
 the women of Rome  
 have such high virtue.

## Catullus 101

I have come across many countries  
 and across the sea,  
 carrying my sorrow to your grave,  
 my brother.  
 My words are too late and fall  
 unanswered before your silent dust.  
 I offer you now the ancient  
 gift rites of the dead wet with my tears.  
 Hail forever my brother, and farewell.

## Catullus 97

I almost can't tell if it makes any difference  
 greeting Aemilius from the front or behind.  
 The smell is so awful. Perhaps his ass is less hideous  
 because it has no teeth. They're a foot long,  
 his gums are rotting, and his lips are like a donkey's  
 cunt  
 as they part on a hot day while she is taking a piss.  
 He says he fucks the girls. He thinks he's charming.  
 He is so dumb he can't even walk a miller's donkey  
 around a grinding wheel.  
 If there's a woman anywhere who would touch him,  
 she'd have no problem licking the diseased ass  
 of an old hangman as he waits between jobs.

Fruitfly Geographic, Stephen Brockwell  
2004, ECW Press  
reviewed by Tim Conley

Ezra Pound's parable about the naturalist Louis Agassiz is always worth repeating. According to Pound, poets can learn much by considering how Agassiz dealt with a post-graduate student whom he instructed to describe a small sunfish. The student first submits a taxonomic summary written in language and terms "used to conceal the common sunfish from vulgar knowledge." Rejecting this, Agassiz repeats: describe the fish. The student puts together an essay, but the unimpressed Agassiz tells him to look at the fish. "At the end of three weeks the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it." It is hard to know where our pity is most deserved — with the student, with Agassiz, or perhaps with the sunfish.

The common fruitfly may be called *Drosophila* on formal occasions, but knowing that does not mean that one knows anything about that fly, or the fly that will quickly succeed it, or the next, or the next. The pace at which they reproduce is what makes them ideal for studies of evolution (Agassiz took an archly skeptical attitude towards Darwin). It is a little dizzying to consider that more generations of fruitflies have been studied for mutations and adaptations than there have been generations of homo sapiens. It also goes a long way to explain why Stephen Brockwell, whose previous book eyed the trajectories of comets and tasted geometries, should take an interest in these little creatures which seem to spring to life from uneaten fruits. The "generations of possible geographies" serve as theme to his new collection of poetry, which moves from saying goodbye to fathers to wondering about the futures of daughters.

Has Brockwell learned the lesson of Agassiz? *Cometology* (2001) revealed Brockwell the geometer,

sensuous lover of forms (however abstract or mathematical the forms may seem); Brockwell the entomologist seems a more dubious proposition. The former's pleasures in the shape and shaping of ideas approach giddiness — joyriding along the Möbius Strip: "O Gétan, I ruin am: / man, I urinate. Go. / You return, upside down, / underneath, facing the same way" — but the ideas are always given their due; the ideas inspire the pleasure and shape the poetry. The latter blocks his own microscope, appears in good profile in each slide photograph. Consider how Brockwell addresses "Weeds":

*Bees love you; they too  
abandon  
nothing. Under the eaves  
they build their hives.*

*In the sun-baked air  
outside the air-conditioned car,  
your flowers provide them  
pollen grains to feed on.*

The rhyme scheme gives a kind of fragrance to the disjunctions presented here. The weeds become integrated, a part of the ecosphere both providing and provisional. But the weeds do not themselves signify: that is, the weeds only become significant, have significance thrust upon 'em, by the gaze of the occasional verse narrator, the benign lyric. Brockwell's clarity comes with a pretty inflexible subjectivity in the driver's seat (of, one might press on, "the air-conditioned car," safely sealed off from the natural world in which he hopes to catch glimpses of his own reflection). Poems like this represent a very brief excursion from the self; as

they often end with a return to the self, it is not difficult to see that, in these excursions, the interest in the natural world "outside" is all too often a happy pretext for self-examination. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but it does make for spotty field research. A poem called "Monique" concludes with the accent not on her lost history but on pity for those who briefly wonder about her: "Where under the earth her mother lies / we have little hope of knowing." The city "Montreal" is haiku'd to close at "my bags," the narrator's affirmation of his own visitor status. Subjects are only ostensible, quickly filed away.

The sunfish is only described insofar as it affects — perhaps, though this is not explored very far, effects — the scribe. "The ideal scribe," writes Brockwell, "has no understanding / of the contents of a message." This notion prompts an anecdote worth analyzing:

*It is said the king's trusted scribe Nasul  
transcribed his own death sentence.  
Loyal in matters of the text,  
beautiful, naVve Nasul  
seduced the king's  
daughter in her royal chambers.*

What he did in the other chambers of the palace (this sentence uttered with Groucho aplomb) we'll never know. The scribe does not know himself, never mind the contents of the message — if, indeed, they are separate. "The History of Scribes" is, I think, somewhat tragic for Brockwell; but from another point of view, the words "beautiful, naVve" seem like flattering code for "vain, ignorant" and Nasul just another hollow man, inspiration for hollow verse.

It is strange to say that Brockwell is most engrossing when he thinks about thinking. His sunfish does not decompose because there is no real sunfish — no fruitflies but the ideas of fruitflies — within his poetry. "Three Deaths of Hippasus of Metapontum," for example, is a conjecture on the apocryphal story about the student of Pythagoras who vexed his master with the suggestion of irrational numbers. Here is elegance:

*To think it was one thing,  
to say it, another; you could have breathed  
for years  
thinking it.*

According to one account, Hippasus was drowned for his insubordinate square roots. Where Nasul is a case of nullity, a voicing without self-consciousness about a lack of self-consciousness, Hippasus is Brockwell's deeper subject, studied more carefully (in every sense of the word). Here the student measures the entire being of the sunfish: "No fish perceive / their ecstasy" and yet, being ecstatic (literally, outside of themselves), who needs mere perceptions?

Brockwell ends "Dining in Eden" with a too-well-turned phrase which encapsulates both the conflicts and weaknesses of *Fruitfly Geographic*, as well as the admirable volition behind it: "The tongue hungers / more than it longs to name." The sequence here betrays the attempt — "name" wins the day at the end — and Brockwell's precise, sometimes illuminating taxonomies represent a poetic sensibility ready to do no more than name hungers other than its own.



*Wild Clover Honey and the Beehive*, Stephen Brockwell and Peter Norman  
2004, The Rideau Review Press  
reviewed by Shane Rhodes

It is rumored that, early in his poetic career, Ezra Pound spent a year writing sonnets. It is also reported that at the end of this year of metered glory, he threw all of his sonnets away. There is something enigmatic and important to Pound's gesture: one, he realized the importance of the poetic form and, perhaps, the discipline and attention it teaches; two, he realized that either he was no sonneteer or that the time of the sonnet had passed and that saving his creations would have only been necrophilia.

This isn't to say that we should base our understanding of the current context of the sonnet on Pound, but to forward the point that when writers (especially poets) talk of craft, quite often they think of sonnets. No other form since the sonnet quite captures what is meant by creativity within restraint. In a way, the sonnet is the Sit. Com. of poetic forms — a certain amount has to happen in 14 lines, there has to be a twist (preferably between lines 8 and 9), there has to be wit and rhyme and, quite often, it can work well within a larger narrative structure. In this present time of free verse, experimental verse and lyric, most writers have been tempted to play the occasional sonneteer — either to explore the form or to use the form to rail against it. And most of us have come to our senses and either tied our sonnets in a bundle and placed them in the attic to gather dust or pushed them to the hidden corners of our hard drives.

And so, what to make of a *Wild Clover Honey and the Beehive*, a chapbook of sonnets by Stephen Brockwell and Peter Norman? First, a comment on the book itself.

I think the chapbook form is perfect for this collection of sonnets. The sonnet is and can be a monotonous form and one that can, once the

number of them gets into the double digits, begin to read like a personal essay. [Having studied Shakespeare's sonnets over the years, I feel I have the right to say that the man wrote far too many and any respectable editor would have whittled them down to fifty. The fact that the sonnet survived Shakespeare is a miracle.] But Brockwell and Norman have restrained themselves to 14 poems each (notice the importance of that number) for a total of 28. Another comment on the book: the paper is fine as is the layout of the text; however, I wish they had chosen to stitch the spine rather than staple it. Stitching a chapbook of this size is quite easy and improves the look and durability considerably. I hate seeing such great paper wrecked by staples.

This is a book about writing and about poetic form ("We need to cultivate uncertainties / of organic form if we hope to be fed." says Brockwell in his first entry, followed by "From is most formal at its most organic" by Norman) and, as such, has a limited audience of appeal; it is a bit like dentists arguing (though with flowery vocabularies) over extraction techniques. Although the writers try to torque the style and form a bit to its modern context, this is also the sonnet of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and not that of Donne and Milton who broke out of the *rigor amores* in which the sonnet had been.

Being a bit of a sonnet lover and a hater, I both liked and disliked this book concurrently — which, I think, is the book's goal and success. The book showcases through its many samples both the versatility of the sonnet form and the occasional doldrums of content compelled by numbers. Quite often, reading the book, you get the feeling that it wouldn't mind tearing itself in two and throwing itself, Pound-like, away. Yet, at the same time, the book does work and can be a great read —

especially in its first half where we witness a well tuned argumentative structure and the interplay of intertwined styles between Norman's enthusiastic, yet somehow metrically contained, romps and Brockwell's more meditative (even when enthusiastic) ambles:

#### A Plea for Anarchy

I've had enough of metaphors of youth!  
Give me the cormorant's view of the sky,  
the toad's view of the forest canopy.

In boundary and margin find the truth  
of the sonnet's centering of the mouth.  
We broke the ladder rungs, fell from the tree,  
drunk on fermented fruit, in ecstasy,  
with fallen apples and a broken tooth.

#### Sure, Be Marginal!

In with the frog's-eye view of swamp, and out  
With egocentric peopledome? Okay,  
Give voice to green and croaky things; go play  
Your interspecial tune, although I doubt  
Your listeners speak Reptilian too. Without  
The mouth (decentralized) and its array  
Of (busted) teeth, and tongue, what would you say?  
Yes, fall from trees, but please — be sure to shout.  
Yet, because much of the book is about writing, it does become less surprising and less energetic as the poems venture beyond the staple mark of mid-way. The argumentative structures and metaphors of chaos and control, cultivated vs. wild, are expected and repeated. However, there are occasional hurrahs as the authors throw in the odd haiku.

The poems are at their best when writing about sex. Here the form works well to contain and to enhance the teenaged machismo of both writers:

#### Sex and the Sonnet

Human minds bear agonies that sonnets  
can't contain. Better for the silken bag  
to carry panties than a sodden rag.  
These cherry lips, these pretty epithets,  
these lines, these petty jewels on coronets!  
How can we embrace this gift of the wag  
whose feigned fidelity pleads for a shag,  
who, when he sings of love, dreams of fishnets?

#### Sex in the Sonnet

Sick of pretty? Hell, fuck that shit, let's fuck  
Pump to the meter of pulsating head,  
Writhe, grind rumps into fecund barnyard muck.  
My muse talks dirty, and she's wild in bed.  
Too tawdry? Maybe then the sinuous  
Somnundulations of the belly dance  
Will mesmerize. The sonnet sensuous  
Rustles as smooth as silken underpants.

As a collaborative effort, though, this books is a good example. The two writer's maintain their distinct styles and voices which come through even within the constraint of the sonnet form. As well, the craft of the poems is impressive; many of the sonnets come off sounding unencumbered by the imposed rhyme scheme and rhythmic pattern, and the writer's both work well to not let the poetic form control them. They often make the sonnet look easy; which is an accomplishment given the scarcity of pentameter these days.

"To save or to throw away?," — that was Pound's question. I am glad these sonnets were saved from the dust bin. By the end of the book, and as you open your mouth to speak again, you may find yourself searching around for the appropriate rhyme.

# Stephen Brockwell

## Death of the Postmoderns

in their car to drive  
 I40 in fourth gear  
 to turn on the tube to watch a ball  
 game to have a steak with butter  
 fried to copulate with a very  
 unattractive member  
 of the same sex  
 to accept a beating in a park  
 to thank the assailant for it  
 with the kind of eloquence  
 Voltaire would have been  
 embarrassed by  
 to read Edgar Rice Burroughs  
 but not Tarzan  
 to serve man  
 to surf the  
 webbed feet  
 in the warm, calm waters  
 of Clearwater, Florida.

## A Socratic Communication Problem of the Twenty Second Century

I can't remember  
 the word for  
 what I,m doing  
 scratching  
 the surface  
 of whatever  
 it is you call  
 this  
 with the tip  
 of this thing  
 in my hand  
 that leaks  
 blue  
 it reminds me  
 very much of a small  
 what is that called  
 again anyhow  
 those small things  
 on a shelf  
 with so much  
 of whatever  
 this is  
 in them

## Bill McGillivray's Trophy Deer

People who live in the city (like you)  
 don't have a clue what life's about because  
 death scares them to death. Ha! Squeamish to squash  
 a spider on your daughter's pillow, I'd bet.  
 Where do the T-bones on the bar-b come from?  
 A butcher saws them from a hanging carcass.  
 That sounds gross to you? Well, I guess it would  
 if your hands were as soft as the feathers  
 on a swan's ass. When we're done with all this,  
 I'll take you out to the bush and we can hunt.  
 O, come on, now. It,s not that bad. You wanted  
 honesty. I'd say that's what I'm giving.  
 Like I said before~I think I said it~  
 people don,t want to hear the truth. They want  
 to hear comforting words. Back to my trophy.  
 When my brother was up in Ste Agathe  
 back about ,68, I'd have to say,  
 we stayed at my uncle's hunting cabin  
 one weekend in the spring. My older brother  
 was a tough chap, he loved to rough it out there  
 with the geese, loons, moose, and bears. Not that we  
 saw a bear that trip. But we weren't always  
 too smart with provisions. A half-cooked burger  
 is as good for flushing bear out of the woods  
 as a case of 50 for a pack of teens.  
 But that,s another story. 5 AM  
 my brother rolled out of his sleeping bag  
 and kicked me in the ribs to get me up.  
 He hated sleep as much as I loved it.  
 At the time I think I had a Remington  
 .22. He had a new .303.

We hiked for about half an hour up stream  
 from Lac Ouareau and found a patch of spruce  
 to lay low in. A doe stepped down the hill.  
 Her ears were perked but she didn,t spy us.  
 I was frozen in my boots. There was no way  
 I was going to shoot it. A .22  
 would never have brought her down too easy  
 anyway. It was a good thing my brother  
 had the guts. He shot her good in the neck  
 and she leaped her last few hundred yards.  
 I was quaking in my boots and trying  
 not to cry like a baby. He carried her  
 back to the cabin while I trailed behind,  
 neither of us saying a word for an hour.  
 He lifted her up into the truck bed  
 and drove us home. It was maybe nine.  
 We forgot to eat. We forgot to pee.  
 I was half surprised we made it home. Our dad  
 beamed like the father of a newborn son  
 when we pulled up in the driveway to the barn.  
 I didn't have the courage not to watch  
 them dress it. So it was my dad,s trophy  
 for fifteen years until he passed away.  
 My poor brother died of colon cancer  
 when he was thirty three. By rights it was his.  
 It passed to me. I wasn't going to sell it  
 or throw it in the trash and let it rot.

tengo sed, Shane Rhodes  
 2004, greenboathouse books, 38 pages  
 isbn 1-894744-17-9  
 reviewed by rob mclemman

Only in love is loss made up.  
 Only in religion do we ignore it.  
 — Unas Historias, *tengo sed*

An absolutely lovely chapbook produced by Jason Dewinetz' greenboathouse books is Shane Rhodes' thirty-eight page *tengo sed*, a collection of seventeen poems written while the author lived a year in Mexico. There is a fine tradition of Canadian writers in Mexico (but certainly not as many as have made pilgrimages to Greece), with George Bowering's *Sitting in Mexico* (published as *IMAGO* #12, 1969), written after two summers spent there in 1964 and 1965, to William Hawkins, who went south with a Canada Council grant (when tequila was only eight cents a shot), to produce a number of the poems in his collection *The Madman's War* (published by SAW Gallery in 1974), and then of course, Malcolm Lowry (who was technically an American, but who's counting).

Originally from the west, Shane Rhodes was one of the original editors of *QWERTY* magazine (along with Steve McOrmond, Sue Sinclair, Andy Weaver, Paul Dechene, Darryl Whettler and Eric Hill) during the time he was schooling at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, eventually moving back to Calgary, where he was an editor for *filling Station* magazine. It was some time after that, after publishing his first collection, *The Wireless Room* (2000), the first poetry collection that NeWest had published in years, that he went down to Mexico. Around the time of his second collection, *Holding Pattern* (2002), he had returned to Canada, and very soon afterward moved to Ottawa, where he currently lives in the Capital's Little Italy.

As Rhodes' writes in the acknowledgments of *tengo sed*:

Why travel? It is more than a question on a form from Immigration, but can I realistically answer it while sitting down? Perhaps it's for the stories we tell upon our return so that we can sit (as Odysseus in the court of Alcinous) recounting our adventures? Or is it to replace the boredom Pascal notes of sitting quietly in an empty room with the boredom of sitting quietly in an empty bus? Perhaps, in the end, it becomes the same question as "Why write?" I have no answer to this yet, but I'm working on it.

There is a figurative phrase in Spanish (I'm unsure if it is particular to Mexican Spanish) which is used to describe something that brings pleasure: *me late* — which would translate as *it makes my heart beat*.

Much of this book was written during a year long stay and travels throughout Mexico.

Recently, while in Ottawa driving from one bar to another, Rhodes mentioned an essay he saw reference to, online. Written by a student at the University of Alberta and presented as a paper at a conference in Scotland, on Rhodes' first collection against Robert Kroetsch's first, *Stone Hammer Poems*, the piece wrote Shane Rhodes as "Robert Kroetsch's gay son." There is a lot to compare between the two as poets, and one can even make comparisons between *tengo sed* and Kroetsch's chapbook, *Lines Written in the John Snow House* (2002), later included in his trade collection, *The Snowbird Poems* (2004). Rhodes is able to write a lush lyric while still writing in a plain, spoken line, a mixture of statement and lyric flow. Listen to this, the first half of the poem "Cuentas," that reads:

*They agreed, hiking the mountain which overlooked the city spires and silver mines, that their lives were already arthritic with worry.*

*On the mountaintop, they removed their t-shirts, jeans and underwear to suntan — interrupted only by the goat herds eating brown grass dried tough by summer drought.*

*And they meant by "worry" an anxiety that fed from its own imprecision and so became an italicised sadness — as in a life corroded by work, the lack of money, the loss of time — filling a lower case (times new roman) hole.*

*After an afternoon storm, they dried themselves and descended, stopping only to pick cactus fruit — its cool skin and warm, lucent centre full of pits.*

*"This is how the middle-aged would live," she would say at times. "A life of pattern and routine with very little conscious waste."*

*And it makes me want a quick end to it: "They returned to their pension (the one with the beaten tile in every room), made dinner and turned out the lights" or "The grey-green pigeons, startled by the evening bells, flew from the gutters to the church spires."*

Kroetsch's small chapbook was written during a similar trip, another Alberta writer placed but nearly placeness (he has been based in Winnipeg for a number of years), while in Calgary during a writer-in-residence stint; both collections written as familiar and foreign, a self-contained group of poems. Is there a difference?

Before his first collection appeared, what I saw of Rhodes' work was made up of "great lines in good poems," and, with each new publication, has steady-

ly improved. Rhodes has always managed to maintain a loosely-restrained lyric, pulling between that and the underlying (barely contained) energy that runs through his lines, but the pieces in *tengo sed* are far more refined, and fuse the two far better than anything he has accomplished previously.

*Carne*

*In a Mexico City market, stalls sell tacos made from the meat of cooked goat heads. Beside the grill are piles of eyeless sockets and obstinate looking jaws still with their full array of stained teeth. You eat the meat from the head, a man tells me pointing at the skulls while pushing a taco deep into his mouth, because then at least you know it's not rat meat.*

There does seem a difference between this and the work of his two trade collections; it's good to watch any writer move outside of themselves and their own histories. There are some pieces in *Holding Pattern* written during his time in Mexico, but in *tengo sed*, it's exclusively what the poems are from, written both from Mexico and the *idea* of Mexico (whatever that means), as Rhodes works to place the pieces inside the imagination of where he is. As he writes at the beginning of "El Mercado En Merida" (p 26):

*a shop sells nothing but coconuts beside men who turn old tires into sandals*

or the short piece "Los Pescadores Y Los Rancheros" (p 21):

*The rancher ranches so every two months  
he can drive to town and eat shrimp  
with beer and batter and cocktail sauce.*

*The fisherman fishes  
for the occasional meal  
of chicken and veal.*

One of the most interesting pieces in the collection has to be "To Elizabeth Bishop," a long list of a piece that includes lines such as:

*Here is a trade. Here is a woman in labour.  
Here is trade. Here is a woman's labour.  
Here is a border zone. Here is a pay phone.  
Here is free trade. Here is a man getting paid.  
Here is a market place. Here is a church.  
[ . . ]*

*Here is a tourista. Here is an assembly line.  
Here is an assembled line. Here is the blazing divine.  
Here is a smokestack. Here is a wire rack.*

And ending with:

*Here is the beautiful song. Here is the beautiful song.  
Here is a room. Here is a man sitting.  
Here is his hammock. Here is his beach sand.  
Here is his harbour. Here is his coast.*

The pieces in *tengo sed* work through Rhodes' meditative spread, both specifically working and surrounding the Mexican space as an insider who knows he is still a traveler. From the first poem to the last, Rhodes writes himself in, as in the brief opener, "On Imitation," that writes:

*In the night,  
the cat-in-heat sang.  
In the morning,  
the mocking bird sang  
of the cat-in-heat.  
In the afternoon,  
I wrote of the mocking bird.*

The ten part poem "Otono" that ends the collection is quite lovely, a flow that connects each fragment but still holds to the disassociation:

6

In the 1400s, 20,000 human hearts  
cut from their chest with obsidian blades

7

commemorated the new temple nearby –

only stopped when the priests fell  
from exhaustion. Now

everything I touch –

8

feldspar, a pen

to write this down –  
beats in my hand.

There is nothing  
we would not do to keep it

The continuity between breaks flows nicely, adding weight and depth to the lyric flow, giving the reader the chance to read between the lines, between the line breaks and the line continuity. As the poem ends, with the two line part "IO," writing:

They will burn  
as long as we need them to.

And it does. It does.

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# BIOS:

**Anita Dolman** is an Ottawa-based freelance writer and editor, and managing editor of *Poetics.ca*. Her work has recently appeared in *Grain magazine*, *Geist*, *Utne*, *The Fiddlehead* and *Prism International*. Her first chapbook, *Scalpel, tea and shot glass*, was published by above/ground press in fall 2004. "The economist" first appeared in *PRISM International* 43:1 (fall 2004), and "Sidewalk" first appeared in *Peter F. Yacht Club #3* (October 2004).

**Tamara Fairchild** recently completed her LL.B. at the University of Ottawa and now lives in Toronto. She plans to practice criminal law. Not the kind you find on Bay Street – the other kind – involving the sort of people who tend to get caught. Her work has most recently appeared in *Body Language*, an anthology published by Black Moss Press.

**Tim Conley's** poetry, fiction, reviews, and translations have appeared in such journals as *3rd bed*, *Queen Street Quarterly*, *PRISM international*, and *The Danforth Review*. He is reviews editor at the online journal *paperplates* ([www.paperplates.org](http://www.paperplates.org)) and is currently writing, with Stephen Cain, *The Encyclopedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages*.

**Gwendolyn Guth** is an aspiring poet and mother of three active sons. She has been a waitress, a second language monitor, an academic, and is now recreating herself as a classroom teacher. Her chapbook, *The Flash of Longing*, appeared in 2000. She lives in Ottawa.

**William Hawkins** is an Ottawa poet and Blue Line cab driver. With Bruce Cockburn, he was in the band *The Children* in Ottawa in the late 1960s. The author of *Shoot Low, Sheriff, They're Riding Shetland Ponies* (with Roy MacSkimming, 1964), *Hawkins* (1966), *Ottawa Poems* (1966) and *The Gift of Space* (1970), he was included in the seminal anthology *New Wave Canada*

(1966). His *DANCING ALONE: Selected Poems 1960-1990* appears in spring 2005 with cauldron books / Broken Jaw Press. The poem "King Kong Goes To The Shawville Fair" is his first new poem since 1990. He has recently been seen at County Fairs all across the Ottawa Valley.

**Matthew Holmes** is reviews editor of *Arc Magazine* and Chief Inspector of the bad reposesy Mfg. Co., publishers of *Modomnoc*. He recently moved from Ottawa to Sackville, New Brunswick.

**George Elliott Clarke** writes dramatic, singing poetry. His beloved works include *Whylah Falls* (1990), *Beatrice Chancy* (1999), *Execution Poems* (2001), and *Blue* (2001). His newest book is *Québécoisité* (2003), which is also a jazz opera. The recipient of the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 2001, Clarke also received the National Magazine Gold Award for Poetry in 2002 and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award in 2004. An Africadian, he lives in Toronto, but owns land in Nova Scotia.

**rob mcLennan** lives in Ottawa, where he does many things. The author of ten trade poetry collections, most recently *what's left* (Talonbooks, 2004) and *stone, book one* (Palimpsest Press, 2004), he has edited numerous anthologies, including *side/lines: a new canadian poetics* (Insomniac Press, 2002) and *Groundswell: the best of above/ground press, 1993-2003* (Broken Jaw Press, 2003). The editor/publisher of above/ground press and *STANZAS* magazine, he edits the journal *Poetics.ca* with Ottawa poet Stephen Brockwell. He is currently finishing a novel and a collection of essays.

**Max Middle** is an Ottawa based poet, performer, musician and photographer. He is not easily charmed but loves magic. In his spare time, he enjoys swimming, watching snails gallop, eating green vegetables, sleeping and dreaming. Recently, Max has been conducting investigations into sound poetry and improvised music with some very talented collaborators. He is a founding member of the music, noise, poetry and art performance experiment, The Max Middle Sound Project, which performed this June as part of the Ottawa International Fringe Festival. He hopes to soon be able to update his web sites with all kinds of audio and video files. In the spring of 2005, the Max Middle Sound Project will release their first CD. Visit one of the following web sites for news regarding its release: <<http://www.maxmiddle.com>> or <<http://www.adornato.com>> or <<http://maxmiddle.tripod.com>>

**Peter Norman's** poetry and fiction have appeared in *subTerrain*, *This Magazine*, *Toro*, *The Malahat Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Bywords*, *Prism International*, and elsewhere. His first chapbook, *After Stillness*, is available from above/ground press. With Stephen Brockwell, he is the co-author of *Wild Clover Honey and The Beehive: 28 Sonnets on the Sonnet* (available at [www.bywords.ca](http://www.bywords.ca)). A selection of his sonnets can be viewed online at [www.newformalist.com/ebooks/norman.html](http://www.newformalist.com/ebooks/norman.html) He lives in Ottawa.

**Monty Reid** Born in Saskatchewan, Monty Reid lived in Alberta for many years before moving to the Ottawa area in 1999. His books of poetry include *Crawlspace* (Anansi), *Dog Sleeps* (NeWest) and *Flat Side* (rd press). His most recent publication is a chapbook, *Six Songs for the Mammoth Steppe* (above/ground press). He is currently Director of Exhibitions at the Canadian Museum of Nature.

**Shane Rhodes'** first book, *The Wireless Room* (2000, NeWest Press), won the Alfred G. Bailey Award and the Alberta Book Award. His second book, *Holding Pattern* (2002, NeWest Press), won the Archibald Lampman Award. Shane recently published the chapbook *Tengo Sed* with Greenboathouse Books and is also featured in the new anthology of Canadian poets *Breathing Fire II*. Shane currently lives in Ottawa.

**Chris Turnbull** lives in Smiths Falls, where she publishes *rout/e* (now and again) and chapbooks (hawkweed press). Her poetry chapbook, *Shingles*, was published by Thuja Press. She works in the CIE at Carleton University.

**Ewan Whyte** is a writer, poet and translator. He studied Classics and English at the University of Ottawa.

**Clare Latremouille** is a displaced British Columbian, originally from Kamloops. After a ten year hiatus, she returned to the east in the late 90s, and her work has appeared in *Hostbox*, *paperplates*, *Missing Jacket*, *The Peter F. Yacht Club*, *STANZAS*, the anthologies *Written in the Skin* (Insomniac Press, 1998), *Shadowy Technicians: New Ottawa Poets* (Broken Jaw Press, 2000), and *Groundswell: best of above/ground press, 1993-2003* (Broken Jaw Press, 2003), as well as the chapbook *I will write a poem for you. Now:* (above/ground press, 1995). She is currently working on a novel or two.

**Laurie Fuhr** is the editor of *bloom oon Canadian Surrealist Journal*, an online and print zine. She has lived in Germany, Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Cold Lake, Alberta; she's just moved to Calgary. Her poems have appeared in the anthologies *evergreen: six new poets* (Black Moss Press, 2002), *Short Fuse: A Global Anthology of New Fusion Poetry* (Rattapallax, 2002) and *Shadowy Technicians: New Ottawa Poets* (Broken Jaw Press, 2000) as well as periodicals including *This Magazine*, *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics* (India), *modomnoc*, *SPIRE*, *Free Fall*, *Bywords*, *White Wall Review* and *The Carleton Arts Review*. Her multivocal poetry is inspired by poets writing in different styles across the country. Pull Laurie's hair at [bloom\\_oon@yahoo.ca](mailto:bloom_oon@yahoo.ca)

**Stephen Brockwell** has spent the first half of his life in Montreal and the second half in Ottawa. Where he will spend the third half is uncertain. He works in sales for Autodesk, a design software company. He'll be completing the course work for an MA in Canadian Studies on a winter sabbatical. His most recent book is *Fruitfly Geographic*, ECW Press, 2004.

## ARTWORK

**Tanya Sprowl** is a fine maker of stuff, and the proprietor of the *phiveDesign*. Somehow she gets herself involved in far too many pro bono projects on tight deadlines. Still, she loves every minute of it and waits for good karma to hit back.

**Derrick Lacelle** is a designer and illustrator in Ottawa, Canada, and the proprietor of the *Lucky No.1 Design Co.* He denies looking at online pornography, but no one believes him.

**Don Monet** is an Ottawa artist and activist. Much of his work is informed by the 13 years he lived and worked with the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples in Northern B.C.. In 1992 he published "Colonialism

On Trial", a graphic documentary following the Delgam Uukw court action of 87-91. In Ottawa he has organized a number of thematic group exhibitions including: "Union~Art" at Ottawa City Hall Gallery (2004), "Art vs War" a WarChild Fundraiser (2003); "Art~Work" Mayworks festival (2003); "Crime Seen" (2001) and "Art Against War" (1999).

**Jeremy Reid** is an Ottawa based photographer, graphic designer and the extraordinary cook working deep in the dungeons of Irene's Pub.

**Jennifer Kwong** is an Ottawa based designer, artist and illustrator. She has been involved in several top secret projects. If you look closely you might find her fingerprint left in various museums, art shops and lonely public spaces.

**Juan Carlos Noria** is a fresh proponent of the visual art scene in Ottawa, Canada. Born in Caracas, Venezuela he carries his Latin American sensibility on his sleeve. True to his subservive nature, he undercuts his own personality, allowing himself to explore two other personas and visual styles. He sometimes works under the pseudonyms of Royal or Dixon. He has been influenced by his contemporaries, Mark Masters and Tanja Handa. Yet, he is himself—singular Juan. He is without pretense, full of concern for others, quick to laugh and quicker to paint something ripe.

**Sarah Dobbin** makes her bread and butter as a local freelance industrial designer and sessional lecturer at Carleton University, as well as a dabbling artist creating prints, projections and interactive art.