The FIDDLEHEAD

Atlantic Canada's International Literary Journal

75th Anniversary Issue

1945 — 2020



The FIDDLEHEAD

Atlantic Canada's International Literary Journal



. . . a fiddlehead, that small plant
that grows in the Saint John River valley
in the spring, and which is said to be
symbolic of the sun.

Alfred Bailey
February 1945
(first issue of *The Fiddlehead*)

The Fiddlehead acknowledges that the land on which it is housed is the traditional unceded territory of Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet). This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship which the Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Mi'kmaq, and Passamaquoddy peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Wolastoqey (Maliseet), Mi'kmaq, and Passamaquoddy title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

The Fiddlehead 75th Anniversary Issue

This special 75th anniversary issue of ***The Fiddlehead*** is funded by the Government of Canada. We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the University of New Brunswick, and the Province of New Brunswick.







Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des arts du Canada



Manuscripts may be sent via Submittable or via post to:

The Fiddlehead
Campus House 11 Garland Court
UNB PO Box 4400 Fredericton NB Canada E3B 5A3

Mailed submissions are accepted year-round, but our Submittable reading periods are February 15 - April 30 and September 15 - November 30.

For complete submission guidelines, please visit *The Fiddlehead*'s website:

www.thefiddlehead.ca/submit

Twitter: @TheFiddlehd
Facebook: TheFiddlehead

Copyright remains with the authors.

Back issues are available at ***The Fiddlehead*** office. Email: fiddlehd@unb.ca

Canadian Subscription Rates
(effective July 1, 2020)
Two Years: $60.00
One Year: $35.00

International Subscription Rates
(effective July 1, 2020)
Two Years: $70.00
One Year: $40.00

Printed in Canada

ISSN 0015-0630
Publications Mail Registration Number: 008617

Advisory Editors

Sharon Bala | Brian Bartlett | Billy-Ray Belcourt
Gwen Benaway | Jo-Anne Elder | Rowan McCandless
Soraya Peerbaye | Shane Rhodes | Shannon Webb-Campbell

Editor
Sue Sinclair

Associate Editor
Ross Leckie

Managing Editor
Ian LeTourneau

Creative Nonfiction Editor
Alicia Elliott

Fiction Editors
Gerard Beirne, Clarissa Hurley, Mark Anthony Jarman

Poetry Editors
Phillip Crymble, Ian LeTourneau, Rebecca Salazar

Editorial Board
Poetry: Jenna Lyn Albert, Joelle Barron, Roxanna Bennett, Jessica Dolan, Sarah Ens, Kayla Geitzler, Susie Hammond, Erin Hiebert, Joelle Levesque, Madelaine Longman, Taidgh Lynch, Carley Mayson, Melanie Power, Chantelle Rideout, Matt Robinson, Emily Skov-Nielsen, Douglas Walbourne-Gough, Stephanie Yorke

Prose: Amanda Dawson, Jann Everard, Kendra Guidolin, Sarah Hamill, Izza Hassan, Zach Keesey, Jaclyn Morken, Niwar Ameen Obaid, Carmelinda Scian, Melissa Spohr, Shoshanna Wingate

Editors Emeriti
Bill Gaston, Robert Gibbs, Don McKay, Jan Zwicky

Book Reviews
Sabine Campbell, Ross Leckie

Cover Design
Ian LeTourneau

Layout
Emily Skov-Nielsen

Administrative Assistant
Patricia Simmons, Darin Squire

Marketing and Promotions
Emily Skov-Nielsen

Contents, 75th Anniversary Special Issue

Introductions

6 Sue Sinclair
15 Jo-Anne Elder: *New Writing in Acadie: Gabriel Robichaud and Émilie Turmel*
43 Billy-Ray Belcourt
61 Rowan McCandless
85 Brian Bartlett: *Yellow Foxgloves: Canadian Poets Emerging Later in Life*
107 Soraya Peerbaye
131 Sharon Bala
151 Shannon-Webb Campbell

The Fiddlehead 75 — Birthday Greetings

8 Don McKay, Bob Gibbs, Roger Ploude, Bill Gaston, Michael Taylor

Jo-Anne Elder Looks Forward . . .

22 Émilie Turmel: *L'Avenir À Qui.* Trans. Jo-Anne Elder: *Whose Future*
28 Gabriel Robichaud: *Two Poems.* Trans. Jo-Anne Elder

Billy-Ray Belcourt Looks Forward . . .

44 Brandi Bird: *Two Poems*
46 Selina Boan: *Campaign for My Body's Mess*
48 Mackenzie Ground: *berry talk*
49 Jake Byrne: *A Bouquet of Ketchup-Flavoured Roses*
53 Arielle Twist: *Two Poems*
55 Cecily Nicholson: *in haptic concert*

Rowan McCandless Looks Forward . . .

62 Hege A. Jakobsen Lepri: *All the Right Things*
70 Nicole Breit: *Married Poly Bi-Femme Operating System Manual*

Brian Bartlett Looks Forward . . .

86 Roy Adams
87 Mary Barnes
88 J.D. Black
89 Laurie Brinklow
90 Antony Di Nardo
92 Alyda Faber
93 Maureen Scott Harris
94 Jonina Kirton
95 Eva Kolacz
96 Arleen Paré
97 Barbara Pelman
99 E. Alex Pierce
100 Ingrid Ruthig
101 Jean Van Loon
102 Margo Wheaton

Soraya Peerbaye Looks Forward . . .

109 Maheen Hyder: *Four Poems*

Sharon Bala Looks Forward . . .

132 Sofia Mostaghimi: *Roxane and Julieta*
145 Clarisse Baleja Saïdi: *Containers*

Shannon Webb-Campbell Looks Forward . . .

153 Michelle Sylliboy: *Three Poems*
156 Susan Musgrave: *Three Poems*
159 Brian Brett: *Turkish Delight*
160 shalan joudry: *Two Poems*
162 Rachel McCrum: *Breast Snout of the Earth Pig*
163 Sue Goyette: *Anthesis (an excerpt)*
169 Anna Swanson: *Portals*
171 Tanya Evanson: *A Single Organism*
172 Nolan Natasha: *If You Need Me, I'll Be in Summerville*
173 Michelle Porter: *Love, Hope, Belonging*
176 Lee Maracle: *Two Poems*

Contributors

178 Notes on Contributors

Reviews

111 Shane Neilson: Fermenting Over Time
To Live and Die in Scoudouc, Herménégilde Chiasson. Trans. Jo-Anne Elder

113 Brian Bartlett: Blessings on Those Who Stepped Forward Then
How to Avoid Huge Ships, Julie Bruck
Reunion, Deanna Young

116 Ian Colford: "In Love With Language"
The Discovery of Honey, Terry Griggs

119 Kim Fahner: Weaving a more connected world
Reckon, Steve McOrmond

120 Suan Haley: The bloodstained land we live on
Argimou, A Legend of the Micmac, S. Douglass Huyghue

Looking Forward: Celebrating 75 Years of The Fiddlehead

Time stops for a moment when an anniversary comes around; we pause on the threshold of what's been and what's to come. Of course, in the office *The Fiddlehead* team has been doing the administrative equivalent of a triathlon to get the anniversary issue to print and launched cross-country. Yet an anniversary remains a moment of reckoning; there's a kind of stillness about it even in the midst of whatever festivities are being planned, whatever revelry may go on. At a party, I cherish the moments when I step outside of the party, near the crowd but not of the crowd — when I nip outside for a breath of fresh air; when I find myself sitting on the stairs with someone random, waiting for the bathroom; when I look into the quiet upstairs bedroom piled with coats. An anniversary celebration is a big thing to plan and to participate in, but it ultimately demands that we step outside of the rush of things, pause, take a breath, take a look around.

When *The Fiddlehead* celebrated its 50th anniversary, we took a look back, and anyone interested in *The Fiddlehead*'s past — indeed the past of CanLit — should read Robert Gibbs' opening essay in the commemorative *Fiddlehead Gold*, aka issue 185. (I didn't know, for instance, that *The Fiddlehead* was once housed in an observatory — the writers and the stargazers under one roof . . .). The issue itself features a remarkable range of writing from the 40s through to the 90s. This year we turn 75, and this time we celebrate by looking forward.

A forward-looking spirit was inaugurated by Alfred G. Bailey in the first-ever editorial of the first-ever *Fiddlehead*. In February 1945 he wrote, "To continue a tradition is to develop it to the point of contemporaneity. As this point is forever in motion the tradition must be forever unfolding by means of constant experimentation." Literature as a tradition in motion, responsive to the productive pressures of the now, receptive, mutable — that's a vision I'm happy to get behind, 75 years later.

For this anniversary, *The Fiddlehead* is reaching beyond our regular spring-summer-winter-fall publishing schedule to create a special 5th issue, a windfall issue. The usual slate of editors has stepped back and offered the space to our recently renewed advisory board, along with the invitation to con-

sider the theme of "looking forward." What concerns and preoccupations are driving writers forward? Who are these writers? What decisions are being made or need to be made? What lacunae have to be addressed? Each available advisory editor has curated a section in response, and the result is in your hands. Huge thanks to these editors for the time and effort they have put into creating this issue, as well as for their willingness to act as advisory editors otherwise. *The Fiddlehead* is richer for your presence.

What I cherish about literary journals is their quality of *alongsideness*, that writers of different characters, places, backgrounds, and aesthetics appear alongside each other, in each other's company. It's the same reason I like public transportation! In this issue, *alongsideness* is heightened for me, as the advisory editors' distinctive approaches appear alongside each other, creating juxtapositions, echoes, lucidities and resonances. This is what a literary journal does best, and to me it seems a most fitting way to celebrate.

Felicitations, everyone — readers, writers, editors, proofreaders, producers, assistants, artists, designers, printers, promoters, supporters: we've done it, we're doing it, we'll continue to do it.

Sue Sinclair
Editor
Fredericton, NB

The Fiddlehead 75 — Birthday Greetings

Yikes! Wasn't it just last week we were celebrating its 50th with *The Fiddlehead* Gold anthology? (I pause for a few profane — and unwritten — expressions of *tempus fugit*.) Back then we fernheads-of-the-day received a bushel of congratulatory letters from writers who got started and/or boosted with early publication in *The Fiddlehead*. It was heartening and humbling to sit in the office in Campus House with Sabine Campbell and read these, realizing, e.g. that Alistair MacLeod first published in our ("our") magazine, and that Alden Nowlan had written his warm acceptance letter. Robert Kroetsch recalled *The Fiddlehead* as "a listening kind of journal" and John Metcalfe saw it as "an essential part of Canada's literary life" — voices distant enough from one another, literarily, to testify to the old fern's range.

Twenty-five years on it's clear that wide-ranging, open-eared approach still thrives. Good luck to Sue and the current fernheads, and congratulations to Ross for having fostered and furthered this venerable, youthful, multi-voiced, still undomesticated listening post.

Don McKay
Editor (1991-95)

I wrote my first published poem for a school paper called the *Victorian* when I was 9 years old in Grade 3 for the royal visit in 1939 and got 50 cents for it. So I was told by the other kids "Hey Gibbsy you're a poet and don't know it. When I came to UNB and heard about *The Fiddlehead*, I submitted a poem in heavily Miltonic verse — but soon learned that I'd need to come down off my high horse and write in plain English. Two tiny poems were accepted — "Green glows life" and "Adolesens--e" in my Sophomore year I think it was — What a thrill!

Bob Gibbs
Poetry Editor (1967-95), Editor (1971-73)

The Fiddlehead — It took only a short while for me to hear those words after arriving on the UNB campus in the Spring of 1972 as a candidate for an opening in the Department of English. Following the trip in from the airport, I was taken to a Department function in the then Faculty Club on the third floor of the Old Arts Building and initially seated across from Fred Cogswell and Alden Nowlan. The first question Fred asked was whether I heard of and read "*The Fiddlehead*." As a native New Brunswicker and a graduate of neighbouring Saint Thomas University, I had of course heard of *The Fiddlehead*, which even by then had endured longer than most magazines of its type. However, what I did not realize at the time was the special place which creative writing had long held in the community and in the Department I was about to join. A deep and rich tradition in creative writing linked the two, and it was this tradition which inspired the founding of *The Fiddlehead* in 1945.

As a full-time member of the English Department for close to 40 years, I watched from the front rows the growth of *The Fiddlehead* over four decades, including the few challenging years under my editorship when the magazine was in desperate need of fresh editorial energy and talent. Fortunately, the editors who followed had both, and steadily improved the journal to the point where it now ranks second to none in the editorial care, creative design, and overall professional touch marking its production, not to mention the consistently high quality of the writing it publishes. When I occasionally look back on my years in the Department, one satisfying highlight that always stands out is the small part I played early in my career in helping to push along this durable and important journal.

Later as Chair of the English Department, I had the privilege of overseeing the ceremony celebrating the journal's 50th Anniversary, in itself a landmark achievement. Now from the sidelines of retirement, I join so many others in applauding yet another and even more impressive milestone — the journal's 75th Anniversary. Wow! What a remarkable accomplishment for a journal of creative writing — and for that matter, any journal. Kudos to *The Fiddlehead*. It has earned an iconic place in the literature of our country, and throughout its existence has been an outstanding ambassador for the Department of English, community, and Province. I know that many across Canada will join me in recognizing the journal for all it has done over the past 75 years for Creative Writing in this region and beyond, not only by publishing more established writers, but also by making room in its pages for new and promising voices, giving them much needed promotion and encouragement. As

it begins the final leg of the march towards its Centennial, *The Fiddlehead* shines brighter than ever; it is better than it has ever been, and I suspect it will glow even brighter in the future.

Happy Birthday *Fiddlehead*! You are a true Canadian institution. May you thrive for another 75 years and many, many more; and may you never join me in the ranks of the Department's retirees. Writers here and throughout the country need you, and they always will.

Roger Ploude
Business Manager, Editor (1975)

Old Fern,

I'm thrilled you're so alive at 75. If anything you're better than ever: nimble, muscular, feisty, yet still playful. Maybe it's because by definition a fiddlehead can't be old. Maybe it's where you're from: resisting cultivation and its rules you grow in spring mystery muck beside rotting logs, in a dank, budding forest. Maybe also you've had good people hunting you, picking the strongest shoots. In the brief time I slogged and fumbled with that, it was nothing but an honour.

Here's to 75 more.

Bill Gaston
Editor (1997)

Am I justified, I wonder, to consider myself the editor who saved *The Fiddlehead* from extinction? Well, probably not. But I remember at a general meeting in 19? of UNB's English Department — the reservoir for the *The Fiddlehead*'s editors — the alarming possibility of the demise or at least the shut-down for a time of the magazine. Well, we can't have this, I thought. Impulsively, I rushed unto the breach, despite, as this expression indicates, being a specialist from another area of literature than Canadian (although I had off and on in previous and later years been the magazine's fiction editor). I can't quite remember how long I was in the job; the time went by swiftly not least

because of the amount of energy Sabine Campbell brought to her position of Business Manager during my stint as editor. Hats off to her. Not long after I was appointed, the CBC did a programme on little magazines in Canada, and as the — as I say, somewhat reluctant — editor of *The Fiddlehead* I was persuaded — reluctantly again, truth to tell — to be its representative on the broadcast despite my limited knowledge of its history. Fortunately, I never had the misfortune to hear my less than authoritative contributions to the discussion that followed. Bob Gibbs would have done a much better job. And Sabine too, probably.

Then a couple of years later Roger Ploude and I put together a number of short stories from *The Fiddlehead* for a collection named delightfully by Oberon Press, *Fiddlehead Greens*. It has a stellar cast headed by Margaret Atwood, Alden Nolan, Alistair Macleod, John Metcalf, George Bowering, and William Bauer who taught in the English Department for many years.

Michael Taylor
Fiction Editor (1977-84), Editor (1985-90)

Jo-Anne Elder
looks forward...



New Writing in Acadie: Gabriel Robichaud and Émilie Turmel

Jo-Anne Elder

Over the past year, *The Fiddlehead* has confirmed its commitment to recognizing the importance of Acadian and francophone writers by featuring poems by Herménégilde Chiasson, Jean-Philippe Raîche, and Georgette LeBlanc in French and in translation. Presenting work in both official languages serves primarily to make anglophone readers more aware of the vitality of Acadian literature since the 1970s (much of which has not been translated into English) and of the emergence of new writing in French from New Brunswick. In the pages that follow, I will offer brief comments by two leading francophone poets of this millennium and a short sample of their work, in French and in my translation. Although Émilie Turmel lived in Québec until recently and Gabriel Robichaud lived in Montréal and Ottawa for a while, both now live and write in Moncton. Born in 1988 and 1990 respectively, they are already actively involved as cultural workers in Acadie.

Émilie Turmel was born in Montréal and grew up in Québec. She first discovered Acadian poetry when Herménégilde Chiasson was featured at a festival; she realized that although she had a master's in literature and was working for a festival, she "still knew nothing about literary Acadie." Then, at the Acadian World Congress in 2014, a production focusing on the Acadian diaspora introduced her to musician and videographer Jonah Haché,[1] musician Sébastien Michaud,[2] and actor and writer Gabriel Robichaud in an ambitious program of 19 authors. From festival to festival, Turmel met other Acadian writers, was "blown away" by Jonathan Roy,[3] went to the Acadian poetry festival in Caraquet which Roy directs, met Monica Bolduc,[4] Paul Bossé,[5] Dominic Langlois,[6] and others. The festival became an annual summer destination for her, and recently she was invited to take part in it.

In 2017, Turmel met Georgette LeBlanc,[7] who had won the Champlain prize and was in residence at the Maison de la littérature, where she was working. LeBlanc's "fresh and frank voice and powerful writing" captured her. She read *Alma* in a café, frustrated to be unable to read every line out loud to "roll the waves of her lines in my mouth and be able to taste the salt in her words."

Turmel moved to Moncton last year to take on a new role as the Executive Director of the Frye Festival, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in April 2019. "Acadian literature is still something new for me," she writes. "I am gradually adapting to its ecosystem. I understand its beauty and its challenges better now. Writing from this place, from Acadie: what does that mean to me? I don't think I know, exactly, at this point. I am busy experiencing it. I am observing how things are shifting in myself and in my writing. I hope to find an anchor that I can set down, so I can leave and return."

"Poetry, for me, is an act of resistance," writes Turmel. "I'm not surprised that poetry has such a strong resonance in Acadie. If there's something I have in common with Acadian poets, it is, perhaps, a feeling of urgency. A necessity that grabs you by the guts when it comes time to claim our right to express ourselves in our own language, to speak out, to shine, in other words to exist despite being on the edge of the highest tides in the world."

Gabriel Robichaud, on the other hand, grew up in Acadie. As a teenager, the first Acadian artists who made a mark on him were Gérald Leblanc,[8] through his lyrics for the group 1755 rather than his writing, and Herménégilde Chiasson,[9] mainly through his work in theatre and the visual arts. Reading Guy Arsenault's *Acadie Rock*[10] when he was 16 was a "revolution in my perspective on poetry. I don't think I would be writing today if I hadn't read that book."

The writing of poets Leblanc and Chiasson continued to influence Robichaud; added to them were Raymond Guy Leblanc,[11] Georgette LeBlanc, Dominic Langlois, Ronald Léger,[12] Monica Bolduc, Joannie Thomas,[13] Dyane Léger,[14] Rose Després,[15] Sébastien Bérubé,[16] and Jonathan Roy. "And I wouldn't be writing without Serge Patrice Thibodeau,[17] either. I worked (and reworked) *La promenade des ignorés* and *Acadie Road* with him. Serge showed me how to revise my work, rewrite it, when I was beginning to publish. The support he gave me was incredible, as is his writing. The same is true for Jean-Philippe Raiche,[18] who worked with me on *Les anodins*, and was my co-writer on "Le Manifeste diasporeux,"[19] not to mention the fact that I was knocked off my feet when I discovered his *Une lettre au bout du monde* and *Ne réveillez pas l'amour avant qu'elle ne le veuille*.

Robichaud lists the challenges of writing in Acadie: "As in any literary ecosystem, many are called but few are chosen. The numbers of books published, publishers, readers and buyers are all small, and literature has a limited distribution throughout the region. It's of some consolation that, proportionately, the number of books bought per capita is pretty good. Then there are the challenges related to the low rate of literacy in the region, and the fact that writing in French, in a minority setting, puts us in a difficult position.

The majority language dominates, and our writing doesn't reach anglophones unless it is translated (a very rare occurrence for Acadian writers, and for francophones in general across Canada)."

Known as an advocate for French-language literature, Robichaud laments the fact that Acadian culture and literature do not have a more prominent place in the school system and the curriculum, despite initiatives, purchases of New Brunswick books by the government, and incentives. Study of Acadian writers can become tokenism and focus on canonized literature of the past. "Students do not learn about how writing comes into being, how it functions in life and society... There is a similar problem in the anglophone education sector, where people don't seem to be given the tools to learn both official languages." Robichaud wrote a manifesto for the increased presence of literature in schools. "This heartfelt plea seems to have been heard, but I also try to get involved in action that will make a difference in the future. I have a lot of hope that things will change, and it's certainly essential enough, in my eyes, to make me continue advocating for it if I feel whatever is happening isn't enough. For me, the reason a school system exists, regardless of its language or the type of education it offers, is that there is a culture, a way of laughing, talking, living, that comes with it. And if we can't recognize the value and relevance of this culture, we are doing something that is counter to the system itself. Why would we strive only to educate autocrats, when it is arts and culture that diversifies the economy and enriches society?"

Among the unique traits of Acadian writing is the influence of orality on both earlier and contemporary poetry. "...the influence of orality remains, not only on the written language but also on the rhythm of poetry and poetry collections. That may be the thing that I notice most about the poetry being written today, although there are also examples of recent publications that run counter to this tendency or that distance themselves from it."

Many Acadian writers and artists have multidisciplinary practices. This will, according to Robichaud, become an even more prominent feature of Acadian writing in the future. "Just as we can see it happening in music, I have the impression that the genres of literary creation are bursting open. One of the most interesting phenomena I'm seeing is the diversification of territory and identity among writers. We can no longer just talk about the pool of writers from Moncton or based in Moncton; there are writers everywhere in Acadie and writers of diverse origins who live in Acadie, throughout New Brunswick, Atlantic Canada, Québec's Acadian communities, in Louisiana..."

Similarly, there is a growing diversification in writing practices, "a plurality of forms, like a pluri-generational pool that is creating a thriving literature.

I am hopeful that it will continue growing, and that it will continue making room for the voices of women, francophone Indigenous voices, and eventually diverse voices that will enhance the vision of a plural and inclusive Acadie."

While Jonathan Roy and Sébastien Bérubé are already making way for an even newer generation, theirs are "remarkable voices" in Acadian poetry. Robichaud names Jonathan Roy's second collection of poetry, *Savèches à fragmentation*,[20] as the "greatest collection of poetry written by an Acadian poet of my generation to date." Among the new voices emerging in Acadie, Robichaud is particularly attracted by the work of Caroline Bélisle,[21] Luc-Antoine Chiasson,[22] Monica Bolduc, Joannie Thomas, and Lex Vienneau,[23] who are "voices that are young, strong, skilled. Poetry with forms that are burst open, anchored in the guts, perspectives that are really, really, interesting. I'm excited about what will be written and read in the future."

Robichaud sees his role in the literary community both as a creator and an advocate. He wants to continue "to try to inscribe my poetry into its place and time. To multiply its forms, ideas, points of view. To ensure that I don't turn it into 'pretext-literature' or tokenism, even if encouraging something sometimes means learning how to criticize it or to be criticized. I am the editor of the new Theatre collection at Éditions Perce-Neige. That is another way for me to make a concrete commitment to diversifying the publication of literary genres on the territory, as well as embracing a new wave of authors who are just coming to the stage."

Section cover image "Anchor" by Sophie Hamidovic (mixed media, 2019).

[1] See the YouTube link to this artist's work: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5L9ge6yuMVrcKfdzWrjlHg

[2] See the LinkedIn link for more information on Michaud: https://www.linkedin.com/in/sebastien-michaud-1499b788/?originalSubdomain=ca

[3] Jonathan Roy was born in Bathurst and lives in Caraquet, New Brunswick. A bookseller and artistic consultant for the Acadian Peninsula's annual book fair and festival, he is also the Editor of the "Rafale" poetry collection at Éditions Perce-Neige and the Artistic Director of the Festival acadien de Poésie. His first collection, *Apprendre à tomber* (2012), was awarded the prestigious Antonine-Maillet-Acadie Vie prize.

[4] Monica Bolduc is from Edmundston, N.B., and lived for several years in Moncton, where she studied Theatre and continues to work as an actor. Her poems were included in the *Anthologie de la poésie des femmes en Acadie*. Her first collection, *Dead End*, was published by Éditions Perce-Neige in 2017.

[5] Paul Bossé was born in 1971 in Moncton, N.B. He has published five poetry collections with Éditions Perce-Neige, *Un cendrier plein d'ancêtres* (2001) *Averses* (2004), *Saint-George/Robinson* (2007), *Continuum* (2011) and *Les démondeurs* (2016). He also works in film, theatre, television, and radio.

[6] Dominic Langlois grew up in Québec but has lived in Acadie for over ten years. He is involved in several areas of the arts and cultural life. Les Éditions Perce-Neige has published three collections by Langlois: *Mener du train* (2010), *La rue en eaux troubles* (2012), and *Les sentiments barbares* (2016).

[7] Georgette LeBlanc is the author of the poetic novels, *Alma* (winner of le Prix Félix Leclerc and le Prix Littéraire Antonine Maillet-Acadie-Vie), *Amédé* (winner of the Prix Émile-Ollivier poetry award) and *Prudent* (GG 2014 poetry shortlist). She was awarded the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia Masterworks Award in 2010. She is Canada's 8th Parliamentary Poet Laureate. Georgette LeBlanc lives in Moncton, New Brunswick. (A selection of LeBlanc's work was recently published in *The Fiddlehead*, Autumn 2019)

[8] Gérald Leblanc (1945-2005) was from Bouctouche, N.B. and studied at the Université de Moncton. Leblanc was a prominent literary figure and a cultural activist in Moncton. Poet, lyricist, editor, playwright, he also wrote a novel and many short texts for newspapers and magazines. Among the awards he received for his writing are the Estuaire des Terrasses Saint-Sulpice prize in 1994 for his collection *Complaintes du continent* (1993), the Pascal-Poirier Award of Excellence in Literature from the Government of New Brunswick in 1993, and the City of Moncton Literary Award for L'Extrême Frontière (1988).

[9] Herménégilde Chiasson is an iconic figure in Acadian art, society, and culture. His prolific body of work in literature, visual arts, film, and theatre includes over 30 plays and 50 books. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Governor General's Literary Award for Conversations, an Award of Excellence for film and the Pascal-Poirier Award of Excellence in Literature from the Government of New Brunswick, the Molson Prize, the Prix France-Acadie and Prix Éloizes (twice each), the Grand Prix International de poésie de Langue Française Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Prix quinquennal Antonine-Maillet-Acadie Vie, the Grand Prix de la francophonie canadienne. Born in Saint-Simon, N.B. in 1946, he lives in Grand-Barachois, Acadie, with Marcia Babineau, a leading figure in theatre.

[10] A poet and painter, Guy Arsenault was born in 1954 in Moncton. His collection *Acadie Rock* was published in 1973 by Éditions d'Acadie and is a landmark of Acadian urban poetry. In 1988, Michel Henry Éditeur published *Y'a toutes sortes de personnes* and Perce-Neige published *Jackpot de la pleine lune* in 1998. He also self-published a series of leaflets of poems and drawings. Recently, his daughter has assembled exhibitions of his artwork.

[11] Born in Saint-Anselme, N.B., in 1945, Raymond Guy LeBlanc is the author of *Cri de terre*, the first book published by Éditions d'Acadie when it opened in 1972. Since then, as well as working in film, television, radio, and for cultural organizations, including the Société des

Acadiens et des Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick. he has published *Archives de la présence* (2005) and *Empreintes* (2011) with Perce-Neige. In 1998 he received the Pascal-Poirier Award of Excellence in Literature.

[12] Ronald Léger was one of the most unique and least known Acadian poets. His playful and innovative approach to language was reminiscent of the experimental French writing group Oulipo; Léger once called himself "a rat who is building himself a labyrinth from which he is trying to escape." His works include *Roadkill à 30 kilomètres par seconde* (2000), *tachyAcadie* (2003), *Les poissons s'arrêtent* (2008), *Je friboule* (2018). Three years after his death, a performance and an issue of *Ancrages* (2016) were presented as a tribute to Léger: https://vimeo.com/201477101 and http://ancrages.ca/edition/no12-je-friboule-hommage-a-ronald-leger/

[13] Joannie Thomas lives and works as an actor, playwright, poet, and stilt walker in Moncton. She is the co-founder of Théâtre du Livre Ouvert and has performed in several plays produced by Théâtre l'Escaouette. Quatre pattes Catherine (Perce-Neige, 2016) is her first book.

[14] Born in Notre-Dame de Kent, Acadie, in 1954, Dyane Léger is a visual artist and a poet. Her first poetry collection, *Graines de fées* (1980) was both the first book published by Les Éditions Perce-Neige (1980) and the first poetry book published by a woman. For forty years, her painting and poetry have taken Léger around the Maritimes, to Louisiana, and to Europe, while remaining anchored in Notre-Dame de Kent and Moncton, the two New Brunswick homes where she shares her time. Her collections include *Sorcière de vent* (1983), *Les Anges en transit* (1992), *Comme un boxeur dans une cathédrale* (1996), *Le Dragon de la dernière heure* (1999), all published or co-published by Perce-Neige, and *L'incendiaire* (2008), a poetic epistolary collection co-written with Paul Savoie and published by Du Marais.

[15] Rose Després was born in Cocagne, in southeastern New Brunswick, in 1950. She has degrees in Literature and in Translation from the Université de Moncton. An actor, musician, performer, and poet, she has also taught creative writing and French language and worked or volunteered in cultural and community organizations, including *Éloizes* magazine and Éditions Perce-Neige.She has travelled extensively throughout North America as well as to Cuba, to Africa, and throughout Europe, and was part of a Canadian delegation which accompanied Governor General Adrienne Clarkson to Germany in 2001. Her first book, *Fièvre de nos mains*, was published by Les Éditions Perce-Neige in 1982, followed by *Requiem en saule pleureur* (1986), *Gymnastique pour un soir d'anguilles* (1996), *La Vie prodigieuse* (2000), which won the Antonine Maillet/Acadie Vie prize, *Si longtemps déjà* (2009), which won the Éloizes prize, (all published by Éditions Perce-Neige), and *Vraisemblable* (Sudbury, Prise de parole, 2013). She has also translated Phil Hall's *Killdeer* (*Le pluvier kildir*, Prise de parole, 2015) and Katherena Vermette's *River-Woman* (Femme-rivière, August 2019).

[16] Sébastien Bérubé was born in Saint-Quentin, N.B., and lives in Edmundston. A singer-songwriter and a community worker at Madawaska First Nation, he is the author of *Sous la boucane du moulin* (2015), *Là où les chemins de terre finissent* (2017), which was awarded the Antonine-Maillet-Acadie Vie prize in 2018, and *Maudire les Étoiles* (2019). Bérubé is continuing his postsecondary studies in literature.

[17] Serge Patrice Thibodeau was born in 1959 in Rivière-Verte, N.B., on the borders of Quebec and Maine. He spent time in other countries on numerous occasions while living in Montréal where, for approximately twenty years, he was actively involved in the Quebec literary community as well as being a passionate advocate for human rights. He has received many awards and honours for his work. A compulsive traveller and insatiable reader, a writer fascinated by history and archeology, he has been writing poetry for 40 years. A leading figure in the literary community of Moncton since 2005 and publisher at Éditions Perce-Neige, Thibodeau is the author of twenty books of poetry and prose, including two Governor General's Literary award-winners, *Le Cycle de Prague* (Éditions d'Acadie, 1992) and *Seul on est*

(Perce-Neige, 2007; English translation *One*, Goose Lane Editions,), and the first complete French translation of the famous John Winslow's *Journal at Grand-Pré*. His most recent poetry collection, published in 2017, is entitled *L'isle Haute: en marge de Grand-Pré.*

[18] An Acadian poet born in 1970, Jean-Philippe Raîche explores collective destiny, exile, drifting, and displacement in his work; the sense of being uprooted is synonymous with the human condition, and the lover's body is the only home and refuge. Perce-Neige published his *Une Lettre au bout du monde* in 2001, which brought him critical acclaim, and *Ne réveillez pas l'amour avant qu'elle ne le veuille* in 2007 (winner of two important awards in France, the Aliénor and the Louise-Labé prize). After living in Paris and working at the Canadian Cultural Centre there, he returned to Canada and now lives in Fredericton.

[19] *Manifeste Diasporeux*, co-written by Robichaud and Raîche, was performed at the Maison de la littérature in Québec in 2017, as part of the Manifeste Scalène, along with *L'Hymne*, by Sébastien Bérubé, and Voix Rurale, by Jonathan Roy.

[20] Jonathan Roy, *Savèches à fragmentation*, Moncton, Éditions Perce-Neige, 2019. (See more information in note 5)

[21] Originally from the Montréal area, Caroline Bélisle, born in 1992, initially entered the arts scene as a dancer and actor. She moved to Moncton to study at the Université de Moncton and completed a BA in Theatre in 2014; she then began studies at the National Theatre School. She has written many plays for children which have been performed at the Pays de la Sagouine, and she was awarded the Viola-Lèger prize for Tonic Tuesday, presented at a play-reading in 2015. She has been performing her poetry since 2015 and is currently working on both theatre and poetry projects.

[22] Luc-Antoine Chiasson was born on the island of Lamèque in New Brunswick in 1989 and lives in Montréal. A self-taught poet and visual artist, Chiasson also hosts poetry readings and literary events in the Montréal area. *Pour commencer, le sang*, his first book, was published in 2019.

[23] Lex Vienneau was born in Pointe-Alexandre, on the island of Lamèque, in 1991. She studied at Université Sainte-Anne, taking a course with Georgette LeBlanc, before doing her MA in Creative Writing in Ottawa. Both Northern and Maritime spaces inhabit her writing and life. In April 2019 she participated in the Prelude event, featuring emerging writers, at the Frye Festival. Her first book is *Roadkill*, published by Perce-Neige in 2019.

Émilie Turmel

L'Avenir À Qui

qui voit l'homme-rue
corps bivouac éventé dans le matin
les manches vissées aux poches de son manteau du surplus
ses doigts fanés fouillant la paille en-dessous
comme si la braise
comme si la vie pouvait encore jaillir
de ces nids avortés

qui remarque la femme-trottoir
ampoule éteinte à force
éteinte à la longue
alors qu'au ciel
une grue défigure l'horizon

qui entend sa plainte
une aile repliée
sans adresse de retour

qui regarde l'homme-vent malgré
le va-et-vient des bouteurs
vidangeant leur jabot
dans la gueule des oisillons criards
des passants borgnes écarquillés
s'égosillant pour des miettes
toujours plus de bruit oui
plus d'étincelles
peu importe lesquelles
celles de la démolition
de la mastication en règle
de cet édifice autrefois théâtre
autrefois église marché public
ou centre communautaire
puis squat

Whose Future *(Trans. Jo-Anne Elder)*

who sees the street-man
a stale camped-out body in the morning
hands pinned to pockets in his surplus coat
withered fingers rummaging in the straw underneath
as if an ember
as if life could still leap up
from these aborted nests

who notices the sidewalk-woman
a lamp dimmed by years of use
dimmed by wear and tear
while in the sky
a crane defaces the horizon

who hears the lament
a wing folded down
with no return address

who watches the wind-man in spite of
the comings and goings of bulldozers
emptying their crop
into the mouths of noisy nestlings
blind-eyed razor-sharp passersby
screeching for crumbs until they are blue in the face
always more noise than before yes
more sparks
wherever they come from
from demolitions
from regulation mastication
from this building once a theatre
once a church public market
or community centre
then squat

son squat
à lui
à elle

⋆

sur le chantier
chaque bouchée de gravats
râle sa cicatrice sur la terre
naguère refuge
bientôt glaise boue rouillée
jusqu'au fond de sa gorge grafignée de femme
jusqu'à l'âme maigrie de l'homme
silences de fer évincés
s'échauffant rouges
martelés dans leurs tripes
et ça brûle
comme une condamnation
ça leur coule au bord
des rires

mais qui donc entend ces grelots colériques
déblayés du revers ganté de l'économie

qui écoute l'homme-rage
dont on mange jusqu'à la marge même
la femme-statufiée de tout son mutisme
plantée là
où elle n'est plus à sa place

sur le chantier
sans relâche on s'acharne à cautériser la plaie
scalpe honteux de l'urbain trop urbain

their squat
his
hers

⋆

on the construction site
each mouthful of rubble
grumbles its scar along the ground
a refuge in the past
soon to be rusted clay mud
deep in the scuffed throat of the woman
deep in the scrawny soul of the man
cast-off silences of steel
fiery red
guts hammer-struck
and it burns
like a condemnation
it spills over the rim
of ridicule

but who then hears the wrathful ringing bells
swept away by the back of the gloved hand of the economy

who listens to the rage-man
dined on until only a sliver is left in the margins
the statuefied-woman in all her mute motionlessness
planted in a place
where she is no longer rooted

on the construction site
they relentlessly cauterize the wound
the shameful scalping of the urban, all too urban

pancarte blanche sur sol gris
les condos à venir

⋆

condos à vendre

comblez le vide avec
des comptoirs de quartz et
des bains podium
plastique porcelaine teck toc
et des lustres et des lustres de cristal
sous des plafonds de
dix pieds de haut
douze
quatorze
pour laisser gonfler l'égo
l'inflation oblige

les mains au fond des poches
les poings en cendres
l'homme fouille la paille froide

la femme cherche en vain la clé
du paradis

j'aimerais les inviter
dans ma maison de papier
les jours de pluie et de grand vent
j'aurai pour eux des oiseaux fous
et des poèmes sur le feu

white billboard on gray ground
condos to come

⋆

condos for sale

fill the emptiness with
quartz counters and
podium bathtubs
plastic porcelain tech teak
and crystal glosses and glosses
under ceilings
ten feet tall
twelve
fourteen
high enough for the lofty ego
that's what inflation does

hands plunged into pockets
ash-ridden fists
the man rummages through cold straw

the woman searches in vain for the key
to paradise

I'd like to invite them
into my paper house
on rainy and windy days
I would offer them wild birds
and poems simmering on the stove

Gabriel Robichaud

Améripoésie

Je t'écris pour ceux qui doutent
J'écris pour que tout soit possible
J'écris tes routes tes culs de sac tes terrains
Je t'écris parce que je sais ce que t'es pas

T'es pas une épopée
Un continent
Une étendue
Un pays
Une province
Pas même un peuple

T'es pas une colonie française délaissée
Vendue perdue libérée
T'as pas le monopole du nord du centre du sud

Plus souvent qu'autrement
Je te vois en façon d'être
En manière de pensée
En irrévérence devant la majorité
En fous rires qui s'expliquent pas
En veillées qui finissent tard
Entre la chaleur d'un toit ou des corps

Tu m'habites comme les chemins qui mènent chez nous
Ceux que je vois pu
Que je connais par cœur
Jusqu'à les oublier
Les chemins à prendre ou qui te prennent malgré toi
Ceux qui mènent à bon port
Ancrés dans une mémoire qui dépasse le souvenir

Ameripoetry *(Trans. Jo-Anne Elder)*

I write to you for those who doubt
I write so everything can be possible
I write your roads your dead ends your fields
I write because I know what you aren't

You're not an epic
Continent
Expanse
Country
Province
Not even a people

You are not an abandoned French colony
Sold lost freed
You have no monopoly on
the north the centre the south

More often than not
I see you as a way of being
A way of thinking
Of showing irreverence to the majority
Of bursting into giggles inexplicably
A way of staying up too late together
Between hot roofs and bodies

You live in me like the roads that lead me home
Roads I no longer see
Roads I know by heart
familiar and forgotten
Roads you take or that take you in spite of yourself
Roads that take you to safe harbour
Anchored in memory that goes beyond remembrances

Je t'écris
Parce que depuis qu'on me parle de toi
Je sais pas plus ce que t'es

T'es le territoire
Qui crie sur les toits
Sa liberté de dire ce qui dérange
À condition de parler
Tout bas

T'es les Amériques de cuisines de cafés de tavernes
Aux coudes qui se lèvent
Plus facilement
Que les idées les poings les révolutions
Sauf pour quelques majeurs anonymes

Il m'arrive de rêver d'Amériques
Où le français ne s'enseigne pas qu'en prétexte
Dans le fond d'une classe
Au nom d'un *sois fier parce que*
Entre les leçons d'apprentissage
Entre la honte des accents
Le poids du passé trop bien écrit
Au lieu de prêter des plumes
D'écrire les débuts d'un mot
Qui poursuit l'histoire

Je t'écris pour ceux
Qui assassinent les canards
À coups de morts annoncées
Pour mieux voler de leurs propres ailes

I write you
Because ever since people told me about you
I no longer know what you are

You are the territory
That shouts from rooftops
Proclaims the freedom to say what is bothering you
As long as you speak
Quietly

You are the Americas of kitchens cafés taverns
Of people who raise glasses
More easily
Than voices fists revolutions
Except for some majors who are anonymous

Sometimes I dream of Americas
Where French is taught as more than a pretext
In the back of classrooms
In the name of *be proud because*
Between lesson plans
Between the shame of accents
The weight of a past too well written
Instead of putting pen to paper
Of writing the first letter of a word
That moves the story forward

I write to you for those
Who turn us into dead ducks
Each shot a death foretold
So they can leave their nests and take wing

Je t'écris pour te dire
Que leurs envolées
Se peuvent encore
Parce que leurs papiers se tachent d'encre
Parce que leurs yeux s'obstinent à lire
Et que leurs feuilles envoyées au vent
Ne sont pas le sursis
De ce qui est fait pour tomber

Je t'écris pour l'ignorance
Parce qu'Antoine de Lamothe-Cadillac a fondé Détroit
Parce que Joe Dassin est né à New York
Pour dire que Jim Morrison
An American poet
Est enterré à Paris
Et que Baudelaire a traduit Edgar Allan Poe

Je t'écris pour dire
Que Nina Simone chante Ne me quitte pas
Dans la langue de Brel
Que Billie Holiday a chanté Piaf traduit
Qu'on organise la sauvegarde du Paw Paw French au Missouri
Que les racines de Beyoncé sont acadiennes
Et que Gabrielle Roy est de Saint-Boniface
Je veux te dire que j'ai rêvé ton centre et ton sud
À travers *Les mystérieuses cités d'or*
Sans y avoir mis le pied
Encore

Que j'ai lu le Chili exilé de Luis Sepúlveda
La Colombie réaliste magique de García Márquez
Dans la langue de Molière

I write to you to tell you
That their flights
Are possible still
Because their papers are stained with ink
Because their eyes insist on reading
And their pages scattered to the wind
Are not a reprieve
For what is meant to fall

I write to you for ignorance
Because Antoine de Lamothe-Cadillac founded Detroit
Because Joe Dassin was born in New York
To say that Jim Morrison
An American poet
Was buried in Paris
And that Baudelaire translated Edgar Allan Poe

I write to you to say
That Nina Simone sang *Ne me quitte pas*
In French like Jacques Brel
That Billie Holiday sang Édith Piaf in English
That they're rescuing Paw Paw French in Missouri
That Beyoncé has Acadian roots
That Gabrielle Roy is from Saint Boniface
I want to tell you that I dreamed your centre your south
By watching *Les mystérieuses cités d'or*
Without ever setting foot there
To this day

That I read Luis Sepúlveda's Chilean exile
And the Colombian magic realism of García Márquez
In French translation

Je veux te dire que je t'écris en français
Parce qu'en anglais
Embrasser la langue de l'autre
Se dit *Frenchkiss*

Je ne t'écris pas pour te savoir
Je t'écris parce que je te crois

Je t'écris parce que je vois la francophonie des amériques vivre de deux choses

Ce qu'elle fait au monde
Ce que le monde en fait

I want to tell you that I write in French
Because in English
When I embrace my mother tongue
It's called a French kiss

I don't write to you to know you
I write to you because I believe you

I write to you because I see francophones in the americas living on two things

What they do to people
What their people do to them

Le Beat existe

Le Beat existe
Le temps
Le rythme
Le battement
La pulsation
L'urgence
Mais la génération non
Je te parle de quelque chose qui n'existe pas
De quelque chose d'inventé
Qui s'est créé tout seul
De quelque chose qui s'est pas regardé mais qui s'est promis de vivre
Je te parle des routes sans fin du monde
Je te parle d'une terre qui n'était pas plate
Je te parle de l'effréné qui te rentre dans les veines
Qui couche dans ton lit
Qui sait rien du lendemain
Je te parle de ce qui brule
Qui te rentre dans les veines
Qui réchauffe quand tu dors sous la pluie dans un canal près d'un pont sur le bord d'une route avec l'espoir qu'un conducteur saoul se trompe pas de sortie pour anéantir tes chances de réveil de te rendre à bon port
Je te parle de *diners* d'avoir faim pour de vrai d'avoir soif sans fond de vrais mensonges de promesses pas tenues pis de rêves qui sont mieux en rêves

Je te parle de ton pouce comme permis de conduire
De lendemain de veilles qui ont duré trois jours
D'enfants sans père sans mère personne à tuer tout à vivre
Je te parle d'histoires tellement vraies que tu croirais pas qu'elles se puissent
Du jazz dans tes oreilles avant que ce soit snob
Des trous dans tes jeans avant que ce soit cool

The Beat Exists *(Trans. Jo-Anne Elder)*

The Beat exists
The tempo
The rhythm
The drum
The pulse
The urgency
But not the generation
I'm talking about something that doesn't exist
About something invented
Something that created itself
Something that didn't look at itself but promised itself to live
I'm talking about roads without end and no ends of the earth
I'm talking about an earth that isn't flat
I'm talking about the frenzy that rushes into your veins
That lies down in your bed
That knows nothing about tomorrow
I'm talking about what is burning
What heats up your veins
What warms you when you sleep in the rain in a canal near a bridge on the side of a road with the hope that a drunk driver won't turn off at the wrong exit to extinguish your chances of waking up of getting to safe harbour
I'm talking about diners being hungry for real being thirsty a bottomless thirst about real lies about promises not kept about dreams better kept as dreams

I'm talking about your thumb as a driver's licence
About morning-afters that lasted three days
About children without fathers without mothers without anyone to kill with everything to live for
I'm talking stories that are so real you won't believe they're possible
About jazz in your ears before it was snobby
Holes in your jeans before it was cool

Ta vie trimballée dans un sac à dos
De rêveurs plus tôt que du rêve
De l'Amérique qui n'était peut-être pas si *great* que ça du temps qu'elle était *great*
Je te parle de l'*again* avant l'*again*
Sans président

Je te parle de Denver de Frisco de New York
D'autobus de motel crasses d'hôtels pas cher
De bouteilles de portos à 35 cents
De trois jours à survivre avec 10 piasses
C'est tu ça
La vie que tu veux

Your life lugged around in a knapsack
Dreamers rather than the dream
About America that maybe wasn't ever that great
I'm talking about the again before the again
Before the president

I'm talking about Denver Frisco New York
The buses the seedy motels the cheap hotels
About 35-cent bottles of port
Three days with 10 bucks to live on
Is that
The life you want

Billy-Ray Belcourt
looks forward...



Introduction

Billy Ray-Belcourt

The doorknob of language blisters, but we grab it anyway (Bird). Silence is a house we clutter with the social music of our injurability. Poetry is a kind of sound, a frequency that we, like reality in Anne Carson's key formulation, have to attune to. What I know: Noise is the subjectivity of the poet. So much of what makes poetry possible is the ability to unhear the inherited sounds of normal life. Poetry, then, is less about a substance one could be said to have and more so a name for the action of losing everything so as to devote oneself to the makeshift and immaterial. All poets are metaphysicians in the sense that we are after something with little basis in the present. We aren't fetishists of the present, and so we relish in the frenzy of the not-yet and the what-is-to-come. What follows is thus a cacophony of songs set in the registers of the melancholic, the elegiac, the revelatory, and the laudatory. The poets I've assembled here work from the felt knowledge that we are all pulsating inside the indeterminacies of "trying to live in the world" (Byrne). Byrne, Twist, Boan, Bird, and Nicholson all harbour ambivalent relations to language, as they each mine histories — personal and/or structural — that illuminate the poverties of received notions of what it is to exist inside modernity; Byrne goes so far as to say "nothing good could come from [it]." Twist longs "for the loving song of motherhood," while Nicholson finds "more joy than language can risk." Bird makes waste of "old eyes" and adorns "birch bark" instead. Boan stands inside the church of McDonalds and lets "grief memory" flash and blast. Ground, however, slows down and aims her attention on the particularities of berries and finds there a whole cosmos, a "moving world." In the end, what these poets co-engineer is "a moving group luminosity" (Nicholson), one that reminds us we are never done with the labour of listening anew!

Section cover image "Call of the Raven" by Sophie Hamidovic (digital image, 2019).

Brandi Bird

Love Letter to Southern Authority

Southern Authority means no father,
no mother. Means nobody. A permanent ward,
fauna in the background, a deer, a moose,
myself. I stand at the door of a new home
and don't knock. Beyond it are fields
to graze in, trees to rub my soft flesh
against, shake off the flies. I don't know
what exists inside the home, the bones of it
slimy and white like teeth, the foundation
growing concrete like skin over
a burn. The doorknob blisters when I grab
it. I choose to walk away, hands at my sides,
afraid to touch even a crocus. Everything I grasp
recoils, transforms. Every novelty is terrifying
and I am still so young. Birds fly towards
me, circle and dive. They pluck out my old eyes
and replace them with birch bark. I live for a hundred
years like this. No one can tell the difference.

The Selkirk Journal Archive

My namesake is deep red,
burgundy, brandy like rust
on his lips. In Red Rose tea, in a white
Pyrex glass, at the Lord Selkirk
Hotel we simply call God. He
and his friend, natives, like spruce
trees, have skin hard as bark. Both are arrested
drinking off-reserve. Caged, kept in the drunk
tank overnight with handcuffs that bit like barn
cats. Off-reserve is a plot of land in East
Selkirk. He fishes beside it with a silver and bone
flask in his shirt. His hands smell like bait
and tobacco and my grandma's
perfume. He ownerships, sells fish
wholesale and raises seventeen kids
with the profits. Drinking off-reserve,
he and his friend, natives, like pickerel, alcohol
to numb the currents of the Red River. His blue
boat, his brown nets, his red skin, all flattened
in the prairie sun. Sheen of sweat, a hangover,
he wakes up in the clothes he wore
yesterday. Twenty-two dollars and thirty cents
to the judicial body, for the burn through his body,
the privilege to lose himself like I'm lost. We live
in each other's veins. I feel it in a shot
of whiskey, the tree his ashes are spread
under. Today the tree is on private property. I sing
A Mansion on the Hill. I ownership and drink
at the Lord. I ownership and trespass.

Selina Boan

Campaign for My Body's Mess

last night, McDonalds
was my saviour i drank
water like i was in gridlock
an accident slowing everyone
on the highway radios turned
on to flashes of grief
memory blasts itself
through me it is a pillow
in a window display
that says *leave*
your shit somewhere
else it crowds the river
near my kid home
where mom set fire
to sap as a girl
dime sized leaks
from the tree just enough
to make light run
towards the ground
i drink till memory
stops forming father
stops messaging prays
every night to Jesus
in gratitude for sobriety
too easy some days
becoming the things
i fear i'm too soft
for the internet
have the urge to put
my head on the shoulders
of bus strangers daddy
issues a collection
of keychains i've been

adding to rabbit fur puffs
beaded strawberries
on a metal ring i wear
headphones to watch porn
sound maxed in elevators
i pick my nose scratch
time off the walls
in the form of glossed
paint faux wood
inside this grief
forest guts are a deer
hung sliced
in my grandpa's shed
a pool of blood on the concrete
of this day i found
a piece of grass
maskosiy inside the X-ray
of nisit like a fleck
of green glitter shining
i pressed a button
and a hamburger
appeared

Mackenzie Ground

berry talk

dedicated to ninohkom

take a spoonful of berries
scoop love
saskatoons of nehiyawewin misâskwatômina
medicine maskekosihk
ninohkom
the indents of her fingers
held in shape

you have a cosmos on your tongue
        in your mouth
sustenance and theory
the breath of salmon
and wild mint
the cure
of my limited understanding

think about berries
their role in ceremony
seen on walks
picked in gardens
        along fences
the research
the pause
        in a moving world

berries
        juicy worlds
a cosmos
        of land talk
        on your tongue

berry talk

Jake Byrne

A Bouquet Of Ketchup-Flavoured Roses

It is sixteen Celsius in February
I am screaming
Oak outside my window
Budded three months early
Supernovae
So early it won't flower
Not great for anyone who enjoys
Being alive
Here's a hundred
Take me anywhere
Just drive
Knowledge works in secret
And its works are sprouting thorns
My boyfriend texts me
Now that Jessica's taken over the accounts
Now that Jessica's doing his job or whatever
He is allowed to die
At night I try to sleep but can't
My boyfriend texts me to clarify
He doesn't want to kill himself
Just wants to go for a hike along the lakeshore
Until he turns into sun-dappled fog
Until he isn't anymore
And while it's true
That all cold people will look you dead
In eye and mutter
Actually, it's that I care too much...
But it is
I do
It is not his fault
He was conceived in winter
His blood
Gelid and thick

Has just begun
To flow in the sun
See I never needed
The actual bomb
The bomb was an idea we deserved all this
And because the idea
Prefigured the bomb
The idea of the bomb and the work of the bomb
Are one
I want spring to bust
Open onto me like fistfuls of girls
In yellow dresses
Girls
Drooling hot blood
From full lips
A bouquet of ketchup Flavoured roses Made of Doritos
Wish I made that up
Earthlings
You are caught in
A vast and inscrutable system
Beyond your control
My certitude
The world
Doesn't have twenty more good years in it
Maybe not even ten
Has perversely
Transmuted into
Instagram tasteful nudes
Follicle transplants
Deadlifts
I need you to know that I know
But also
I've never looked hotter

Not hot as six times the surface
Of the sun
Mind you
Not hot as the hypocentre of a nuclear weapon
Not hot as the climate that is causing the oak to bud in February
Why did I
Think anyone would care to read my boring thoughts
I dunno
Shoutout to life
And the fact of a mountain
Wow
Beautiful as the curve
Of my seatmate's ass in white Calvins
Peeking out the scoop of his jeans
On this train I ride to get to work
Wow
Maybe somebody would want to read that
If any readers are left alive
And I'm asking myself
Is anybody really sick
Illness in the body is symptomatic in you
Illness in the mind is symptomatic in others
Illness in the world just *is*
That's the fun truth adults learn
Under the rainbow at childhood's end
But I'm like, sooo not there
I'm like, still at the club, bitch
Swishy
I am prone slurping
Mauve into linen
He comes bearing razor blades
As a gift I ask myself
Is anybody really sick

Like Charles
Or my Dad
Or is it the world's sickness coming to light in themselves?
But then my boyfriend casually texts me
He doesn't want to die
Just wants to go to sleep one day
And I remember that
Yes
People in this world are sickened
Sick with the idea of the bomb
Fevered with ideas
That boil into gases
That propel into
Soft and mutable bodies
I love you. Please stay alive
See modernity is only the feeling
Nothing good could come from this
See I never needed The actual bomb
Balloons are Nature's flowers
Apotheosis
Kia Sorrento
Plastics concatenate
Packages fulgurate
Ashtrays coruscate
Neonicotinoids dazzle
Methane clathrates
Livers fulminate
There's an abscess in the throat of the world
A boon that begs for a balm
I was having
Too much fun
Panic grass and feverfew
I was just trying to live in the world

Arielle Twist

Gravel

I asked the creator to make me soft
told them I was trying to prove that I
was worthy of a love that was forgiving,
a love worth losing, while losing myself.
I begged the sky to bring him back to me
this man with brown eyes and a wide smile
but all they gave me was rain, as he roamed
the streets, concrete and sea consuming us
both here. And still, I am finding gravel behind
my eyes, coughing up oceans like my body is
trying to make an island for us to exist again,
or maybe for us to exist for the first time.

Abdominal

We are of filth, fire of the matriarch
this holy prarie fucking which birthed
us between the fields of our mother's thighs.
I long for the loving song of motherhood,
with a stretched out womb, shaped with the kicking
of kin and cries from the abyss of my abdomen
Which I will never know.

How do I cope with the nothingness that comes
with womahood now, lacerations all over body,
begging to know a life untouched by dis-ease,
comfort could be all consuming, I just wish
it would devour me too.

Cecily Nicholson

in haptic concert

debris disk, circumstellar disk of dust debris
orbits around a star sometimes as a ring
a glint in rotation that catches my eye

sometimes they're satellites
or broken rockets in the dusty way

the tide rolls in over this fire ring of rocks
sparks from the hemlock flat moss driftwood
smoke rise ashore this lake of sturgeon
no one will stop you from serving
dinners outside camp

as service gains a perimeter niche
species gains opportunity — smaller dinosaurs
became birds — herein broke-beaked
crows of Edmonds (community centre)
wonderland, heave stories for no-bodies

in caws, rattle and click is a fevery lift
so what, so that we keep lifting
look where I been

of passage and of industry
busted hull skulls sunk that ship class
of sister pirates got the haunt on
bare-handed crunk to shore as wakes
troll the coast line sprite them
ghosts pull up the people

from the dark of the water blurs
the body with feeling wells against the eyes
nothing to keep me from my word's

failure to disperse detention, arrest or exposure
to chemical, lethal or less-lethal munitions
I find more joy than language can risk
one arm always to a ship
guardians carry the route

carrying through a number of tasks
making most of the holds and perimeters
fielding runoff and calving glaciers
saturday night neutrinos flow through
northern star clusters

from or to a black hole via
the heavy water in which we float
our hair like protofeathers, cilia geo-fabric
unfurled forms of stellar associations move
in luminosity, energy per unit of time
sensing the rise, reaching out, there is more
wreckage — furies regard the profound
absence of a *black woman artist*

contralto and jazz sax pre-80s solo
pronouns dissociative night after night
fear-faced — partial futurity, bodily
ever-astral round these affirming flames
time and *now*

souther blood moon throws off electrons
velocity shears, tectonic stress, tidal wills

Rowan McCandless

looks forward...



Introduction

Rowan McCandless

To be a part of *The Fiddlehead*'s seventy-fifth-anniversary issue is truly an honour. To have journeyed with these writers as they shaped and moulded their stories was equally a privilege. Within different themes and forms of story-telling, both pieces in their unique way look forward to the future.

In "Married Poly Bi-Femme Operating System Manual," Nicole Breit presents us with an essay that thoughtfully marries form with content. This essay, written as a system manual, delves into the past as more than a means to embrace her partner, but also as a way to identify the queer self honestly, with all its complexity and contradictions. Intended as a future-proofing document, defined on paper are many small truths. Information is given for "current and future users" to know what they're getting if they want to "integrate and present self authentically, compassionately and with honesty, as a married poly bi-femme.

"All the Right Things" by Hege A. Jakobsen Lepri, masterfully weaves the personal with the political, as a first-time mother questions her ability to care for her newborn during a summer of blistering heat, record high temperatures, and the harrowing hum of air conditioners. The helplessness and anxiety she feels as a mother attempting to breastfeed her baby successfully mirrors her sense of powerlessness in raising a child within the real-life challenges brought about by the climate crisis. How does one look forward with hope when the future, when life itself, appears so fragile and precarious?

Section cover image "Error" by Sophie Hamidovic (digital image, 2019).

All the Right Things

Hege A. Jakobsen Lepri

The fights about the AC had started long before the baby was born — but they had escalated as the summer heat kept building with no relief in sight. They didn't yell anymore — because of the baby, so when they had words, they were whispered and carefully chosen.

"But it's the hottest summer this century," he'd say.

"Exactly," she'd reply, "that's exactly why it's time to stop using it."

How could she be the only one feeling the weight of it all. To him bringing the baby into the house was like having a new gadget, something to play with for a while and then put away until next time.

It gnawed at her, the responsibility. She did her best, but how could she protect it from all the damage already present in the world? She felt ashamed at how she'd lulled herself into the comfortable numbness of pregnancy, padded on all sides by softness, sleepiness and new body sensations. In the weeks since she returned home, she had regained her senses. She could do without AC — she couldn't stop climate change by herself, but she'd limit her emissions as far as she could.

They didn't really need cooling anyway. They had a north-facing backyard. Even when the heat was at its worst, there was usually enough shade and air under the large maple to tide them over to sundown. Nights were hot, but with all windows open and no clothes on, they did sleep. She no longer had to wear a bra now that her breasts had stopped leaking. Every bit helped. If it got unbearable, she could retreat to the cold darkness of the basement.

It was afternoon, and she was in her usual spot under the maple, holding her newborn, when she first saw it. The baby had been sleeping for more than three hours, and she was nudging him to wake up. The sun filtered through the maple leaves on and off, projecting random patterns of shade and low sun on her arms, so at first, she thought the grey area in the centre of the baby's head was just that: the sun playing with the leaves before sundown.

When she shifted him to her left arm, there were the first tell-tale signs of him waking up, the shiver in the upper lip, the one eye struggling to open. But the grey area was still there, even more evident now.

The *fontanelle*, it was called, the gap where the skull was still immature and

open. It would eventually be welded together by time and bone growth by the middle of its second year. In the meantime, there was this vulnerability, this incompleteness.

She let her index finger slide across the skull, tracing the bones from left to right, back to front. Then she let her finger rest right on top to gauge the depression. There was no doubt — where there had been a flat, taut plain, today there was a valley, as if something on the inside was pulling on it.

For a moment, everything was quiet, even inside her head, but then the sudden loud growl from the neighbour's AC broke the silence. A squirrel in the tree above her was startled and jumped off a branch to the garden shed. The baby let out a whimper. Automatically, she lifted her T-shirt, rolled her nipple between her fore-and index finger and helped him latch on.

As usual, the baby kept losing his attachment to the breast, and she had to relatch him several times, but her attention remained on that point in the middle of his head. It didn't heave and drop the way it had been doing for the past six weeks. Even as she touched his toes and tapped his arms, her eyes didn't stray from his head.

"Stimulate him enough to keep him awake during feedings," the lactation consultant had said during her last visit. "Tickle him, even pinch him a bit under his feet. It's important he gets the hindmilk."

In the days since, she tickled and pinched and tapped and stroked and nipped while he nursed. By the time he finished, they were both exhausted.

She knew about hindmilk — the fatter milk, which only came out once the breast was less full. Breastfeeding Gold, the consultant called it — that's what would calm the baby, make it put on more weight, eventually sleep longer during the night, though the sleep part was no longer a sign of success. He slept well, but when the weight gain started to slump, she had to set the alarm at night to make sure he ate enough. Now, night or day didn't make a difference, the nursing schedule was the same. At first, her husband was bothered, but he adapted. He took the alarm as his cue to go and spend the rest of the night in the basement. "It's not like I'm of much help as long as you breastfeed," he said. Then, as if one excuse wasn't enough, he added, "Someone has to work in the morning."

She really didn't mind. With her husband gone, she put the bassinet in the bed beside her, making her routine a little easier.

⋆

A slight breeze ran through the back yard, she could hear the rustling of the too-dry leaves of the trees, and the slight cooling made her notice the spots of

sweat in her armpits. Carefully she deposited the baby in the bassinet, hoping she'd have time for a long shower before the next round. She had almost reached the kitchen door when the neighbours' AC jolted back into action. The cement block around it reverberated, and there was a slight screech from some steel component as it started spewing out hot air again. *Fuck, they weren't even at home, and yet it was working at full throttle.*

The baby moaned, not yet awake, but not fully asleep either. Rocking it helped sometimes, so she moved the basket back and forth, first slowly then faster. Just as she felt it was working, she must have used too much force, and the baby hit the side of the bassinet. This time it cried for real. She put down the basket to reassess, and then from out of nothing, a sudden urge to bang her right fist against the tall wooden fence separating her from the neighbours' yard. There was no one around to hear, neither that nor the *Motherfuckers* she yelled.

⋆

She was still dripping wet from her shower when she called the lactation consultant. While she waited for Maya to respond, she combed her hair with her left hand. It felt knotty and coarse. Maybe, she had forgotten the conditioner.

Maya had been her good fairy for the first few weeks, calming her anxieties, praising her efforts. She repeated the mantra: *Your breasts are programmed to do this,* and *with the right kind of support, almost all women can breastfeed.*

Despite her efforts, the baby put on only one or two ounces a week. The cute rolls of fat on the upper thighs and wrists didn't appear, and even though her words were the same, Maya's advice now sounded ominous.

"How are you guys doing?" Maya said. She managed to sound genuinely interested every time. She probably had to have that gift in her line of work.

She was expecting Maya's usual encouragement, telling her to relax; she just needed to be patient. But the pause on Maya's end after she told her about the change in the fontanelle was long enough for most of the drops to dry off her body and sweat to breakout on her forehead.

"I'm sure it's not serious," Maya said, "but we may need some new strategies."

Then she went back to her regular script, *how long did he nurse, when was his last feeding, how many diapers has he wet today.*

The last question startled her. She had forgotten to count that with all the pinching and tapping she had added to their schedule. She paused, then made up an answer, three, not knowing what Maya was expecting.

She didn't know if that's what changed Maya's standard ending to the con-

sultation, or if it was what she'd told her before, but either way, Maya asked if it would be OK to come over and have a look, and would she be home in one hour.

She lay flat on the bed, naked except for the towel around her hair. She tried to interest him in her body, pulled her nipple close to his mouth, but he barely reacted. Then she just lay there until she heard the knock on the door and she had to scramble to find a sundress to pull over her head.

They usually met in the living room downstairs, but she had left the baby on the bed, so Maya followed her upstairs.

"Whoa, it's hot up here," Maya said as the wall of heat hit them at the top of the stairs.

"There's usually more of a breeze," she said.

Maya didn't reply. They walked around mounds of dirty clothes on the bedroom floor. She opened her mouth to offer some excuse, but Maya spoke first.

"In this kind of heat, they get dehydrated easily," she said.

Maya took him in her arms, and he let out a sigh.

You're a bit drowsy, aren't you? Let us take you downstairs and see if we can see those beautiful eyes open. Coo-coo-roo! Come on, baby boy.

She pushed the laundry piles into one line by the wall when Maya and the baby left the room. She had to start at least one load before her husband came home.

She pulled some iced tea from the fridge and offered it to Maya.

"You sit down and try to stir him awake," Maya said, taking two glasses from the cabinet.

The iced tea was too bitter, but they both drank it up in a few sips. The baby was still lethargic. Maya ran the tap and filled the glass again. She dipped her fingers in it and shook the drops onto the baby's head. There was a slight movement, but he didn't open his eyes. Maya tried again, this time she used the trick of opening his mouth wide enough to cover the whole areola. He latched on and sucked a few times but then lost interest.

"OK, so he's a bit dehydrated. We'll need to try something new. You'll need to supplement for a few days, and then we can try to return to only breastmilk again."

She was waiting for Maya to call her "hon" or "sweetie," but all she cared about was the baby. Maya had pulled out her scale with the white cloth and a plastic bag with some tubes or probes.

The tears had reached her lip before Maya turned around.

"Sweetie, it isn't easy, but it's only for a few days. I'll show you how to use the Supplemental Nursing System."

She handed her a tissue. "You did all the right things, but sometimes things don't go according to plan. Blow your nose and dry your eyes. Baby still needs you."

★

Afterwards, things happened fast. Maya boiled water for the non-Nestlé formula. "That I couldn't do," she said, "There's nothing wrong with formula when necessary, but Nestlé will never have us."

Maya's hands moved quickly. The bottle was placed on her shoulder, the feeding tube attached to her nipple, and while Maya worked on keeping the baby awake, she just sat there with the baby in her lap and watched the drops of foreign milk slide down her breast and into the baby's mouth. The baby sucked from time to time, but not often enough to bring much of her own milk forward.

When they were done, she watched Maya write down what she had been saying: repeat this every two hours, just until he's rehydrated. Two-point five ounces of formula. If he doesn't wet at least five diapers, increase the dose. They were almost done when her husband arrived home.

"Moooom! Baaaby!" he yelled from the front door. For some reason, they had stopped using names when the baby was born. Now they were just roles, titles.

"Here, Dad, in the kitchen," she replied.

He had only seen Maya twice before, but if he was surprised to find her there now, he didn't show it.

"How are my favourite people?" he said without reading the room.

After a short silence, even though he had not directed the question at her, Maya said, "Everybody's just doing their best for this little darling."

The kitchen felt crowded. Maya knew it and started to pack her things.

"This should tide you over to tomorrow, so no need to go shopping tonight. I'll call you in the morning," she said.

★

They ordered Indian and ate it in the basement.

She explained Maya's notes. The rehydration. Setting the alarm more frequently.

He held the baby, and from where she stood, it looked peaceful. There was a spot of brown curry on the baby's arm and another one on her husband's beard.

"You know, if it's formula, I could let you sleep through a feeding or two, let you rest some."

"I still want to breastfeed," she said, "So I need to use the SNS."

"You can't breastfeed if you collapse," he said. "I'm just trying to help."

He took out the garbage while she prepared for a new feeding. While she waited for the formula to cool, she examined the baby's head. There seemed to be no difference from the afternoon, but the light in the kitchen was different from the sun outside.

She pinched the soles of his feet the whole time he was feeding, and he seemed to be sucking more eagerly. For the first time in a long while, he spat up a bit of milk when she burped him. It stuck to her dress. After she put him down, she smelled it. The scent was different. She could tell it wasn't her milk. But while all the breastfeeding websites said mother's milk was sweeter than formula, she wasn't convinced it was true for her.

She changed his diaper, it felt heavier this time, and rinsed him under the bathroom faucet. A rinse and a fresh onesie was better than nothing.

She tried to nurse again before putting him back to sleep, but his latch was lazy. Just as her milk started flowing, he fell asleep. She put the bassinet in the middle of her bed, the Mom and Dad bed, and said to herself she should go and pump, to keep production going. But she decided to rest a bit first, head on her pillow, next to the baby.

She woke up alone, in a dark, cool room — her head heavy with Armageddon-like dreams. Trees pulled out of the ground, wasps boring holes through her window and then finally a flight on the back of a diseased, angry polar bear.

It was dark, but she had no idea of the time. Her breasts were as swollen as they had been those first couple of weeks and cold as marble. The frosty air made her nipples hurt. She turned on the light, put on a T-shirt and walked downstairs.

Dad and baby were curled up on the couch in a way doctors advised against — tummy against tummy — and much too close. There was an empty feeding bottle on the coffee table. Had he bought that on his own, or did they have one in the house for emergencies? She couldn't recall buying it, but that was no guarantee.

She checked the baby's breathing and extracted it from Dad's grip. Then she took the bottle to the kitchen to wash and sterilize it. It was 3:15; she had slept for more than five hours. *What the fuck!* She turned off the AC.

While the bottle boiled, she took out her hand pump to relieve some of the tension in her breasts. She managed almost two ounces in a few minutes.

The last feeding had been before ten, so the next one would be in half an hour. Why hadn't he woken her? Did he just pretend he supported her?

When she woke up the baby, the supplement bottle was all her milk, and

she watched him latch on a little more eagerly than he had for a few days. But just as she thought she had done it, he suddenly started screaming. The bottle was still half full, and she knew she should insist. She put him against her shoulder to burp him. He kept wailing. How could Dad sleep through this?

After a loud burp and some yellowish vomit, he calmed down. He was wide awake for the first time in days. She should try to feed him the rest, but she just sat there, watching him, wondering what he was thinking.

When Dad woke up in the morning, she had fed the baby two more times, done three loads of laundry and changed two diapers.

He didn't look guilty and evidently thought all this activity was a good sign.

"See, if we turn on the AC a bit at night, we all sleep better, I couldn't even wake you when the alarm went off," he said. Mom didn't say anything, but at the end of her saying nothing, things started dawning on Dad.

She made coffee. They drank it in silence. When the feeding alarm went off, he was almost ready to leave.

"I could do this round," he said, "You could have a shower or whatever."

She said nothing, just prepared the formula, hooked herself up with the tube and placed the baby in her lap.

He touched the baby on his head but didn't say anything to the Mom as he left.

She tried to pump a little after the baby was done, but only a few drops came out. They were dense, creamy. If this was the liquid gold, there wasn't much of it.

She opened the kitchen door. The heat was already oppressive in the backyard. The neighbour's AC was running angrily, now on a schedule without breaks. She stood there for a while, her feet assessing the temperature of the flagstone. The sun had barely touched it, but yesterday's heat begat more heat and would continue doing so as long as humans kept ignoring the signs. She stood there until it felt like the skin under her feet would blister, then she closed the door and retreated to the basement with the baby. There was still a trace of air-conditioned chill left from last night. She shivered.

When she changed the baby again, on the old camping table in the middle of the room, the diaper was heavy the way it should be. The smell of his urine had changed. Thanks to the formula, she guessed. The sunken part of its head seemed less evident.

When he fell asleep, she should have taken a shower or taken a nap herself. But everything felt too late. She'd wait it out until later in the afternoon. She watched his eyelids flutter: REM sleep. What did babies dream about? They had no language to understand tomorrow or next month. Everything was

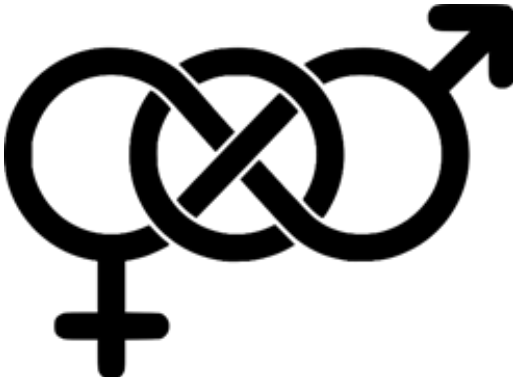
just a big now, an endless moment made of touch and smell and reflexes. Maybe they were better off. No worrying about tomorrow or ten years from now. She stayed next to him until he reached the next, deeper stage of sleep, then she went upstairs to the kitchen.

The meat cleaver was still in the kitchen drawer, even though they hadn't used it for years — a wedding gift from someone who didn't know her. It felt frigid against her hand.

She pulled her housecoat around herself, carefully, so she wouldn't drop the cleaver, and then she went upstairs to the back room, which was too hot to use in the summer with the sun deck above baking in the heat all day. She opened the window and measured the distance with her gaze. The neighbour's backyard spelled out in perfect rectangles filled with hostas and ornamental grasses.. This year's fast fashion. The roar from the AC seemed even louder from the study. A window to their wastefulness.

And then she threw the cleaver harder than she had thrown anything before — an angry launch and a flight and finally a clatter. It didn't quite hit bull's eye, but it was close. The cleaver had broken through the outer protection of the unit, hitting the fan blade, causing a screeching noise. For a while the clanking added to the roar of the AC, but then the handle of the cleaver got stuck and everything came to a halt.

The silent AC unit looked almost sad. The anger had burnt through her now, and she felt heavy and spent. She could sense the smell of rain from a distance and the strange rumblings of faraway thunder. If it rained, maybe they could get through this summer.



MARRIED POLY BI-FEMME OPERATING SYSTEM MANUAL

AUTHOR: NICOLE BREIT

CONTENTS

Description

1.0 Initial Setup

2.0 System Presets

3.0 Compatible Software

4.0 Error Messages

5.0 System Recovery Options

Summary Notes

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

One of the most valuable things we can learn from open sexual lifestyles is our programming is changeable. Starting by questioning all the ways we have been told our sexuality ought to be, we can begin to edit and rewrite our old tapes. So by breaking the rules, we both free and empower ourselves."
~ The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities

DESCRIPTION

This manual is intended to provide current and future end users of the Married Poly Bi-Femme operating system with info on best practices, common causes of service interruption, and system recovery solutions.

As the interface between the owner and her hardware, the MPBF OS performs a variety of key functions including:

· determining what types of software can be installed
· coordinating the applications running on the computer at any given time
· reporting error messages



WARNING!
Being married but poly, involved with a woman yet attracted to men, can create code complexity and critical selection problems. *See 4.0 Errors* and *5.0 System Recovery Options.*

1.0 INITIAL SETUP

This operating system was created in a Vancouver suburb in the early 1970s. Over four decades, embedded programs designed to control the system's operations have been re-coded and are still under development.

2.0 SYSTEM PRESETS

The following outdated presets have been overwritten to ensure the MPBF OS continuously evolves to meet the needs of all users.

2.1 Heteronormativity — Programming around gender and sexuality, rules about sex and marriage — dictated by the Catholic church, reinforced at home — shaped the owner's earliest ideas and expectations.

2.2 Heterosexuality — The six-year-old girl had no word to describe the quickening of her heart when the teacher with dark feathered hair, a button-up blouse, tweed skirt, and clicking beige heels smiled, moved in close, and bent over her desk. Perfume caught the girl in an invisible cloud. That magic, tingly feeling, an initiation. The girl assumed everyone — boys and girls, men and women — loved women. She didn't know there were rules for who you could love, and how.

2.3 Homophobia — The owner of this OS didn't know how to stand up for herself. But when someone called her gentle, blushing, non-conforming friend a fag, she knew exactly what to do, shaming the bully in front of her grade 8 French class. It was only much later she recognized the faint shadow of her own queer self in Curt, hidden so much further down below the surface.

2.4 Biphobia — In fifth grade, Chris asked if she knew Elton John was a bisexual — someone who liked sex with both men and women. Years later, the owner of the OS told her gay friend she thought she was falling for a woman. *Want to know what I think? You're straight.* Her friend's conviction that bisexuality didn't exist was confusing; it also felt hypocritical coming from a lesbian who slept with men. The idea that sexual identity had to do with politics, not desire — that she had to choose between two options — did not compute, causing an internal glitch. The owner of this operating system still does not understand binary code.

3.0 COMPATIBLE SOFTWARE

Some applications integrate more easily with the MPBF operating system than others. Alternate configurations are possible, but oversight is required to avoid system errors.

3.1 Queer + Non-Heteronormative Systems

— 3.1.1. She tells her pansexual friend that when more than one love takes up space in her heart the overflow is sweet, distracting, at times intense. Her friend admits she is attracted to everyone; it is a concerted effort for her *all the time* to not act on her desires in order to honour her agreement with her husband.

— 3.1.2. The owner of this operating system was drawn to her bi lover before she knew he was queer. He hadn't told anyone else; it was something he didn't share with her right away. She loved what was soft and gentle about him, an intriguing contrast to what was hard and angular about his body. Like her young friend, Curt, in this queer man she saw a reflection of herself.

— 3.1.3. When she tried to narrate her poly bi-femme experience, she felt deadlocked. How to write about sex with a woman that was authentic and erotic, yet didn't feel exploitative — or sex with a man without her story being read as straight? Her editor promised there was room in her book for the in-betweens. Assured her that bi sex is, in fact, a "queer arrangement that often gets misconstrued as 'straight' by both hets and queers."

— 3.1.4. Her queerness has taught her to ask rather than assume. This is what she wants for, and from, the ones she loves — to feel comfortable identifying so we can all be seen and known. Claiming her queerness has helped her to accept complexity, embrace contradictions, affirm her whole self. It has made her more conscious of others, and more self-aware.



WARNING!
Although this system was designed to handle multitasking, new integrations will increase emotional labour for all users.

3.2 Alternate Configurations

— 3.2.1 A percentage of creative, emotionally intelligent, socially-conscious men may be sexually appealing and highly compatible with the owner of this operating system; however,

legacy applications (i.e. monogamous anti-patterns) have been known to cause system interruptions.

— 3.2.2. Adapting to new components requires openness and trust, and takes time to coordinate with all users. While honest communication and clear boundaries improve functionality, positive long-term outcomes cannot be guaranteed. No hotfix is currently available.

— 3.2.3. Patriarchal programming and mainstreamed heteronormativity may cause some users to assume this OS will function according to the principles and values upheld by the straight, monogamous women they know.

— 3.2.4. Some would-be users assume same-sex relationships are casual and open by default. Example: One questioning female user, aware of the owner's exclusive relationship, tried to install personal software on her operating system without consent.

4.0 ERROR MESSAGES

From time to time, internal malfunctions related to the married-poly paradox (MPP) may occur. Proceeding without clear boundaries can cause the OS to freeze or spontaneously shut down.

4.1 Stop Errors

— *4.1.1. System crash*

A total system failure (also known as a "downfall") is caused when the hardware's central processing unit spontaneously overheats. Example: The owner of the OS registers a sudden spike in temperature when the creative, emotionally intelligent, socially-conscious man she has a crush on engages with her in an innocent, but charged, feedback loop. He wants to know more about the funny dream she had about him. Teases her a little, takes it a bit further. Asks: *Was it hot?*

COMMON ERROR CODES

- 5 — Access Denied
- 21 — Device Not Ready
- 32 — Sharing Violation

· 54 — Network Busy
· 258 — Timeout
· 302 — Disk Too Fragmented
· 314 — Disk Resources Exhausted
· 548 — Device Already Attached
· 569 — Synchronization Required
· 641 — System Shutdown

She isn't sure how to respond. Doesn't know where the lines are now between them; how much it is wise to reveal. Considers her intentions. His wife. What he may be thinking. Her wife. Her heart pounds. Heat climbs her neck and chest. The system shuts down; the loop restarts.

— *4.1.2. Automatic shutdown*
A bad line of code (e.g. a failure to recognize monogamous instructions) can cause a temporary system failure. The crash is a failsafe — a control function to prevent catastrophic degradation in the event of an operator error.

5.0 SYSTEM RECOVERY OPTIONS

Should the operating system experience a severe malfunction, these advanced troubleshooting techniques can help avoid prolonged downtime.



IMPORTANT!
The first step to repair a deadlock is to remove the *mutual exclusion* condition, eliminating exclusive access to a resource.

5.1. Exception handling
Problematic programming (i.e. encrypted messages that could harm another user) may be deleted at any time. Code can also be modified to avoid future disruptions to normal program execution.

5.2. Automated system recovery
The system recovery option allows users to return to a desired restoration point (i.e. a version prior to when an error occurred). Should this be required, the owner of the operating system will accept any user's desire to start over with humility and gratitude.

— *5.2.1. Safe mode operation*
Operating in safe mode can fix memory management issues (i.e. remembering priorities and agreements). Feelings for other users are recognized, as is the truth about the heart: it is not an app one can *force quit*. Useful observations can be made when emotions are regarded from a distance, with curiosity.

Example: The owner daydreams she and the creative, emotionally intelligent, socially-conscious married man browse the local music shop holding hands — something she and her wife rarely do because they've been leered, glared, and spat at for touching in public.

IMPORTANT!
Although no software is future proof, identifying coding problems,sharing updates, and addressing security vulnerabilities will improve functionality for all users.



5.3. Development of a help system
— *5.3.1. Request for supporting documentation*
The owner of the MPBF OS invites users to draft their own manuals to improve the shared user experience.

SUMMARY NOTES

The owner of this operating system has taken great care to

· define her sexual identity on her own terms, acknowledging the communities that make her feels less alone and invisible
· overwrite unquestioned, inherited coding that oppresses all genders, especially women, under the patriarchy

· re-code programming that limits her freedom with intention, to avoid harming others

An update is in progress to better support the owner of this OS as she proceeds with less fear and more transparency.

Example: When she told her wife about her feelings for the creative, emotionally intelligent, socially-conscious man, no system failure occurred. Her wife wasn't surprised; she just wanted to know if she felt she had to act on her feelings.

She didn't. She just needed to feel free. To acknowledge attraction, desire, this other-love in her heart and imagination, if not the world; to express it within the lines they draw.



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Married — The owner of this operating system was sure she would marry the sweet, brown-eyed boy she fell in love with in high school*, but it was her college boyfriend who casually proposed. She hesitated. Over time traditional marriage felt less and less right. Slowly she began to divorce the idea that, for her, men and marriage fit together.

In her mid-20s, when a friend asked why she was attracted to men but no longer interested in dating them, the word that came to mind was "compassion" — but that wasn't quite right. It wasn't that any man she'd loved lacked kindness or empathy, but none could call themselves feminists. None wanted to learn how they could make things better for women.

Once she fell in love with a woman, there was so much relief that the old rules no longer applied. She and her girlfriend re-wrote the rulebook, resisting the powerful scripts that felt impossible to overwrite, even with the best men they knew.

* An alternate early (and in retrospect, quite likely queer) fantasy involved marrying that prettiest of men, Jesus, and living in a convent with many other women who also aspired to be pure of heart.

Poly (as in *Polyamory*) — From the Greek *poly*, meaning "many, several" and Latin *amor*, meaning "love." The belief that it is possible — natural, even — to feel romantically and/or sexually attracted to more than one person at a time. In practice, poly relationships are open to intimacy with more than one partner, with the consent of everyone involved.

For the owner of the MPBF OS, poly is a form of self-love. It is tied to feminism, a refusal to be controlled or to suppress her sexuality in a way that makes her feel diminished. She loves being married — has always longed for a deep, lasting connection with another person they could build a life on together — but will not attempt to re-wire her heart.

She believes sexual energy is sacred, abundant, deeply connected to her creativity and spirituality; that desire occurs when there is a subtle but real exchange of energy between people that may then be expressed physically or transformed creatively and/or spiritually. The energy is then released, directed outward, as a kind of blessing or prayer for the beloved, or the world.

For a time, the owner of this operating system was simultaneously involved with her future wife and a male partner. When the secondary relationship ended, she and her future wife defaulted to monogamy. A few years later, they were raising two children together. The laws had changed by then; they happily got married. There was no urgency to discuss future poly arrangements; with two little ones, full-time jobs, aging parents, they were tired. Didn't need more complexity.

Now in her mid-40s, she has lived monogamously with her wife for nearly two decades and deeply appreciates the stability of their family life. Still, she remains poly in spirit, open to what attraction, desire, sex, and love still have to teach her.

Bi — Identifying as bisexual means "yes, and" for the owner of this OS, who is drawn to people of her own gender and genders that are not her own. This does not imply she feels attracted to men and women in the same way, or to the same degree; she has been involved with more men than women, but that doesn't make her more straight than gay.

Her pull toward certain men feels innate; the timing sometimes biological, connected to her cycle. It also has something to do with the fact that she was oriented — quite literally turned toward men from a very young age.

She was programmed to find women attractive, too. The media she absorbed — TV, movies, music videos — created for the male gaze, sexualized female bodies, casting them as objects of desire. Those images may not have been meant for her, but she, like everyone else, tuned in.

Femme — An identifying label describing queer women who express culturally feminine characteristics. The owner of this OS embraces femme for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, the pleasure of cat eyeliner, sparkle eyeshadow and lipstick, curve-defining dresses, fishnets, and heels. Femme is intentional, an act of resistance, an authentic expression of her self.

Janis Luna writes that femme is also about spirituality and magic, sacred sexuality, and political power. The owner of this operating system has long described herself as "witchy", believes in the radical act of truthtelling as a healing force, and is deeply attuned to her intuition and dreams.

She agrees with Luna's observation that femme is also about caring for a world that needs more love:

the way we are vulnerable, soft, and sensitive, yet strong enough and courageous enough to be nurturing others, and emotionally honest with ourselves, in this hard and callous world.

Brian Bartlett
looks forward...



Yellow Foxgloves: Canadian Poets Emerging Later in Life

Brian Bartlett

Over the past few years, in conversations about new poets, I've noticed "new" is often equated with "young." With Keats's precociousness, Rimbaud's abandoning of poetry when only 21, and Plath's brilliant early blooming — as well as the slow maturation of a youthfully published poet like Yeats — it's easy to forget that some poets didn't bring forth their first book until after entering their sixth decade; one extraordinary example is Amy Clampitt. In the past year I asked around for suggestions of living Canadian poets who fit the description. Curious to hear stories outlining how and why they didn't release a first collection until well into middle age, I then invited some of those poets to write brief memoirs.

The 15 resulting prose pieces form the first multi-voiced narrative documentation of Canadian poets classifiable as "late beginners" (the term can be misleading if not taken to mean, specifically, those who put out first books relatively "late"; some of the following writers published poetry in journals for many years before releasing a collection). The gender imbalance among late beginners is hardly surprising, but the degree of that imbalance is startling: of the 67 Canadian poets considered for this survey, 55 are female and only 12 male. A few of the accounts gathered here cite conventional domestic roles in the 1950s and '60s (wife, mother, homekeeper) as postponing agents, yet a wider variety of such agents have also included careers (teaching, publishing, architecture, social work, business), a passion for other arts (fiction-writing, music, painting, theatre, dance), and troubled health (of the writer and/or family members).

We need to explore in depth the lives and works of poets defying the common model of poetry being most dramatically excited and elicited in youth. Many questions around matters of age and artistic accomplishment should be tackled. May this *Fiddlehead* feature be a small, valuable step in that direction.

Section cover image "Book of Flowers" by Sophie Hamidovic (mixed media, 2019).

Roy J. Adams

A university dropout at 19, I was working as a printer in my hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when I decided to become a writer. Like so many others, I was more interested in the bohemian, devil-may-care lifestyle that writers were supposed to live than in honing the craft. Predictably, I was a failure at the age of 21.

My second career choice was to become a university professor, an ambition at which I eventually succeeded. After three years in the U.S. Army, I returned to school. More mature and focused at 24, I completed B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees and secured a post at McMaster University, teaching and researching industrial relations and human rights. At "Mac" I was free to choose my own projects and my specialty of international and comparative issues got me around the world. It was a richly satisfying career but the creative writing itch remained.

In 1997, I retired early and took up the quest once again. More failure. The short stories and bits of memoir I attempted were too much like my academic writing: precise and informational but lacking in drama, song and sensual stimulation. Around 2011, a friend, Gaiyle Connolly, suggested that I give poetry a try. I'd always considered poetry an inscrutable calling to which I was deaf. Nevertheless, I began to attend local poetry workshops where I offered up my bumbling efforts to polite but uncomfortable audiences. Realizing that I needed help, I went through lots of instruction manuals. At McMaster, I sat in on relevant courses. Jeffery Donaldson, an A-list poet and literature professor, generously offered to mentor me.

In San Miguel de Allende, Mexico I attended workshops led by notable American poets such as Mark Doty, Erin Belieu and Richard Hoffman. Jeffery told me about Poetry Weekend in Fredericton, where, despite my greenness, I was welcomed by that annual gathering of accomplished and novice Canadian poets. I heard them read their poems, listened to their stories about the craft and personal encounters with success and failure and bought their books. I enjoyed being in their company; it encouraged me to persist.

In 2014 my first poem in a literary publication appeared in *Tower Poetry*. During the ensuing years, I won minor prizes in several regional poetry contests and had work accepted by, for example, *Feathertale*, *Vallum* and *The Fiddlehead*, which made me feel almost legit. The Ontario Poetry Society published my chapbook *Bebop From Beau's Caboose* in the fall of 2018 and another chapbook-length manuscript entitled *Critical Mass* was shortlisted in the contest held annually by Frog Hollow Press. When that set of poems

arrived at Silver Bow Publishing, I was invited to expand it to book length. I did and was offered a standard contract. Those people, who knew poetry, thought my work good and were willing to supply the resources to publish it.

Although it wasn't the novel that I set out to write nearly sixty years earlier, it was a work of art, however minor. That it was poetry, a form I considered beyond reach back then, made it even sweeter. "Starry notions," I thought, recalling the song "Those Were the Days," are not inevitably crushed by "busy years rushing by." Sometimes, however late, they actually materialize.

Mary Barnes

Born in 1943, I began reading from an early age, picking out words from the local newspaper. Intrigued, I continued, and found that love of reading became a mainstay in my life. By slipping into strange worlds where I felt comfortable, I realized I had discovered something astonishing that would in turn become a life-expanding experience. Soon afterwards I began to write, believing that I could.

In my early adult life, I dabbled in art, joined an art course and explored different media but that was an expression short-lived (I still have the sketches). I continued to write but it was not until my late 50s and early 60s, after retiring from the business world, that I began to write in earnest.

Through the years, I read voraciously, wrote and wrote — but I wanted and needed instruction. After joining a writer's group, I set about honing my craft. Though the members were helpful, I was dissatisfied with my work. Leaving the group, I pursued courses at various colleges and universities through Long Distance Education, feeling that I needed to expand my knowledge of writing. I studied short fiction under Ann Ireland and later with Robert Hough, who gave me invaluable advice on focussing. One of my pieces of writing won the Tom York Award for Short Fiction. After several years of studying, I also earned my BA.

After many years of rejections (which gradually worked their way into the proverbial bottom drawer along with the manuscripts), I began to write in a much shorter form. Why did I turn to poetry? I think poetry found me — images arrived waiting for recording, dreams abounded, and somehow, these evolved into poems. I also discovered that I was and am fascinated by how much can be said in a small white space. Poets can be so enraptured by words and images that they find themselves inside the poem. Looking at the sky, do you see only blue, or is there something deeper? Continuing to read and devouring everything from Emily Dickinson to Alden Nowlan to Eavan Boland, I delved into poetry, wondering what I would find, and what mean-

ing it would have for me. I also kept searching for voice, finally discovering it in the landscapes I knew and in my Ojibwe heritage.

In her inspiring book *A Journey with Two Maps*, Eavan Boland writes: ". . . poetry is not a pure stream. It will never be sullied by partisan argument. The only danger to poetry is the reticence and silence of poets." There it is. If we want to continue this art, then we need to write, let our voices be heard.

And here I am, with a book completed, my first full-length book, *What Fox Knew*, to be published in November, 2019.

Breathless, my mind is already turned to forming a new poem.

J.D. Black

I was born in 1951, but my first book of poems, *Black Velvet Elvis* (The Porcupine's Quill, 2006), wasn't published until I was in my fifties. Aside from a few regrettable pieces in high school and first-year college, I wrote no verse until 2000. My appreciation of poetry was very general, and given my deep interest in music, I paid most attention to art-song settings and more poetic song lyrics. My ignorance of poetry was profound, and I'd never imagined myself as a creative writer. I was surprised when short lyric pieces came to me unbidden, and even more surprised when they demanded to be written down and refined. At first I saw this as poetic afflatus that would shortly die of natural causes, but soon I found that I was filling a small binder. Also, the emotional connection with writing (including catharsis) was compelling. Soon obsessive elements appeared: carrying notebooks to jot lines down in, writing while travelling (and even hiking!), keeping paper and a flashlight by the bedside for a line or phrase that forced me to write it down (I only use paper and pencil; computers are inimical except for final versions). My forbearing wife, Patricia Grant, proved (and remains) an essential critic and editor.

Eventually I worked up the nerve to show a few things to relatives, friends and colleagues (some of whom write poetry themselves), and received encouragement and some friendly criticism. I started to collect poetry and attend readings. I also religiously followed Robyn Sarah's column *Poetically Speaking* in the Montreal *Gazette*. I was particularly blessed that The Word bookstore was a ten-minute walk away from work (ideal for lunchtime browsing), and The Double Hook was just down the street from me; both also hosted readings. I worked at McGill University (in the Marvin Duchow Music Library), and the Rare Book Division there held notable and frequent readings, under the aegis of Irena Murray and David McKnight. I was particularly drawn to and inspired by the poetry of Eric Ormsby, Robyn Sarah,

and Carmine Starnino; later, I very much appreciated their critical writings. I was later incredibly fortunate to have Robyn as an occasional giver of advice and editor, and Eric as mentor, critic, and editor of *Black Velvet Elvis*.

I'd assumed I would be writing free verse exclusively, but in retrospect there were strong formal elements from the very beginning — I was just too ignorant to recognize them. As I studied prosody, form, and the history of poetry, I often found myself writing formal verse almost reflexively, despite my expectations and even my initial prejudices. I still find free verse at least as difficult as formal verse to write well. And then there's the obsessive element in form. . . . Writing comes to me in brief or prolonged episodes (and sometimes feels like demonic possession); I've no work discipline for it. Lately I've been more preoccupied with nature photography; that also provides the occasional subject for a poem.

Laurie Brinklow

As a teenager I wasn't especially interested in reading poetry, but like many angst-ridden girls I certainly wrote it. I filled diaries and notebooks with my scribblings (most of which have, after many moves, thankfully disappeared!), and always excelled in English class. I suspect this had much to do with being what back in the day was called a "bookworm," escaping into the security of fictional worlds as the one around me crumbled. I enrolled in a creative writing class during my first year at University of Victoria, but dropped it at Christmastime as I detested the professor — or maybe it was because I really had nothing to write about. I hadn't yet found my voice.

It wasn't until I started working at Ragweed Press in Charlottetown in 1983 that I started writing again, after being inspired by copy-editing Janice Kulyk Keefer's *White of the Lesser Angels*. Janice's ability to make the ordinary extraordinary got me going, thinking, "I can do that!" Lorna Crozier's books, *The Garden Going On Without Us* and *Angels of Flesh*, *Angels of Silence*, published around that time, were also huge influences. I entered the Milton Acorn Work Poetry Competition and received an Honourable Mention. When the judges, my boss Libby Oughton and fellow Ragweed editor Richard Lemm, discovered that I, their Managing Editor, had written "Pile Driver," they were more than a little surprised. I went on to be a member of two writing groups, and took workshops whenever I could, including the Maritime Writers' Workshop (with Jan Zwicky as instructor and Don McKay insisting on supplying the poets — including me, Sue Goyette and Lynn Davies — with beer), Community of Writers Workshops at the Tatamagouche Centre in Nova Scotia, and Frank Ledwell's creative writing

class at UPEI. The latter is where my prose poems were born. In my early 30s I had finally found my voice.

But being a single mom with a full-time job at the University, and running my new Acorn Press on the side, ate up my time and energy. Other writers would tell me: if you really wanted to make writing poetry and getting a book published a priority, then you should be able to do it. But I just couldn't. There was only so much of me to go around. In the end I was always the mom/editor/publisher, focusing on other people's books and not my own. I felt guilty for not making my own book a priority. But with time and distance, I no longer feel guilty about taking so long to publish — and I've learned not to heap that kind of guilt on anyone else either.

I count PEI poet Jane Ledwell as one of my mentors and the reason *Here for the Music* came to be. I had sold Acorn in 2010 to Terrilee Bulger (to go to Tasmania to do my PhD), and Terrilee happened to ask Jane about Island poetry manuscripts. Jane knew mine, and told Terrilee that it was one of the best ones out there. So by 2012, at aged 54, I was ready, with Jane as my editor. I was never so nervous to open a book… and, of course, it wasn't perfect. There were a couple of errors, and things I wish I'd done differently. But it was still beautiful and it made me happy.

While doing interviews with writers in Tasmania and Newfoundland about "islandness," I would be struck by something, and say, "That sounds like a poem!" So over the last eight years I've been working on poetry that re-presents my research, poetry that has became the counterpoint to the scholarly writing in my dissertation. The poems are still waiting to become a book. And now that I'm almost 61, maybe it's time I made that book a priority.

Antony Di Nardo

My first poem picked up on a theme by Donne written in the stylings of e.e. cummings. I was sixteen then, but didn't publish my first collection of poetry until I was sixty-one. That's forty-plus years of toying with poetry, off and on, before succumbing entirely.

In his prose book *The Art of Recklessness*, Dean Young says poetry teaches a way to remain in "a state of anarchy." For me a brief career in journalism and a much longer one in teaching and school administration made creative anarchy virtually impossible. It took the anticipation of retirement, and its reality, to return me to poetry. It gave me time to write, to read, subvert, revise and make things up with words. I submitted my better pieces to the

journals. I wrote prose content for textbooks. I was no longer the sixteen-year-old poet.

There had been sporadic publications in my early adult years: I had several poems in the *Northern Ontario Poetry Anthology* back in 1976; some fiction and poetry appeared in *The Squatchberry Journal* out of Geraldton, Ontario, at around the same time. I edited and published a small-town weekly paper. Print media was my master. Teaching paid the bills.

When I retired I gave myself the goal of publishing a book by sixty, and I returned to teaching literature. The latter immersed me in a culture of imagination and it consolidated my personal aesthetics regarding fiction and creativity. I wrote poetry, book reviews and an aborted novel, and edited chapbooks by two other poets. I paid my dues in regular rejections, cherished the thrill of acceptance. The now-defunct *Books in Canada* published my reviews. I taught English in Beirut, in the faraway chaos of an inspired and inspiring civilization. It was there I assembled a manuscript that Brick turned into my first collection, *Alien, Correspondent*, in 2010.

That same year, Barry Callaghan, on the strength of a dozen poems he'd accepted for *Exile*, asked if I had a manuscript. I did, sort of. I had been working on a suite that evoked past experiences and absurdist memories, my poetry maturing, now wry and sometimes surreal. It had a voice I could comfortably sustain. It became *Soul on Standby*, published the same year my first book was released. Two other collections followed: *Roaming Charges* (Brick, 2015) and *SKYLIGHT* (Ronsdale, 2018).

I'm a latecomer to book publication primarily because of practical reasons. Making the time to write while earning a living certainly was a factor. If poetry teaches anarchy, however, age delivers control, and in my experience combining the two produced, I think, eclectic results. Also, there's a side to poetry that requires a finely tuned ear, passion without distraction and the discipline to pursue a project. For me, it took half a lifetime to get there.

If you're familiar with the common foxglove you'll know it blooms in early summer, bright, prolific, in shades of pink and purple. Very showy. But in the part of the world where I live, you'll find also the yellow foxglove, less common, less obvious and late-blooming. I suppose I stand among these.

Alyda Faber

1963/2016: I live my writing life under a big hand. Not the hand of God. Not the hand of anyone I know, not my own. It's an unseen hand that gives me a sensation similar to looking at a stainless steel bin of chicken feet, pocked white flesh with clean claws, at Getaway Butcher Shop in the Seaport Market. I think of the hand now as a practical problem (how can I cook and eat this?), a spur to metaphor. Before, it overshadowed me. The hand's territory was a labyrinth with no exit, without the satisfactions of finding my way into the middle and out again. Whatever path I'd taken was always wrong somehow. I lived in a state of constant self-interruption, self-correction, self-criticism. I lived outside myself and relentlessly inside myself. In exile from myself and others, I didn't dare to want what I wanted: to risk whole-heartedly the beauty and exposure of words. I was afraid to turn the hand's silence and rigidity into figures on a page. Afraid to follow the promise of the Psalms, my earliest rites of poetry.

A friend once said to me, a liability is also an ability. I've learned that in order for a liability to become an ability you need to become present to that liability with your heart, soul, mind, and body. I learned this through years of weekly spiritual exercises with a psychiatrist. The method was prayers of savage lyrical intensity. We did not search for the big hand. Strange, that such methods should release me into a desired writing life, but they did. The hand's looming silence used to take me into regions of helplessness, embodied as rigid tension (which still happens). Now the hand also provokes words on the page. Through writing and working with poets, I've grown into an animal sense of belonging to a communion of poets. I see how these poets abide and endure in their writing lives. When a poet mentor tells me, you're close to having a book, I am ecstatic, and I go into free fall, certain I will die today or tomorrow. Jacob wrestles all night beside the River Jabbok with a man who strikes his hip out of joint; in pain, persists in the struggle, and demands a blessing, which he is given before the angel leaves at daybreak.

Maureen Scott Harris

I think of my relationship with poetry as a difficult marriage, inflected by both societal and personal circumstances, and marked by repeated separations and reconciliations. (It's difficult to say who leaves whom.) My attraction to poetry began with nursery rhymes, my mother reading and reciting Mother Goose to my younger siblings and me. Later she added A.A. Milne ("King John Was Not a Good Man," a special favourite) and Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. When I learned to read for myself, poetry disappeared. I have no recollection of poems at school until Anne Marriott's "The Wind Our Enemy" turned up in my grade-six reader. I knew something about farming hardships in Manitoba, and recognized the wind and prairie. In grade 7 my homeroom teacher, Miss Chalmers, loved Keats and one day she read us "To Autumn." I still remember her class on adjectives. A light bulb flared: I understood words could create an atmosphere and emotional tone in my compositions. Then I became an ardent practitioner of purple prose — but not poems. In grade 11, Miss Metcalfe offered a prize for an essay or poem on any topic. I had never written a poem, but I was bored at school and decided to try one, because it would be shorter than an essay. I was surprised when it won the contest. A door was now ajar and I began hunting for poems in *Ladies Home Journal* and *McCall's*. In university, I was encouraged by my first-year English prof and some writing friends to write poems, and I fantasized about becoming a poet.

But life as an artist of any sort was unimaginable to my family, and to me. Who was I to write poems? Growing up in the forties and fifties it never crossed my mind to ask how I might become responsible for myself — the path for girls was marriage and a family. Marriage didn't seem likely because I wasn't popular. But I did get pregnant, dropped out of school, went away to have the baby in secret, and gave him up for adoption. In the aftermath of that experience I gave up writing as well. I no longer believed poetry was something I could do. (I've written about this block in my essay "Opening the Griefcase," winner of *Prairie Fire*'s 2006 creative non-fiction contest.)

In the 1970s, as I discovered contemporary women's writing, I began scrawling a few lines or an image on slips of paper. Eventually the slips added up. I applied to the last New College Writing Workshop in 1978, and was encouraged by my instructors, P. K. Page and Joe Rosenblatt. Joe's ongoing support was crucial to my continuing to write. I joined a writing group that included Rhea Tregebov, another important mentor, whom I had met at the workshop. Still it took another 15 years before *A Possible Landscape* (Brick Books, 1993) was published half a year after my fiftieth birthday.

That was 26 years ago. Since then I've published two further books, but poetry continues to come and go. On reasonable days I acknowledge that often I cannot or do not write. Inertia and refusal claim me, I feel poetry wants too much of me, I'm not up to it. When poetry comes back, it disperses the fog of inertia and I'm reconciled to the work it demands. More than reconciled: there are no better days than those I spend with poems — finding their shape, discovering what they want to say.

Jónína Kirton

When I was a child growing up in Manitoba, Labrador and Ontario, my hockey-obsessed family had zero interest in things like reading and writing, but I loved to read and imagined myself a writer. Sadly, these longings were ignored by my parents. Once I was a grown-up, working and life as a low-income single mom left no time or money for such things. My writing life began at fifty when I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and found it impossible to stay in the workforce. Now married, I had someone in my court. My husband, a jazz musician who had given up his art to raise a family, understood the need for creativity in one's life. Money was still an issue, so I am very grateful to the British Columbia Métis Nation as they paid my tuition for the Simon Fraser University Writers Studio, from which I graduated in 2007. There I met my dear friend and mentor Betsy Warland and began to make my way with poetry. Prior to attending the studio, I had only written about unrequited love, in journals, which I shredded when doing some cleansing and clearing after a long period of healing.

During that period of deep healing, I was fortunate to attend a monthly talking circle in Richard Wagemese's home that he shared with his wife, Debra Powell. Although the circle was not about writing, Richard did speak of his writing and it was there that I began to dream of becoming a writer myself. At first, when writing I felt like a fraud. Who am I to think I could be a writer? I also wondered if it was too late for me. My growth was slow and steady. At home I still had children — two teenagers, one of them my nephew. It was at the SFU Writer's Studio that I began to think of myself as a real writer. A fire had been lit as Miranda Pearson, my mentor at the studio, helped me see that I was a poet. Once inspired, I kept going and it was Ingrid Rose's writing from the body that awakened my ability to write poetry that spoke to the trauma I had experienced as a young Métis woman growing up in a home where violence was common, and our Indigeneity was denied. Much of my first collection, *page as bone ink as blood*, was written while work-

ing with Ingrid, then the fine tuning was completed with Betsy through her Vancouver Writing Manuscript Intensive, where I am now a mentor. While writing my second book, *An Honest Woman*, my sweet nephew (whom my husband and I raised after his parents' passing) was diagnosed with a rare, aggressive form of cancer, and we provided palliative care in his final days. Both Ingrid and Betsy provided support during that time and I managed to get the book out. It was a finalist in the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize.

Once a writer we write. We write through it all, and in many ways it saves us as we create connections with our mentors, other writers, those we in turn mentor, and our readers. These connections sustain us. I have been truly blessed to have wonderful mentors, like Betsy and Ingrid, both of whom taught me to be courageous with my words and how to be a good writing mentor myself.

Eva Kolacz

I have always believed in a destiny where everything follows its own pattern or cycle. At an early age in Poland in the 1950s I was captivated by poems, reciting them on the school stage, mostly revolutionary poets of the Soviet Union; my favourite of those was Vladimir Mayakovsky. These performances led me to start writing poems at the age of 11 and later to become a professional actress.

Winning an important poetry competition at the age of 20 helped me to become part of the literary organization in Kielce, giving readings and being published in magazines. I was fortunate to be inspired by the best of Polish literature, and by the great poets, mostly European and Russian: Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Block, Sergei Yesenin — often in the original version (Russian was obligatory as a second language in the Communist Block). Akhmatova taught me how to translate my experiences as a young woman into poetry. Krzysztof Kamil Baczynski (who died at 23 in the Warsaw Uprising) showed me how to use abstraction in a lyrical manner. Zbigniew Herbert and Wislawa Szymborska (the latter found my juvenile poetry "original and promising") provided philosophical approaches.

In my late twenties, along with my work in the theatre, I was absorbed with my first manuscript of poetry, aware of the limits I faced, the harsh reality of censorship. In 1981 I left Poland, not knowing where I would find a new home, how I would continue writing without knowing the language of my new country. The decision to immigrate was painful. Every writer in a similar situation struggles to find a solution. I found a universal language in visual arts. Paints became my words, their movement on canvas my lines

of poetry. I continued writing knowing that in Canada, the country I had immigrated to on a refugee status in 1981, it would not find a wider audience and I would be prohibited from publishing my books in Poland, as was Czeslaw Milosz, who appeared on the Polish scene only when he won the Nobel Prize.

My major source of Canadian poetry was a book that I'd bought at the University of Saskatchewan, *15 Canadian Plus 5*, edited by Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce. For a long time I continued to question my ability to write in English because I didn't want to deprive the poems of the power of transcendental ideas and richer composition as I could express them in Polish. Then ten years ago, I started to work on my first book in English, *Whatever We Are*, which was published by Hidden Brook Press in 2019. The question why someone would publish a first book so late could be answered with the question: Why would someone conquer Mount Everest in older age? Are we, then, the latecomers — an orchard with trees that needs more time to bear fruit?

Arleen Paré

I was born in September 1946 in Montreal; my first poetry collection was published sixty years later. During those sixty years, I was busy growing up in the suburbs, marrying young, birthing two sons, becoming a feminist, spending a year in Kenya, completing a Masters degree in social work at McGill, moving to Vancouver with my family, coming out as a lesbian, divorcing my husband, and working in mental health social work. In all that time I wrote only one poem, and not once did it cross my mind that I might become a poet.

That first collection, *Paper Trail*, referred to by its publisher, NeWest Press, as a mixed-genre novel, was written as I was moving toward retiring from my job with mental health housing in Vancouver. That was about five years after I'd completed an M.A. in Adult Education at UBC. My graduate thesis, completed in 1995, before I had considered creative writing at all, became my entry level drug: I liked writing it better than my bureaucratic daytime job.

Until my late forties I hadn't even read poetry; until I was almost fifty, I hadn't thought about writing anything beyond academic work, but in 1996, I decided to write a novel and joined a writing group. I began taking evening courses in writing and began (in 2001) what became *Paper Trail* in a course offered by Betsy Warland. Finally, I completed Simon Fraser University's Continuing Ed writing program (TWS) with Betsy in 2003 and worked on *Paper Trail* while continuing to work in bureaucracy. *Paper Trail* was about

my job and leaving it. Writing it kept me sane through my final year; I wrote myself out.

I retired in 2002 and finished *Paper Trail* in early 2003. Before NeWest sent me a contract in 2004, the manuscript had been rejected or ignored at least five times. I didn't really care that it would be over two years until it was published — at least someone wanted it. On good days, I suspect the mixed-genre nature of the book made it difficult for publishers to accept; however, most publishers never responded to my submission, so I wouldn't know.

After moving to Victoria, I completed the University of Victoria undergraduate writing program (BFA 2008), and later the UVic graduate writing program (MFA 2012). I have been crazy lucky in my teachers: first Betsy Warland, who taught me to think out of the box; then Patrick Lane, who taught me how to think lyric poetry; Lorna Crozier, who supervised my MFA thesis and taught me how to shape poems; Steve Price, who was deeply poetically knowledgeable and willing to share; and Carla Funk, who was inspiring. I am also lucky in my wife, Chris Fox, who loves me and my poetry, has a doctorate in Canadian literature, and is a professional editor, my first reader and first editor.

Poetry saved my sanity, set my trajectory for the rest of my life. I have written seven books and won a Governor General's Award for Poetry. I now have the habit of art.

Barbara Pelman

> And it was at that time. . . . Poetry came
> to find me. Don't know, don't know from where,
> it leapt, winter or the river. . . .
> but I was called from the street. . . .
> my heart broken loose in the wind.
>
> — Pablo Neruda, from *Selected Poems*, translated by Stephen Mitchell et al.

It was divorce that brought me to poetry. Of course, I had an extensive background to step forward from: an MA in English Literature with courses mainly in poetry, practice as the 'family poet' writing for birthdays and anniversaries, and, as a high-school English teacher, writing poems as examples for students. But mostly I was a teacher, not a maker, of poetry — until one time in a small poetry group I'd joined after the divorce, I brought a poem called "Five Nails in a Coffin." In the group I said, "It was therapy for me to write this, but is it a poem?"

And then a serendipitous series of events. A friend brought me to

Mocambopo, the poetry venue run by Wendy Morton. Later, I read at the Open Mic; Wendy then invited me to do a Feature Reading. Soon I attended a poetry retreat with Patrick Lane at Glenairley, in Sooke. That was 2003, a few years after the separation. I had just turned 60. I continued to go to Patrick's retreats once or twice a year, for fifteen years, and other workshops as well, with Lorna Crozier, Carla Funk, Laura Apol. From a retreat in Italy with Lorna came the story of Marcello, a cellist and lover who inspired in me a chapbook of poems; one of them, "Aubade Amalfi" won the Federation of BC Writers poetry contest in 2014. But it was Patrick's influence that remains strongest. He sits on my shoulder, even now, saying, *the line has its own logic; verbs and nouns, strong verbs, specific nouns — not moth but mourning cloak; you have to earn your big abstract statements; make your details work for you; start with an image; be present.*

Because of Wendy, I was part of her project Random Acts of Poetry, reading poems to strangers on the street. Because of her I had my first book published in 2005 by Ekstasis Editions. And from that first retreat with Patrick, I had a poetry group to write with, twice a month, poets from that initial retreat, and later, others.

My everyday life now is mostly poetry: assisting with Planet Earth Poetry events, teaching poetry, organizing and attending poetry workshops, writing at a café or at my kitchen table. Most of my friends now are poets. They are, as one friend says, echoing Margaret Laurence, "my tribe." My teaching had changed too, from an academic, text-centred approach to a more interactive, writing-based focus — the highlight of which were the days I brought my students downtown to write poems on the hoardings around constructions. And poetry brought me so much more: a deepening of thought and feeling, a delight in language, a closer observation of the world around me. But mostly the deepening: the search for truth and beauty, though it's hard to write that phrase without irony. Truth and beauty? Really? But yes. My own truths, and my own untruths, the ones I have lived with all these years. And the truths that happen within the poem itself, the surprise of new understanding. To write a beautiful line, a beautiful image, some wisdom in the lines. It is my spiritual practice, for poetry, like prayer, begins in praise. And a return to wonder: the hummingbird in the hawthorn, the first tomatoes on the vine I planted, even the wasp desiring the mango on my plate.

E. Alex Pierce

I never doubted the vocation of artist. In adolescence, I called that 'music.' I believed I could be a concert pianist, and until I entered the conservatory at Mount Allison University, I had no idea what that might mean. Being on stage put me in direct contact with a listening public, and something in the music leapt across the divide. Classical music led me to theatre, theatre to dance, dance back to theatre and clowning and performance art. In the words of Adrienne Rich, I made "the leap. . . . which I live now / not as a leap / but a succession of brief, amazing movements / each one making possible the next" ("From a Survivor," *Diving into the Wreck*). It was only in retrospect that the progression made sense. And each "amazing movement" felt like an arrival. The work was hard. There is no artistic discipline that does not have its apprenticeship, its body of knowledge, its gatekeepers and masters.

I did not have a goal, other than to do the work that gripped me in the instant. I studied everywhere with masters in the field. I practised apprenticeship. I learned by doing: stagecraft, rehearsal, hours spent over a text preparing notes for impeccable actors. I worked in stage management, props, design; I studied voice, movement, diction, projection. I earned the right to be on stage. I read Shaw, Shakespeare, Chekov, Ibsen, Beckett, Pinter, Shepard.

And then I danced. I stood at the back of the barre with the ballet bunnies; I sweated my way across the floor propelled by the conga drums of Graham technique, I stretched my limbs in Anna Wyman's West Vancouver studio and evolved from awkward duckling to preening swan. A car/pedestrian accident shifted that focus and I arrived in Berkeley at the end of the 70s to join Ruth Zaporah's Action Theatre and speak the images the improvised action called up. My love affair with theatre had begun in 1964 in Stratford-on-Avon when I encountered Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and fell into the spell of words on stage, of image conjured and made alive.

And then I took an office job — at the Canada Council. Surrounded by artists in the field, I processed grant applications, talked theatre artists through the process, and conducted juries — in both official languages. I made one theatre piece for five actor/writers. And then I stopped. The next time life turned me inside out I went into Jungian analysis: I was an artist without a practice, and I was exhausted from burn-out work. For months I recorded my dreams and put every waking thought on paper. I do not know how the synthesis came about. I began to write. Poetry.

A summer school at Iowa, an application to the Warren Wilson MFA Program in Creative Writing, three years of intensive mentor/apprentice-

ship (again!): Eleanor Wilner, Heather McHugh, Carl Phillips, Renate Wood — and I emerged into the literary world of Canada in the late 90s, the Banff Writing Studio, Sage Hill, and a job at Cape Breton University where I taught creative writing (Playwriting, Poetry & Poetics, Composition). Don McKay, Jan Zwicky, Barry Dempster, Daphne Marlatt, John Glenday, Stephanie Bolster — and a host of poet-colleagues — affirmed in my work an unmistakeable voice. My first book? *Vox Humana* with Brick Books (2011). That leap!

Ingrid Ruthig

You could say I came to poetry late, by a circuitous route. But also that poetry came to *me* early, in youth's junction of words and music — rhyme, hymn, psalm, libretto, lyrics, storybook and, with Stratford in easy reach, Shakespeare. Later, while earning my degree in Architecture at the University of Toronto, "it's all about the story" was a signpost, and language and the poetry of built form became ever entwined with exploring, understanding, imagining, making, communicating.

During the decade I was licensed and practised in Toronto, commuting from the home my husband and I made outside the city, I reclaimed reading for pleasure. Mostly fiction. Then I read to our young daughters, rediscovering near-forgotten rhymes and learning new ones.

I also learned the construction industry is rife with crossroads. The first firm downsized. Work evaporated at the next. I couldn't reconcile parenting's demands with the thought of starting a practice in a town where I'd no connections. I dithered, and engaged an interest, venturing into creative writing, found it fuelled my stay-at-home brain. Encouraged by new acquaintances to send my nascent work to journals, I began to publish.

I joined the editorial board of a literary journal (*Lichen*), produced biannual issues, attended events, networked, wrote, submitted work, practised. And readreadread. One evening I opened a collection by Steven Heighton, whose name kept appearing and who soon became a guide, then good friend. His poems' structure, sound, and sense made me recalibrate what I was writing and redefine where I wanted to go with it — which was "to formalize the truth," as Eavan Boland puts it in *Object Lessons*. I also realized that poetry, better than fiction, suited my mindset, sporadic free time, and concentrated bursts of working.

In the midst of these discoveries I came to another crossroad. The architectural association introduced professional development, eventually forcing

me to decide whether or not to remain licensed. With my better-paid husband onboard, I chose to retire and write instead.

Publishing credits, especially for poems, multiplied. A manuscript took shape. Then stalled, amid the sudden changes life can spring — publisher uncertainties, my husband's health, my own frustration. Impatient, I re-engaged with visual art, where *I* decided when the work was finished. I also hand-made books, edited critical volumes, read and reviewed others, all the while publishing poems and winning some prizes.

Chance intervened again. A review I wrote prompted Evan Jones, poet and editor with Fitzhenry & Whiteside, to invite me to read at an event. He soon asked to see any work I had. I sent the latest manuscript, hope held in check. After metaphorical miles, stumbles, and detours, *This Being* arrived.

Is 55 late? I think the timing was just as it should have been. It's how it played out, regardless. On discouraging days I still consider ditching poetry. But it would only track me down again, goading me to go farther, to keep exploring what I can't by any other route and, with luck, to find satisfaction in what only poetry can reveal.

Jean Van Loon

Writing has always been a pleasure for me, and played an important part in my paid work as a civil servant and association head for the Canadian steel industry. As I approached retirement and craved a creative outlet, I quickly realized I wanted to make things with words. I enrolled in a short-fiction workshop. Everything about writing that my work had engrained in me had to be turned upside down and inside out. My expository, analytical or advocacy writing — geared to people with limited time to absorb information — had to start from the general and fill in supporting details later, so the harried reader could read as little as time permitted and still get the major points. Now my task was to invite readers into an imagined world and make them want to linger as long as the story would take. For that, I had to start with something very specific, and knit details around it until some general idea, insight, or feeling was implied—without being explicitly stated. I stayed with stories for more than 15 years.

Then poetry happened — a workshop here in Ottawa, a class in my MFA program at UBC, and an invitation to join a group of writers for a weekly poetry group. Memories resurfaced of Eliot, Atwood, and Ondaatje read on occasion in my university years and after. I realized how poems, sensual and concise, stick deep in the mind. I began to read poems as widely as I could. The writing group has rooted me in poetry. It has provided me with the

opportunity to learn from more experienced poets, and to create with them opportunities for all of us to learn. We share critiques that I've learned to trust, tips about publishing opportunities, support in times of disappointment, treats, and lots of laughs. And a weekly reason to put poetry first.

It was through this group that I conceived of a set of linked poems about an intriguing figure in the history of my home city of Ottawa — J.R. Booth, the greatest of the Ottawa Valley lumber kings. His first big contract was to supply lumber to build the Parliament Buildings. I became smitten with the character, his ambition, humour, and eccentricities, and loved learning about what daily life was like around here in the late 1800s. It was a delightful challenge to find a way to evoke the man and his times so as to draw others in as well. It has been a richly rewarding experience to read to varied audiences, many of whom do not usually read poetry, and to feel them engage with the work. Built on my fascination with Booth, my first poetry collection, *Building on River* (Cormorant, 2018), was published when I was about to turn 75.

I continue to write poetry, on various themes. Some ideas have come up for another suite of poems, but so far none has grabbed me so tight I can't escape. In the meantime, I still love making things with words.

Margo Wheaton

The request in the Facebook message was clear. As a poet invited to contribute to *The Fiddlehead's* 75th anniversary special issue, I was asked to provide "a brief memoir/narrative/summary of 'your life with poetry,' including the story of why your first collection wasn't published until after you had reached your 50th birthday."

It seemed simple enough. And yet, after reading Brian Bartlett's polite request, I felt as if I was suddenly standing before a wall or sitting alone in the middle of a field staring at a mute horizon line.

For days, when I thought of it, all I saw was a blurred smear of images that coalesced eventually into a single solid thing: an amber-green pool of light cast by a small lamp on the wooden desk where I used to write when I lived as a single mother on North Street in Halifax and was trying to recover from a poorly-understood and debilitating illness called chronic fatigue syndrome.

The then-mysterious condition, coupled with the hard-to-control insulin-dependent diabetes I'd had since I was a kid, and complicated by a further diagnosis of environmental illness, had disabled me and thrown me off the academic track and the PhD in Literature I'd been racing towards.

It took years to recover, and shortly after, a close family member became chronically ill, starting a long drawn out dance with an under-resourced

healthcare system that was officially tasked with providing resources and care, but was often woefully unable to do so.

Like a lot of other poets, I suspect, who've experienced lengthy periods of illness or disability (and like those poets, too, who are simply dealing with the accelerating demands of just making a living), my relationship with poetry has been characterized by absence and disconnection. Like a passionate love affair, it's fuelled by distance and the hunger to breach it.

"My life *without* poetry," maybe, more like.

Maybe that's why my first collection of poetry, *The Unlit Path Behind the House* (McGill-Queen's, 2016), didn't appear until I was past the age of fifty. Even though I'd been publishing poems in literary magazines for years, for a long time I didn't hunger for book publication so much as I hungered simply to write.

These days, like other poets and writers faced with a dramatically pressing world, I'm grateful every time I can sit in the warm light of the lamp on my desk and begin to dream.

Sample poems from all poets featured in this section can be found on *The Fiddlehead* website (thefiddlehead.ca).

Soraya Peerbaye
looks forward...



Introduction

Soraya Peerbaye

Maheen Hyder and I have been talking about her writing together for a few years now. Some of the poems and letters that follow are ones we have visited, and revisited, over time and across distance, while she travelled between Pakistan, Egypt, Tunisia, Hamilton and Toronto; while sitting in kitchens, coffee shops and theatres; while cooking, while ice-skating; in person or over WhatsApp; with family living rooms in the thumbnail image, or the balconies of Cairo streets, moving to where the signal was strong. I've seen some of her words appear in letters she's written to my daughter, when my daughter learned that the Tooth Fairy wasn't real. "There are other worlds, there are other worlds."

Some of the questions we have turned over: what is the "right" way to write, in Canada? What are the rules, what boundaries can be crossed, what poems are welcome, whose bodies, whose voices and language, are welcome in poems? And most persistently, as she visited and revisited cities with their changing streets, people, régimes, Maheen asked: when is a poem ended? She wrote, "To write about another world where the ending is ruptured or incomplete is not welcomed, the poem must always come together, the poem must always leave you with a sense of completeness. . . "

Often what I feel in the movement of Maheen's poems is a response to that pressure: to explain, to complete and translate one's experience; to justify oneself. In the disorientation is a poetics of refusal. Often I found myself turning her questions about how to write into ones about how to read. How can I read without acquisitiveness? When a reader reads about the writer's (a brown, Muslim girl's) memory of 9/11, do they suddenly believe they "get" her? How do we resist grafting a gleaming bit of information onto soft bodies and skins of meaning?

There is so much risk in writing for a reader who may other you. Maheen recently sent me an essay by Aracelis Girmay, who asks, "Who or what does this work care for? Love?" Perhaps what I am most struck by is Maheen's concern with the personal address: the act of approaching, speaking to someone, whether in a letter or a poem, whether the one exists elsewhere, in memory, in the control station; whether the one is simply within. So many of these poems, even the letter, seem to turn and turn again, towards the one

the work cares for. The one, the reader, maybe, that the poem is meant for. In their unfolding of time and place, the whirling relationship of "I" and "you," is a grief and a grieving that is sensual, emotional and critical.

This is not about identity; the poem is not finite; there are poems beyond the border of the poem.

Section cover image "Nomad's home" by Saman Sarheng (digital image, 2019).

Maheen Hyder

Blueprint for Departure

remember remember remember / the cost of your life — Shailja Patel

Dear M,

Time is a startling and human compass. It will take you places you can't imagine right now. Frankfurt. Istanbul. Tunis. New York. Johannesburg. Alicante. Boston. Doha. Toronto. Cairo. Zurich. Lahore. Yanbu. Montreal. You will shed skin in every city and it will be up to you to revive yourself while mourning the loss of past selves.

Mama and Baba will do everything right. They will do everything that parents are supposed to do when raising children spread across ocean tides with wild minds and sprawling dreams. Like most parents they will stumble and pivot towards misunderstanding. When pills are found in the drawer of your bedside table, you will have to calmly explain that they are not yours and instead belong to the person in the next room they believe is devoid of being capable of any wrongdoing. When culturally socialized Muslim parents start to see cracks in their sons' personalities and versions of truth, it will be a bright reckoning with reality and an important lesson in how raising children in the West has its own peculiar set of challenges. Mama will ask you questions to which they are not prepared to hear the answers and they will often get it wrong and still come out triumphant for trying.

Baba will always be a prince of a man who insists on a healthy compilation of seeking knowledge, craving adventure and longing for homes in countries that no longer belong to us. Education is Baba's religion and it will lie with a straight back on the mantle of every house that is not a home moving forward. This will never waver.

M, you will have to learn the difference between him not believing in you versus him wanting you to remain alive. The fires you will kneel towards are ones he wants to protect you from. Mama will love you in ways that you will never understand. Take what she offers anyway. They will eventually let you go and trust that they have raised you to choose integrity over ego, humility over accolades and passion over complacency. You will spend your whole life trying to enact the values

they so desperately taught you. You will have to find the courage to make a mistake.

A heartbreak you will become familiar with is named Pakistan. You will draw a line around Pakistan to protect it from condemnation. You will not answer the questions people ask.

Pakistan is yours and you will claim it even if your throat is raw with not knowing.

M, in a decade or so, buildings will burn and people will look up from the streets and out from their balconies to see planes crashing and it will change everything. You will be in fifth grade when this happens and you will be halfway around the world in a small factory town that is known for its steel industry. Everyone will speak English there. The principal of your elementary school will summon you to his office and ask you to translate for him as planes crash into buildings on the television screen.

A little boy is crying and speaking in tongues they don't understand. You will pretend to be a big girl and it will be the first time you understand what it means to fear a person because they can never know what it means to be different. They can never know what it means to be a hairy little Pakistani girl sitting next to a little boy quivering quietly as he repeats over and over the verse from the Quran that his Sunday school teacher taught him to say when he reckoned with uncertainty and fear, "Please guide us, please have mercy on us, please forgive us." The towers engulfed in flames and tiny bodies free-falling without a parachute from high-rises brought him uncertainty and he reached for prayer.

You will reach for prayer multiple times in your life. It will take some time but you will finally come to terms with what it means to invite God to the dinner table. You have two brothers right now. The youngest will come later. Your brothers will not protect you. One will choose mosques. One will choose cocaine. The youngest will not learn from all of their mistakes. He will make his own. Fast-life, fast-money. University dropout. College dropout. Aimless. Young enough to make a mistake and recovery gracefully, old enough to know better. You will carry the burden of your siblings' choices until you sit at the edge of

them and choose differently. You will choose arson and the spiral of dislocation lodged in your body.

M, the family friends and dinner parties in gulf cities, coastal districts and factory towns will seem forced and performative. Aunties dolled up and wearing satin and velvet. Gold on earlobes. Gold on wrists. Gossip travelling between rooms like parched air through dusty vents. You will never stop thinking that you don't fit. And the aunties will never stop telling you that you must lose weight. *Apple cider vinegar, beta. One teaspoon a day. It will help reduce the fat in your thighs.*

M, these dinner parties and family gatherings that seem more like fanfare and pomp and circumstance...they will save you from yourself. A time will come when these dinner parties in security-guard controlled compounds will serve as a reminder of where you come from and the realization that little is promised to anyone in this world. Gold can be spun into dirt if you don't keep it safe. M, you must create the world you want to live in. Yes, everyone will eventually scatter, and still, I insist, the tiny fleeting moments matter.

The fleeting moments I speak of include that one time you gathered around an open flame across from the inland sea in a tiny peninsula near the Persian Gulf during sunrise. Your feet steady at the brim of the shoreline, *karak* poured into plastic cups keeping your hands warm as you exhaled, tiredness pulsing in your body while Baba and his friends reminisce about what they've left behind. Baba's familiar expression doused in stoic perseverance reverberating across the sand dunes: *no regrets, we must keep moving forward.*

Once you leave you're always leaving. Remember this. And remember there will always be other worlds, other dreams, other possibilities. At first departure will seem exciting, adventurous, a way to run from the spillover of emotion that comes with always leaving and starting over again.

Eventually you will become accustomed to almost-lives and learn with precision how to slip quietly out of cities and coastal towns and into other landscapes. You will land in places that will swell your heart with fear and I promise there will always be something to retreat into, a refuge of sorts. Sometimes a path in a forest behind the park with a

red swing, sometimes a hill overlooking the skyline and the comfort of water to whisper to, sometimes a balcony overlooking a district with vintage cars lining the street. There will always be another life waiting.

Pakistan will always break you and split you open and this is okay.

While driving you to your apartment in yet another city after having lived in separate countries for half a decade, Baba will casually bring up that he used to be an active member of the Pakistani Communist Party under a zealous dictatorship. You will hold your breath and choose to look out the window beyond electric wires and mega malls instead of asking for details. You will do this to protect yourself. To know more means to be responsible for more. Sometimes to take responsibility for a country is too big an ask. Cities are more manageable. You will take responsibility for cities. You will be indebted to them for giving you somewhere to go, somewhere quiet and warm to sit for a night. Trust no one. Mama was right about this, *trust only God.*

Trust that you will find your way back to Pakistan.

The war, the revolution, the dead man you were supposed to marry, the losing of language, the reclaiming of self, the runways, the defeats... these will leave you raw and wounded. That's another life. Look closely at the one you embody through living right now. Stretch it beyond reprieve. Ask for giraffe farms and poetry about identity and chocolate mousse and memoirs and Iranian films and fields of sunflowers. Listen to what the elders say and choose to hear the story instead of the judgment.

It will take time but I will eventually find my way to loving you.

Kiss the sky from the rooftop of your grandmother's house in Gardentown for me when Mama and Baba bring you home. . . you will spend your whole life clawing your way back.

Lahore, Pakistan | August 10th, 1991. Fatima Memorial Hospital

Daughter, Daughter, Do Not Tell Them Where You've Been

This is daughter / sit / rest / wait / don't /daughter/
cover your hips / what sprawls below your waist / is shameful to lean into light /daughter/
cover your chest / men come knocking on doors / for far less

Far less marks ruin / on a nine-year-old body / as I hide in bathrooms / run the faucet over
wrists seared ruby / pledge allegiance to my hush / as I shiver / as I unclench fists / heavy
with /daughter/ sit / rest / wait / don't /daughter/ books
won't save you / dreams won't save you / accept your inheritance of quiet & breathe quieter

Breathe quieter / as your body is caught / in the unfurling net of Mama's terror / taunts of
no one will desire your excess / bend / break / surrender your hunger

Surrender your hunger / as you circle the block / once / twice / nine times is penalty
as crumbs of bread are found frolicking on your mattress / *Hide what you swallow*
in drawers / but I see it growing roots in your thighs

Discipline looks like / *one meal a day* / & before lights out
drawers pulled open / contents inspected / every night
pockets checked for wrappers / closets ransacked / suitcases
stored under the bed / unzipped / *because you can hide food anywhere*
& resting against the fridge door / a lock / silver / shiny / *for your own good*

For my own good / a key lodged in my throat / turning the hunger in me

The hunger in me / a frantic hiss / the hunger in me / a frail wolf / the hunger
in me / a door stained with grease marks / leading to a body / limp / overflowing with dust

Daughter / wake for *fajr* / say *bismillah* / say *inshallah* / say *alhamdulillah* / kneel towards melody
as it freckles morning / /daughter/ turn the dial on the boom box low / halt
the hip-hop closed / & daughter / do not stray from the letter of faith

The prophet / peace be upon him / says whomever recites the first four *ayas* / of *Surat Al Baqarah*
then *Aytul Kursi* / followed by the last three *ayas* / of *Surat Al Baqarah* / will not be inflicted / with
any kind / of difficulty / Ya Allah most Merciful / the kind of difficulty / I am facing / is body&girl

I am girl / always looking / for an open door to walk through / I am girl / trying to fit / into
anything that will hold me / I am girl / twelve years old / squeezing my hips / into a single
red swing / reserved for toddlers / at the park

I am girl / with swollen knuckles pulsing breath / I am girl / whispering to the carcass
of pinecones / *boxer* / *fighter pilot* / *please* / *as long as I get to hit back* / I am girl / gathering
match sticks / lighting fires / to make holy the surrender / I want to undress from my body

I am girl / storing my hush / in moss / growing on trees / in the forest / I walk towards / a red
swing / battered with guilt / swaying behind me

This is daughter/ wait / before you board another plane / I have to tell you about home / & family
is obligation / is the pearl dinner set / we held onto for three decades / until we abandoned
what survived / because it wouldn't fit / and what doesn't fit / we discard like fish bones
like bruised fruit / like daughters too big / to bring anywhere close to home

Home / is three continents / I drape in tinsel and flare

Home / is pleading with a mother / pretending not to hear me

Home / is late October / steel factory town / forehead pressed
against back window / wanting the slanted witch hat / wanting
the silver sword / wanting a white sheet to disappear into

Home / is rice soaked in meat broth / and my brother's yelling / soaked
in chemical stretch of lungs

Home / is back-handed by wooden spatula / sometimes a rolling pin
to empty / the disaster in me

Home / is a black silk hijab / laid out like directions / on a cream-coloured
Ikea chair / dragged in from the curb

Home / is replaced floorboards / varnish on everything / including
every lie I tell / so I can return

Home / is my darling father / looking away

This is daughter / sit / rest / wait / don't /daughter/

Daughter runs / is still running / daughter lands on runways / & every phone call is the same

Daughter / do not tell them / where you've been

Manhattan / black dress / transparent / so much skin
sober forty-two days / whisky I drink anyway

Alexandria / *zalabya* / soaked in honey / powdered
with sugar / platefuls I devour / just because I can

Vancouver / river spooling at my feet / wind I speak to
cherry blossoms I curse / a God I unlove four ways

Johannesburg / gift my aunt gives me / shoved into a drawer
a wish I still mouth to myself / on the subway ride home
to have torched every page of that book on healthy eating

Geneva / I'm older now / order pasta with salty fish
at a sea-side restaurant / and dare my mother to speak

Lahore / huddled around the dinner table / braless / cold
seeping into my bones / shelling warm peanuts / my uncle
white beard / one good arm / a doctor / lowers his eyes / speaks
to the godless in me

Some daughters / do not disappear their body

At twenty-six / I lay mine across shorelines / hike my dress / above my thighs
bring the boom box close / play the hip-hop loud /& refuse to apologize / for all
that is body & girl / because this is mine

One of Two Holds a Memory

Where do I send the letter that says

Ethar, one of two holds a memory and I am forgetting

Once upon a time my spine pointed East, towards streets
that became martyrs where metal buckets dangled
from balconies, looked like tiny stars within our reach
so we filled them, filled them with notes to send skyward
towards rescue to say water boil saltwater for burial
morphine I need to settle the swollen flashlight
moon is a scorned mistress

Tonight, she hits back as we coax our want out of a country's
last lung Pull the lifeless across asphalt every fogged morning
Pass the ميدان Pass the bridge Pass the lion statues
with their eye patches Pass the opera house to find women
standing hungry and eager at the morgue *My son has a birthmark*
on his elbow, have you seen him?

I can't answer. Haven't looked. As I walk back for another body
I watch young girls gather in herds in front of the lions statues
They are preparing for battle penning their names across
palms necks calves to say:
If you find my body, call this number. You will reach my father
He is standing by the door I left open-mouthed and humming

If my father asks, tell him I unloved the old country
This was about belonging to something that wanted me back

Ethar, I forgot what ثورة meant. I said freedom meant freedom
Shattered glass on the rooftop terrace for days punished
myself for forgetting words forgetting neighbourhoods
forgetting street names forgetting how to make كوسا محشي
I watch rice fall apart Vegetables turn soft instead of tender
It's not like when you taught me I shatter glass till I remember
till I know better than to forget ثورة is revolution حرية is freedom
And today neither is ours to take

Do you remember when we sprawled our quiet across wooden seats
of the Nile's abandoned feluccas? Your yellow shoes tapping
against mine No one to see the wishes we stacked against the night
Our only trespass the padlock we pried open with bobby pins
Our gossip and objections clapping together feverishly in the hash
speckled air between us until you say: *I don't care if the country's*
burning, M *I won't abandon it*

Everyone I know is dead detained or forging papers
for departure. No one looks each other in the eye anymore. I believe you
believe the fading turquoise beads circling elastic around our wrists —
our pact to outrun the flame in the rearview *Look! It stretches*
like a slingshot And what I flung was the desire to outlive the disaster
of wanting a home

As I sleepwalk into other cities I am still trying to disappear
the hollow gutted ache and sin of having wanted out
as desperately as you wanted in. I talk to the country at night
sometimes *What have you done?* *What have you done?*
Everyone is leaving you

I promise I wanted to follow you Ethar The country
we mourned (together) claimed you For two years I called
texted emailed begged threatened
Crickets went into hibernation and fell ill Fracture
in my knee healed

You never answered Point me towards your unmade bed
I know what it means to love something and misplace it
Forget the consequence of return Questions
only you can answer Tell me where you are, Ethar
What you put on the mantle of our girlhood survives

Habibti, look

Sometimes the choice is between staying and breaking or leaving
and remembering through song and shattered glass When the chorus
of runway sings *sometimes you have to leave to come back* Please
Walk Towards chants for dignity chants for other worlds
chants for bread Run Pass the ميدان pass the bridge
pass young girls with ink-stained limbs marching in And I promise
Nefertiti in her gas mask and the lion statues meant to protect us
will lift the fog long enough and bring you home

Outranked

I may not have been on the ground in Afghanistan, but I watched parts of the conflict in great detail on a screen for days on end.
— Heather Linebaugh, Former Drone Imagery Analyst

Heather, you and I arrived at different sides of the same war with expired apologies lodged in our pockets. Spine flaring under pressure of our heels pushing off, eager to follow a breath back into its body. We both wanted out of a small town, mine perched on a peninsula in the Persian Gulf, yours nicknamed after Quakers in the mid-Atlantic.

> Doha. Twelve years old. Baba's new job. I didn't understand where I was — grass worn from chemicals, heat puncturing dust on every surface, white kids from Texas suburbs mistaking oil for a throne. I embraced the corniche as a consolation prize for leaving my brothers behind in Canada. In the Al Sadd apartment, I eyed the white handle of the balcony door, dared the junkyard below to sing the song about coming home.

I took a shot of vodka to impress a boy, lost my scholarship to Georgetown. My mother mistook my hijab for a compass always pointing. The worth of my intellect tied to my piety in an instant. Hijabi girls don't drink. Hijabi girls don't want to be touched. Hijabi girls don't fight back.

> Do you know what you were running from? What compelled you to join the U.S. military? We all have a fire in our rearview mirrors, Heather. What fuelled yours?

I told myself working as an emergency crisis worker in conflict zones would help me prove to myself that I'm wanted somewhere, needed somewhere. I wanted to be worthy of a life. What better way to measure my worth than to surrender it?

> The map scorched, all exits frayed. I stayed the course, played the role. I am resourceful, Baba's daughter. When I finally stood, I ran. Do you have a father? What did he say when you told him about the armed birds that fly?

*

I don't pretend to know what you are hungry for. The golden rule of survival: If you start to question how people cope, you will lose. A friend tells me I don't add up when I point to a cheap bar and call it an alternative, a savior of unhoused glass awaiting shatter.

> I want to be yanked up and dangled, to unravel in a pool of mascara salted with sweat. My every bone bends into a lie I am unwilling to decipher. I tell different versions of the same story. I don't want to remember. I don't want to pluck the wreckage from my throat, play dress-up with one city, then another.

I know you smoke cigarettes empty in bathroom stalls to take the edge off. It's okay. I bring brown paper bags holding whiskey into a home that lets no one in. Heather, what did you think you would find out there? I wanted to save my father's country from digging its own death.

> I accepted my inheritance on a napkin. These days, before I accept any invitation, I ask about their commitment to bury the dead. I need to know if they will pour me a glass if I lose a limb. How about a lover? I still have nightmares of the marketplace in Kunduz littered with prosthetics. I still have nightmares, Heather.

Mahmoud. Asya. Ali. Farhan. Fatima. Their breath, their having once lived in front of me, haunts me even now. What keeps you up at night? Is it the guilt of having killed or the knowledge that you could have chosen differently?

> You were safe in some way. Safe in the combat unit of the U.S. military that hides under the veneer of decreasing boots on the ground by using unmanned aerial vehicles with tiny jugular-sized explosives inside. You sat in an enclosed space looking at images on a supercomputer, trying to detect evil and harm through body language on terrain that others called home. You were doing your job. At least that's the story you told yourself.

I tell myself stories too. Collateral damage is worth less if you are brown-skinned and Afghan. Pakistani. It doesn't matter. It's luck. Where we end up is luck and privilege and time-warped into choices our parents made. I tried to reverse the choice to leave in the 90s. I tried to go back.

★

Heather.

When the clouds stitched themselves together and the whirring of a motor running out of fuel moved the sky closer to Asma's wedding, were you watching? What is a celebration worth to your oath? A hundred points for the bride's father? Three hundred for the Imam giving the khutbah? What algorithm is used to question the likelihood of picking up a rifle for safety instead of battle? What do the unwed look like painted in blurred strokes on a screen? Are the colours static?

Heather, there is an ugly in me I can mask as exhaustion, as needing space. I've named it smother and run. I tried dipping it in water steamed with turmeric to make it lighter. No luck. I was asked once where the armed birds live so I pointed to the bend in the road, the peak of the mountain, the sand in the ravine, the fruit-bearing trees in the valley, and whispered

there,

there,

there, there.

You defend a thunder that scythes at villages. I want to know, does the adrenaline needle itself into your veins when bushes of smoke appear on your screen? I want to know, what undresses your body after you position the aim of a loaded —

⋆

Do you have a tell? A sign you are doing unwell? My hands become jaws that unclench and stutter. I slip on ice in front of neon signs advertising roti, rice, kebab. I lie in windowless rooms and hallucinate a flute rising in mid-air, piano keys fingering their lowest notes, an accordion scuttling to unfold the melody. I dare myself to blink.

My friends lie about getting sober. No one wants to talk about it. The one who knocks and needs to bathe but can't come in, the one who hasn't written back, the one who calls from another time zone hinting at flight in three languages.

What about your friends, Heather? How do they make sense of your avoidance to engage with crowded spaces and the way you limit interaction with those that feel unfamiliar? And how do we come back from this? Do you ever think about being desired? I wonder sometimes if my body knows how to want anything other than survival. My parents want to know why I won't just surrender to a man. If I can knot myself to womanhood, why can't I worship?

★

Heather, I was on the other side of the glass after you dotted the match with flame. In this life there is performance and witness. The sky is shorn, you have to make your peace.

The gifts you bring, explode.

Sharon Bala
looks forward...



Introduction

Sharon Bala

On the surface, "Roxane and Julieta," a sly send-up of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers, seems simple. Girl meets girl. One falls in love, the other not so much. Enter stage left the boy. But immerse yourself in Sofia Mostaghimi's deft and subtle narrative and you'll quickly realize there's so much more to this story than a trite love triangle.

Over the course of a sultry summer, two women navigate the hot zone of their emotions, the push and pull between desire and disgust. Lazy conversations thrum with tension. The fire escape — a key set piece — is by turns portal, middle ground, and cage. The characters are flawed, yes. But Mostaghimi is not here to judge. Instead, she mines the quotidian, unearthing humour, pathos, jewels of insight, which she presents to the reader without moralizing, without varnish. And yes, there is a twist at the end but it's not what you expect. In this marvellous story, the epiphanies are reserved for the reader.

In Clarisse Baleja Saïdi's "Containers" you are an East African refugee with dreams of going west. Second person narration is inherently confronting, implicating the reader by putting them not just in a character's shoes but inside their very skin. Saïdi uses the second person to great effect in this tightrope walk of a story that balances dark subject matter with hope, agency, and above all, luminous prose.

But what sets this story apart is the voice, at once wise and wry, punctuated by the occasional, laugh-out-loud wisecrack. This is a story that demands to be read out loud and slowly. That's the best way to savour every bon mot, insight, and provocative one-liner.

Section cover image "R&J" by Sophie Hamidovic (mixed media, 2019).

Roxane and Julieta

Sofia Mostaghimi

"Juls, you want to know something?" Roxane swivelled on her stool in the Dufferin Mall food court. She was loud and her eyebrow was pierced and she didn't care who heard her when she talked.

"What?"

Julieta was the heftier one with round, wet eyes, and soft, pulpy features that even when she worried seemed puffed up with extra skin.

"I had an abortion once – before I knew I was a lesbo, obviously." Behind Roxane, a row of old men drank coffees, greedy in their stares; she grabbed a French fry from its carton, and the spring of the chair swivelled her back around towards her girlfriend.

"When?"

"Like, six months ago, maybe?"

"Whose baby was it?"

"It was a fetus."

Roxane's long, white arm moved to fetch more fries. The tattoos on it of sea creatures and waves seemed alive.

Julieta's jaw clenched. She swallowed.

"Okay, well whose *fetus* was it?"

"Juls, I just felt like telling you that and now that's all."

"So like, what? Was he married or something?"

"Juls, stop."

Roxane sucked the salt off of each of her fingers. She felt concern vibrating off her girlfriend as if it were an invasion. Even the pulsing eyes of the old men nearby seemed less threatening.

"Oh my God," Julieta said. "Or did he like . . . assault you?"

"Juls . . . "

Fingertips still moist from licking them, Roxane pushed a strand of Julieta's black hair back behind her unpierced ear. Julieta gave a little kick with her voice — this was how she always whimpered when she felt powerless — and Roxane kissed her. She wasn't supposed to kiss Julieta in here. Any one of her mother's friends who worked in the Walmart down at the

other end might spot them. Julieta pulled back then, receded alongside the eyes of the men, and put her mouth on the straw of her drink.

"Those old, creepy men behind us think we're so totally hot, eh, Juls?" Roxane shot her eyes at them.

Six months ago, when Roxane was already a high-school dropout Julieta was finishing up her senior year. In every classroom she'd sat in the front row. Her evenings, she'd spent studying. Her Sundays, she'd spent in church with her mother. She'd never even kissed a girl before.

"Well, don't worry," Julieta said.

In Roxane's broken, blinking eyes, Julieta saw something like sadness slinking.

"About what?"

"I don't think you're going to Hell or anything."

Before they'd met, Julieta used to stare at Roxane on her walk into work in the afternoons. Dressed in her blue Walmart uniform, Roxane would be standing in front of the dumpsters in the Dufferin Mall parking lot, feet in dirty, white Converse, neck tilted to one side, smoking joints, and daring mall patrons with her eyes to say something, anything.

Roxane noticed Julieta a few weeks after that, in the bathroom of the food court when it was still spring, the chubby girl with the puffed-up face and big, brown, wet eyes.

"Are you okay? You look like you've been crying," she'd said to her, leaned over the faucet under the bad, yellow lights of the bathroom.

"Fine," Julieta had said but she slept easier that night. If a stranger could notice your sadness then this world, it wasn't hopeless.

When Roxane finally called out to Julieta, it was only a week later but it was the summer now. It was hot. Across the pavement, on the horizon, air quivered. Julieta crossed the parking lot in her black Starbucks uniform. Roxanne had already finished her shift and changed into short shorts and a tank top. And it was curious and sort of hot how Julieta gawked at her body without saying a word. The feeling of anticipation had been almost unbearable, and for Julieta too, who knew she stared but couldn't help it. And when Roxane called out to her, it was like a fresh breeze coming up off an ocean and delivering them from the beating of the sun.

"Yes, you!" Roxane shouted. "Want a puff? I'll share if you give me a free coffee next time I come in. Deal?"

"I can't smoke before work. It'll make me anxious," Julieta said.

"Well what time does your shift end?"

"In six hours."

"Okay," told her. "I'll be here."

Julieta walked away smiling so wide that she could barely see out of her eyes with those cheeks of hers pressed up against them.

"Tell me about that guy, the one who got you pregnant," Julieta asked Roxane as they lounged naked on her living room sofa. Her mother would be home soon from work but until then Roxane was curled quietly into the small spoon of Julieta's big one, staring at the wall opposite the sofa. Both the TV and Julieta's mother's Catholic altar had been set up there, on the same white translucent tablecloth, on the same long, cheap fold-out table.

"Did you like doing it with him?"

Roxane blinked and stretched her arms over her head.

"Ya. Sometimes," she said.

"So you're bisexual? Do you think?"

Roxane laughed hard and purposeful, and the sound was like a gurgle.

"I think everybody's bisexual. Now, let me go. I need a cigarette."

"Wait."

Both of Roxane's skinny, tattooed legs flopped from the couch to the rug.

"What's wrong?"

Roxane could feel out of the corner of her eyes her girlfriend's breasts slumping towards each arm pit, and for a moment, she wondered if she actually did feel anything for this person.

"Nothing's wrong. I just need a cigarette."

Julieta tried smiling. Her voice was quiet but her eyes were bright.

"Come back."

"Your mom's gonna be home soon. If I don't smoke now, I'll have to wait for her to go to sleep, or until I leave."

"You should quit."

Roxane bent over and found her pack of smokes in her purse on the floor.

"Ha. Quit," she echoed. She pulled her T-shirt over her head then took off to the fire escape.

The fire escape where Roxane smoked flanked the north side of the detached, red brick house of which Julieta and her mother rented the second-floor apartment. Above them, on the third floor, lived Joey, the landlady's son. He was recently moved-in after separating from his bitch wife because, as he told it, she'd had the nerve to tell him that she didn't love him anymore.

"Can you fucking believe that?" he had said, a few hot nights back, from the landing above theirs.

Roxane was standing on the fire escape lighting the tail end of a joint.

Pressed against the back door as she was, she had a clear view of Joey at the top of the stairs. A huge, burly man, with heavy feet and thick, porous skin, his hair grew in curly, black tufts that hovered over him like a dark halo. "I can," she said.

"After everything I did for her. The wedding. Everything. I can't fucking believe that."

Slowly, she'd walked a few steps up towards Joey then leaned against the railing, dangling another question.

"So you're divorcing her?"

Joey, in the middle of an inhale, had stopped and turned his head to watch this skinny, bold girl materialize below him.

"Jesus Christ," he said. "How many tattoos you got there?"

Roxane laughed.

"I told my boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, he could use me for practice. He was a tattoo artist. I think I have thirteen, or fourteen . . . we used to live together. We both loved the ocean so they all have to do with that, like with the ocean. See?"

With his mouth pressed around his cigarette, Joey ran his eyes over the mermaid's tail drawn around Roxane's bare thigh.

"You like the pain, or what?"

Roxane cocked her head up and made a small nod.

"And you know," he said, , "I could arrest you for smoking that. You know I'm a fucking cop, right? You know that?"

He had almost reached down to pet her hair in approval, and in her memory, he had.

So then that afternoon when Roxane walked out onto the fire escape for a cigarette in an oversized black T-shirt and a lacy, purple thong, she was waiting for Joey to come out.

But Joey didn't come out. Instead, Roxane finished her cigarette and the girls waited until Julieta's mother came home to have leftover spaghetti with too-garlicky tomato sauce. Since her first invitation into Julieta's home, Roxane had preferred this one to her own. She loved Julieta's mother, a small brown woman with a rounded stomach and black eyes who loved to dramatize the loud, hard footsteps of Joey above them.

"He walk like he possessed," she repeated tonight during dinner. "He walk like he, I don't know. Like he crazy."

"We should move then," Julieta said.

"Where? You want to go back to Mexico? You never been!" A low, fast grumble filled the room as Julieta's mother laughed.

Julieta rolled her eyes. She looked at Roxane, who gazed at her mother with tight, polite lips, and Julieta wondered what it would be like to have grown up white.

After dinner, while her mother watched her telenovela, Julieta begged Roxane to sleep over. She loved to set her cold feet against Roxane's skin while they slept and imagine that with every sleepover, she saved her just a little bit more from a life of bad, mean boyfriends and sad abortions.

In the middle of the night, Roxane was awoken by a low thud followed by a shaky and muffled woman's laugh. Roxane looked at Julieta who still snored snuggly in a small cocoon at the edge of the bed, and strained to listen. She heard a door closing, upstairs. More laughter. Then silence. She sat up with fear or excitement, or some combination of both that was neither of those things, and felt the wall at her back start to rattle like a tok, tok, tok. She thought she heard the rush of a moan, too, pale and wanting. Julieta still snored. Then again there was that moan, raw and surging.

Roxane thought back to her ex-boyfriend, of his bare back as he lit a cigarette and the smoke rolled out backwards, to collide with her naked body on his bed. She didn't know why this was the image that had come to her, except that this was how babies were made, via these sounds and grunts and this sweat that truly, requires no intimacy, not really, and of how after the abortion, she'd told her boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, about how the first step to the procedure is the insertion of seaweed to dilate the cervix. "No way," he'd said, between two pulls on a joint. Before they'd broken up, she'd insisted that he give her one last tattoo, underneath her bellybutton, of strands of seaweed. She searched for it now in the dark, green and undulating.

In the morning, Roxane rolled onto Julieta's belly and tried to tell her about the man who had gotten her pregnant and for whom she'd dropped out of high school and run away from home to live with, and about how he had reimagined her body with images from a book about the ocean they both loved to look at in the mornings, after long nights of drinking.

"If you ask me something, anything, I'll answer it," Roxane said. She was wide-eyed, and expectant.

"Alright." Julieta rubbed her eyes. Her face was swollen from last night's sleep, and she smelled strong, like wet earth. "Alright, do you love me?"

"Of course, I do," Roxane said, too quickly for thought. She rolled off the thick, warm body of her girlfriend, and stared up at the ceiling.

"You do?" Julieta's body rolled onto Roxane's now, and she stared at her with a soft, smudged out expression of relief. "I love you too."

They heard the front door closing. Julieta's mother was gone to church, and a weight wasn't quite lifted, just suspended, temporarily above their heads. In the shaky quiet, both girls drifted off to sleep again and Roxane had wild, bad dreams, and sometime before noon both were awoken by the same banging, the same moans as last night's.

"Oh my God, are they doing it up there?" Julieta's face lit up. Her amazement seemed simple and childish but inside it was like a door was opening, and she fluttered to get out.

"Sounds like it."

"Does that mean? Do you think Joey hears us?"

"We're not loud enough."

Roxane got dressed. Julieta got dressed too, in a too-small tank top, then followed Roxane out onto to the fire escape. Outside was bright blue, without clouds. The girls sat on the landing, feet dangling between the iron bars, saying nothing, they were completely quiet. Just as Roxane finished her cigarette, the door above them swung open, and Julieta gasped, and a woman coughed, and Roxane lit another cigarette.

"Roxane, I think it's a one-night-stand. Like he just picked her up last night or something."

Roxane looked at the backyard where she registered nothing but an old rusty oblong bathtub in the farthest corner. Above them, Joey and the woman talked about the weather.

"Hello? Roxane. What do you think?"

"Juls. I don't know. Who cares? Why don't you ask him if you're so curious?"

Joey talked loudly about his ex now. She'd turned out to be an unappreciative little cunt; that's how most women are and it's to be expected, when they get everything handed to them the way they do. "Imagine growing up knowing a man's always going to fucking, financially take care of you?" he said to the girl who laughed hysterically at rhythmic intervals.

"Can I try some?" Julieta took the cigarette from Roxane's fingers and put it against her lips.

"Juls, are you sure?"

She pressed it to her lips cautiously, as if she weren't sure of her own depth perception, and as Roxane watched her inhale, she felt protective and guilty and a little bit in awe of Julieta's innocence. Julieta coughed, but only mildly, and once she had, the world felt bright and dizzy. The door above them slammed shut.

"Oh my God," Julieta said. "Imagine having sex with someone like Joey? He's like one of those Neanderthals. Like a brute."

Roxane felt very tired and very heavy.

"Let's go inside, Juls."

"I don't want to. I want another drag."

"I'm going inside."

Julieta pressed the all-white cigarette back into her mouth, inhaled then tossed the thing into the landlady's grapevines.

Before she met Roxane, Julieta used to kneel at the foot of her mother's altar, next to the TV, and pray to the Virgin Mary that she not go to university a virgin. Having remained a virgin her entire life, Julieta thought that it was Mary who'd understand her delicate and somewhat sinful plight the best. Her favourite figurine of Mary on her mother's altar was small and plastic, and she'd hold it and shut her eyes and hand so tight that Mary's silhouette would leave a mark on the inside of her palm that lasted for hours sometimes.

Even then it was clear to Julieta that she was gay. Boys didn't fascinate her, they didn't scare her, they didn't make her nervous. They were boring and predictable. Girls confused her. They made her blush. She liked the way they walked with asses and breasts that hung off of them like thick chains of silver. Still, when a woman caught her staring she'd bow her head down in shame and wish that she'd been born different.

When Roxane appeared, Julieta knew her prayers had been answered, and if her prayers had been answered then it wasn't wrong, who she was, how she felt. Roxane taught her these things with the sudden force of lightning.

"Who the fuck cares what anyone else does in their own bedroom?" Roxane had said to her. "We can do whatever we want. And it doesn't even have to stay in the bedroom, actually." Roxane had kissed Julieta straight on the lips. "Now kiss me back," she'd said. "Who cares? What are they going to say? If they say anything, just watch what I'll do. You can't always just be like, reading books. You got other parts to your body than just your brain, you know that, right? I'm serious. Kiss me. I know you want to."

Julieta had swallowed hard then pressed her lips then tongue into Roxane and they'd both fallen backwards, into the grass. On a warm, sunny day in the Dufferin Grove Park, surrounded by fifty people or more, they'd kissed and touched each other over their clothes for close to an hour.

So then it was true. Julieta knew.

Most weekends now, Joey came home late with a different girl who made varying levels of noises and degrees of moans that Julieta, in her small, teal-blue bedroom, studied with curiosity. Her mother, if she heard the women,

pretended not to, and if Roxane spent the night and was awoken by them, she would only shrug and roll back asleep.

The effect was Julieta herself became louder when Roxane pleasured her, and she insisted on being pleasured more often now. At work, during their breaks, the girls would meet in the food court, and the same old group of retired men would watch them as Roxane kissed Julieta's neck, her lips. Julieta also developed a system that she used to report on the different kinds of women Joey brought up to his apartment. Levels one through three were quiet, and level tens were so loud, they shook the wall against her head at night. Then within that, Julieta explained, were gradients and subtleties. Some drew sound of out of Joey, while others didn't. Some were screamers, others moaners.

"It's like this whole other world," she said.

Then one night when Julieta's mother worked a night shift, the girls got drunk, and Roxane told Julieta that the major difference between them was that she was brave and Julieta wasn't. She wasn't passive, and Julieta was. It was an off-topic, mean thing to say, without context.

Instead of rage, Julieta felt crushing tiredness like a wave.

"What makes you say that?" she asked.

"Well, I do what I want. That's why you're still so innocent. You do what people want you to do."

"That's not true."

Roxane grabbed her pack of cigarettes from her purse and left for the fire escape. Joey wasn't home. All of his lights were turned off, and it was Friday. Roxane thought how fucking wonderful it must be, to be a guy, to have no conscience. She sat, and she felt that she was floating, waiting for something, not someone, or maybe it was someone.

The back door opened and Julieta stumbled outside with the bottle of rum, begging for a whole cigarette this time.

"See. I do what I want," she said.

"Be careful."

She sat next to Roxane, and their feet dangled over the black-blue darkness of the backyard. The city was loud, yet it all felt very far.

"In grade ten, I called our gym teacher a *fucking homophobic misogynistic sexist asshole* because he told this guy to stop "whining like a girl." I got in so much trouble, my mother beat me with her shoe, but I didn't care because it was true. And another time, I helped this girl, that I didn't even know, I just saw her on the street and this guy was hassling her, so I told him to leave us alone because she was with me, and I'm kind of big so I think he got scared and he did, he left. So see."

Julieta inhaled hard on her newly-lit smoke then tried suppressing a cough. Roxane reached for Julieta's hand. She wished she could sink into her, love her —

"I'm sorry, Juls," she said.

"But I know you're more brave than me. It's just the truth. You just say the truth that's all, right?" Julieta held the bottle of rum with both hands, and drank.

"Right."

"Like I never had a tattoo or an abortion or had sex with lots of people or flirted with everybody that I meet, all the time, because I'm so insecure and need their attention, or I've never not said what I'm thinking, all of the time, because I need secrets to make me special, or I've never been too wrapped up in myself to notice how anyone else around me is feeling or been so scared to let go that I won't even let myself have an orgasm."

Roxane laughed like how she did when the words would not come.

Julieta held the cigarette in one hand and the rum bottle in the other and she seemed a hundred years older than she had on that first afternoon in the parking lot when she and Roxane had met.

"You don't understand me at all," Roxane said.

Julieta set the bottle of rum down beside her and latched onto the railing to lift herself upright. Through the bars of the landing was this city that felt like nothing but a trap to Julieta, who had wanted to leave for school, or see the world, but staying here was all that she could afford, and with this girl, this girl she thought she loved or she did love, it had sometimes felt, on some days, that that was an alright thing, an adventure in its own way.

"Good. I'm glad," Julieta said. She turned around and went back inside.

Roxane stayed up late watching TV in the living room while Julieta slept. Then at four am, she heard Joey's loud, hard footsteps banging in the stairway outside. She wore only a T-shirt and a lacey thong when she stepped out with her pack of smokes and lighter, and when he saw her on the landing, he wore a pair of dark jeans and an unbuttoned shirt. He was alone.

"What are you doing up so late?" he asked. He was drunk, like she still was, and his eyes were red. His voice was raspy.

"What are you doing up so late?"

"Shit night at the bar," he said. "Got any weed? I need to take this edge off."

Roxane slipped one of her pre-rolled joints from her pack, and barefoot, walked up the steps onto Joey's landing. It was only one storey, but she felt infinitely higher, and the backyard felt infinitely smaller. On the horizon,

the darkness was turning to blue, and she felt rushed and anxious to talk. She lit the joint, and when she passed it to Joey, his hand was fat and hairy and throbbing, bent over her skin, buzzing. Little goosebumps blew the little hairs on her skin straight up.

"Goddamn, fucking heat. Won't let up, eh?"

"I know," she said, loosely. "My mom's place doesn't have any A/C, that's why I'm always here."

"Yeah? Was starting to think you two were lesbians or something," Joey said. He was much taller than she was, and when she talked to him she had to look up, and she liked that feeling of being immersed in a man's presence.

"You know we can hear you," she said, finally.

He passed the joint back to her.

"Hear what?"

They both looked at each other, and the air between them was thick.

"Your footsteps. When you walk. You walk really loud."

"I do, eh? Good thing my mom lives on the first floor."

Roxane nodded, and as she did, Joey touched her hair, pushed it back behind her ear.

"I don't usually think girls with tattoos are hot but you are," he said. He folded the cartilage of her ear forward. "Got any back here?"

"I don't like it when they're too hidden. I like it when they show."

"What else do you like to show?" Joey stepped forward, and she felt his hot, sour breath on her neck and shoulders, so unlike Julieta's which was soft and tasteless.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing?"

He buried his mouth into her neck, he licked, he pressed. Roxane shut her eyes, and she could see the letters that made up Julieta's name inside of her head, flashing like a neon sign, but her legs wouldn't budge.

He kissed her. The kiss was wide-open, full of spit. His tongue felt thick in her mouth. She couldn't tell if she kissed back, but she must have. She thought she must have been. There was comfort to something so gruesome as this. Her thoughts organized themselves effortlessly before her despite every one of his forceful gestures. He tugged on the string of her thong and grabbed for her pussy. His thumb rubbed it hard. She was wet. He groaned in smug satisfaction.

"You like that?" he asked.

He walked forward so that she had to walk backwards, into the wall behind her, which was the door to his apartment. She felt his arms on either

side of her, her boniness against him, his hand, which felt cold, against the heat of her.

"Wait," she said.

The door downstairs swung open and light rushed out onto the empty landing.

Roxane felt that the breathing was cut underneath her like with a sword. Joey breathed heavily against her. She waited for Julieta's eyes to wander up to her where she was now, this brute Neanderthal pressed up against her. He would stop if she saw them. He would have to stop, and she would have to explain herself.

Julieta grabbed the railing and looked below at the backyard then on the other side, towards the street. When she was finished, she turned around and went back inside.

Joey had gone back to licking her neck, her mouth.

"Wait."

"Why?" He pouted, as if a child.

"Fine."

She couldn't help it, in a way. Her pussy throbbed and he was strong and he smelled like sex. "Finish me off but then I have to go inside."

Joey's eyes were glassy. His breath was like whiskey.

"You're all the same," he said.

He rubbed her like she wasn't made of skin, but something tougher, like rubber. It felt good in the way that pain can and then it only felt good, being rubbed like that. And as Roxane came, Joey covered her mouth with his hand and she felt that she was receding into some kind of vivid blackness, small and memory-like. Then the world moved into focus again and what hadn't seemed like her fault a moment ago, now crushed her with the weight of her choice.

"I knew the moment I saw you you were a nasty girl," he said.

Roxane nodded meekly and said goodnight.

In bed, she folded herself over Julieta's body, which was warm and rigid and still for the remainder of the night.

If Julieta knew, she never said a word about it. The next time they had sex, Julieta was loud, the loudest she'd ever been, and afterwards, Roxane had asked if she loved her, and very soberly, Julieta said that she did.

"You say I don't understand you but you're just scared for me to. You're wary of intimacy," she said.

And the summer moved the way summers do: slowly at first, then the days tumbled together, gaining momentum. Julieta followed Roxane to parties in

her neighborhood. They got drunk and smoked cigarettes on the balconies of strangers' apartments, talking about which classes Julieta should take in the fall, and what was Roxane going to do, and what did she want to become when she grew up anyway?

One night, after cabbing home from a party, the girls waited to hear Julieta's mother's snores through the wall before remembering that she'd picked up a night shift. Julieta took off her pants and top then fetched two glasses of water and set them on the coffee table.

"You know like 60% of the human body is made up of water?" she said then she plopped her body over top of Roxanne's slim, bony one.

"Get off of me. It's hot."

"The A/C is on."

They heard footsteps. Roxane felt this thud of a panic that what if Julieta's mother hadn't gone to work and found them here, half-naked? She floundered against Julieta.

"Oh my God, relax." Julieta said and slipped her hand up Roxane's jean skirt.

"Your mom. I can hear her. Julieta. Get off of me. Julieta."

Julieta was delicate in her own way, careful not to hurt Roxane as she struggled against her, and the footsteps carried up slowly.

"Julieta."

"Stop it. Let me."

"Why? Get off of me. What is wrong with you?"

"Roxane."

The footsteps moved up, past their feet, up their heads, to the top floor.

"Come on." Julieta still pressed. "Why do you never let me?" She had stuck her fingers up her girlfriend and into her, she kissed her neck —

Roxane thought that maybe she imagined these sensations flitting across the darkness of her body, black-orange and unwinding into near explosion. She wanted to scream, to cry. Instead she squirmed. She knew then that if she was powerless to this then she was powerless to everything. She moved like a boat without a motor, moaning then feeling the terror of this closeness, she screamed. Julieta fell backwards.

A *tok* sound rang across the room as Julieta's head hit the coffee table then she was sliding between it and the couch, her hunched back exposing thick rolls of fat on her belly.

Julieta looked up at Roxane with those wide, innocent eyes, rubbing the back of her head with her still-wet fingers.

"Oh my God," Roxane said. She thought of Joey on the fire escape. She

thought of her ex, and of all the ones before him, like a string of lights that burnt out as you went along, made a popping sound as they did.

The sound of the air conditioner switching back on made a long, low grumble.

"Juls?"

Julieta started to cry.

"Juls. I'm sorry."

Julieta's sobbing was hushed and jumbled. At times, no sound came out, only her shoulders bobbled then she would come up for air, a giant gasp, as if she'd been underwater and were only now just reemerging.

"I'm sorry, Juls. But you can't — I can't — we —"

Roxane wanted to shake her, tell her to stop.

"Never mind. We're just drunk." Julieta got up off the floor, grabbed her clothes and glass of water, and went to bed.

In the morning, the two girls sat on the landing and smoked cigarettes. Julieta rested her head on Roxane's warm, bony shoulder. Upstairs they heard the door to Joey's back door opening, and with him was a girl who sounded not much older than they were. He was making fun of her.

"Sometimes I think if I never met you, I'd still be so dumb," Julieta said. She lifted her head and looked at Roxane who stared back at her.

"I'm sorry," she said.

In September, Julieta started school. A Pink Floyd poster of light refracting through a prism went up on her back door. She started to keep something she called an *Ideas Journal*. Stacks of books filled the floor next to her bed and she switched to wearing glasses, started to decline drags of cigarettes. From a cool, restless distance, Roxane observed these changes with the sad, clairvoyant smile of a mother. By October, they were broken up.

Containers

Clarisse Baleja Saïdi

Everybody knows you do not put your purse on the ground. That would invite poverty. This is why you carry your bag across your chest everywhere you go, never let it out of your sight, not even when trousers lay at your ankles like chains, nor if those guys beg you to look them in the eye(s).

In the southeast corner of your boarding room, in the midnight generator-free part of town, your bag rests on your broken white folding chair. The mattress — you found it abandoned on the curb — is so thin, so full of bite, you may as well be lying on the cement floor beneath it, you, new horizon, the way your angles meet with the flat earth. Elbows. Knees. A weary temple. The bag always rests higher, always within reach. It contains everything, and the chair's rest has just enough room for a paraffin lamp, your stack of fashion magazines, and this so-called purse of yours. Plenty of room.

When you left your hills for the coast, you had no intention of working at the dock. You had had enough of water, of swimming with hippos at the Camp, of pots that boiled rocks when airborne provisions (sprung little legs and) ran out. You wanted to feel dry soil, to not sink, to mind your very own Business. But you arrived with your spotty Swahili and a page of experience blank as a stare. *Where have you heard of peace and noise?* Your mother did not understand. *Come see*, you said, *how no one looks for us* (here). You cannot imagine her (at home) — knowing. *My child,* she still writes*, God exercises vengeance in silence. Come back*. You are both grateful for messengers. *AOL: Absentees Online,* you joke. Africans Off Land. Life births language in place of answers.

The sure work was at the Port. Remember how you made your way downtown, past willowing trees and roundabouts, past the State House with its crested cranes and dancing flags? You travelled on foot, pausing for one sweet hour at high noon while traffic cleared, until you were by the waterside. It took four days to find work, cleaning containers. You borrowed night fruit from willing branches. Sympathizers. You would not always be paid and

might have to run odd errands for tips. But you got a badge and everything. Official. Haba na haba hujaza kibaba; Little by little fills the measure.

You learn to stretch your tips; shilingi yako go toward room and board, chapati, ugali, coconut oil from the Indian store (for chapped feet), aloe vera from the pharmacy (for weeping scabs). You use the toilets at the port and avoid the latrines in your new quarters. You negotiate space. In steel elevators going up and down; inside squat Port District buildings; within lorries that move laterally (covered in banners and stickers that prescribe religion: Jesus is the Answer, Allah will Provide). Everywhere there are people, their sounds and shapes, all creating holes, slits, slots, you. Better.

Even the womb could not make for safer hiding. In the meanest time, you accommodate paying sailors. They grab you from front and behind. Sometimes this feels good. You have seen humans in pieces, parts apart, afloat. Un-strokable. The shillings you spend. You save the Dollars and Euros and Pounds. Plenty of Euros and Pounds, Euros to pound. You are funny. Dollars, Euros, Pounds — these will get you out. With passage on a boat, you will be on the other side of the sea in no time.

One of the Euro-Peeing-Men told you about Lizzie. He stroked you (would later enter you) and said, *Did You Know Someone Somewhere Named a Container?* They did too, in Ghana, in fact. Someone took the necessary pains to dress her, then painted her bright yellow and turned her into klabu, a nightclub of all things. You admit you did not know, that life does not teach everything. You've seen shipping containers turned into offices, mobile homes, nice ones, with doors and air conditioning, but never into nightclubs. You try to picture Lizzie the Container, gold like her coast, pulsating in the dark. You want to see her for yourself. Is she like her foreign cousins? Does she fill up with sailors, misfits, Aurora's arrival? Do people thrash in her corners, her unnamed corners?

Memories persist. You know the truth, l'*homme n'aime pas l'homme,* not enough to forgive. Now, solitary night, strip down and let lotion on bare skin slip you into the other world — like afterbirth — for there is no breeze anywhere inside, not even in chambers with three walls and a sea view.

The Maritime Giants wash up on shore with their precious loads. Vessels and their staff welcomed into the Harbour of Greetings. Once they move their freight, then they turn to you and the other Misérables. They select the

African of their liking. You are always popular, with your high behind and slim waist. Night falls, and you all climb on board, filling up the empty containers. Two, four, eight at a time (people are polite, you can share corridors, only Problems have no manners). Three also, sometimes you are only three entering the Door of Many Returns. It pains you but it pays you. And money from two men is twice the chai. They fill you up, you fill your pockets. But you do not like them and you are not like them. They want it. You supply it. Ni business. *(Night)*life is no joke.

When you've collected enough, you'll visit Tema yourself and search for Her, Lizzie on the other side. The other Ocean. But you will fly there; Ships are for freight and slaves, the dead or dying.

Then, west again. Further. Walimu told you Canada was once Kanata, meaning village, settlement.

You tell the new neighbours. They are your friends because they eat with you. You don't tell your mother. She only dreams of returns and reconciliations, old lies. You will never *come back*. You have already decided. This place is just not it. It is full already. You will move to a fishing village and set up a tailor's shop. You won't need much: a small outfit, a big sign. It will say *Karibu*! Like that. Welcome. Near. No thanks needed. Enter. (How can one word be so full, yet ask so much?).

You have yet to work out the logistics but no more Giants. Even if it will mean you will make peanuts, you'll learn to live on the ocean's tidings. The fish. The water. You will let in no one.

You will only need yourself and the shiny paper that will line your new haversack, gently used yet more travelled than you. Your mother will write of returns and reconciliation. Do not press send.

Shannon Webb-Campbell
looks forward...



Introduction

Shannon Webb-Campbell

The past is essential to the future, it informs and shapes our way forward.

I am writing this in the passenger seat of a car moving at 140 kilometres an hour through Maine, en route back home to New Brunswick, after visiting Grolier Poetry Book Shop, and standing outside a flat on 9 Willow Street, Sylvia Plath, and Ted Hughes's former apartment in Boston. The highway is designed to look ahead — eyes move from road to horizon, and horizon to road. Every so often we glance over our shoulder, but the main objective is to get where you are going.

Driving is one of the ways we look both backwards and forward. Poetry is another. Plath and Hughes understood this.

The future is something that hasn't happened yet, it may not happen. The future is a projection. This is why the theme of looking forward intrigued me to connect and reconnect with many poets of my past, present, and ultimately, who will write us into some unforeseeable future.

Poets are both driver and highway. They hold a vantage point like no other.

Cape Breton-based Mi'kmaq poet and scholar Michelle Sylliboy's poetics bring the deep past forward, as she writes in Mi'kmaw hieroglyphs. Her suite of poems is a photographic collaboration between words and language, as the land and her connection to the ancestors informs her practice.

While *The Fiddlehead*, Canada's oldest literary journal, celebrates its blue sapphire year, Susan Musgrave's work is truly the diamond jubilee. Musgrave, who lives on Haida Gwaii, speaks to grief, which centres us somewhere between the past and future in strange and devastating ways. Poems like "More than Seeing," "What We Do," and "Life in the Uncontainable World" are the back roads of life.

Vancouver-based Brian Brett's "Turkish Delight," writes of the soft animal vulnerability of desire. Nova Scotia-based Mi'kmaq poet shalan joudry's "Depths," and "Ceremony for the End of Day," offer us inroads, and circle back to how the deep past speaks to our present, and in turn, our looking ahead. The work of Irish poet Rachel McCrum, now based in Montreal,

in moments echoes the power of Plath's poetics in "Breast Snout of the Earth Pig," as her work insists our unconscious is a sign of what comes next.

Halifax-based Sue Goyette's "Anthesis," is an excerpt from a long poem-in-progress, and as always, her staggeringly brilliant poetics reminds us the real gift is in taking the long way home.

Newfoundland-based Anna Swanson and April White's collaborative garbage poems project is ongoing, yet "Portals," and "Mylar Balloons: 53-Point Timescale," are two found poems made from pieces of garbage collected at beaches and swimming holes around Newfoundland and the Al Purdy A-Frame studio in Ontario. This collaborative drives the poetics of garbage, and in turn, speaks to our environmental crisis and responsibility towards future generations.

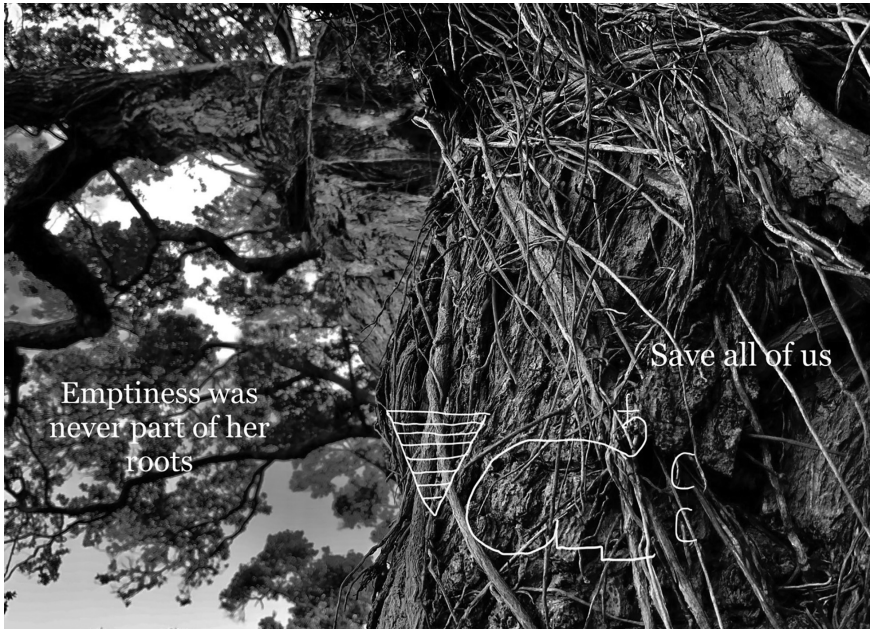
Antiguan-Canadian poet Tanya Evanson's "A Single Organism," reaches towards, or combats the concept of Eden, a similar sentiment to Nolan Natasha, who is based in Nova Scotia, and writes of "If You Need Me, I'll Be in Summervile," about a day of multiple beaches, hours only measured by nostalgia, and spirit.

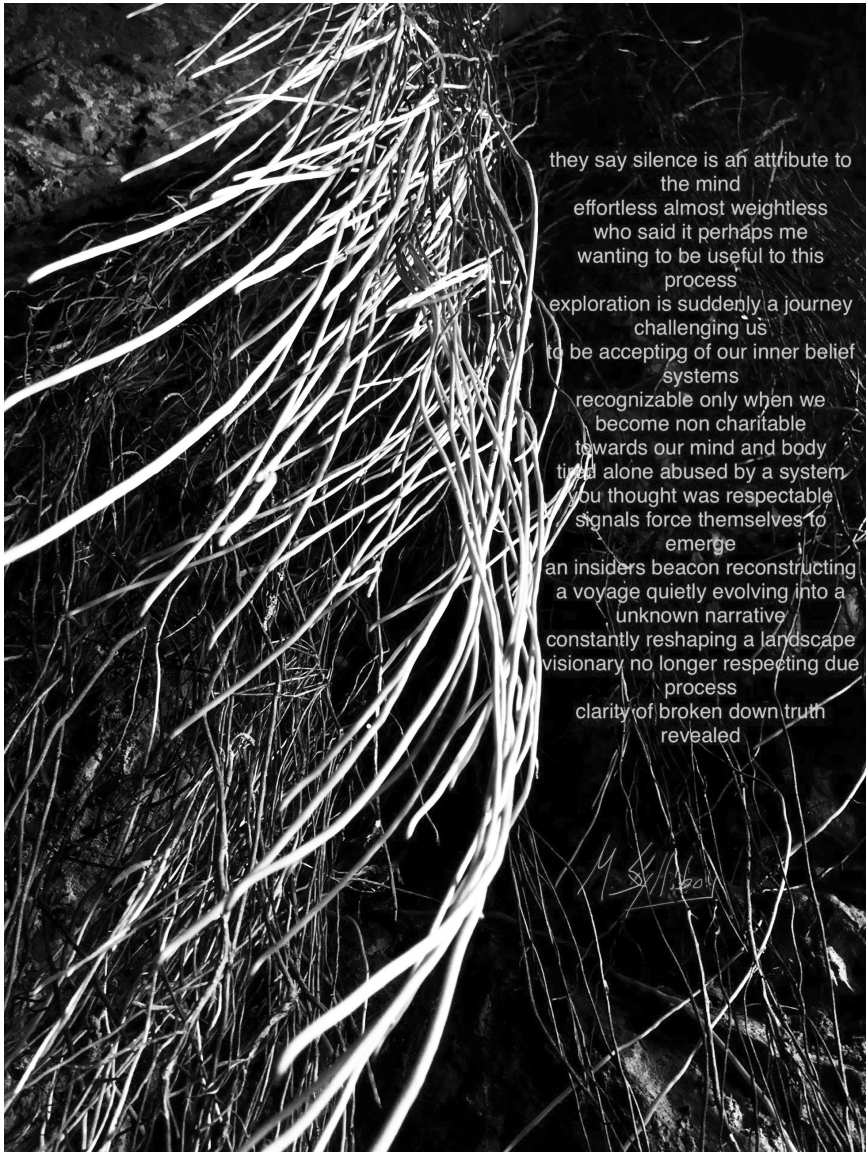
Newfoundland-based Michelle Porter's essay, "Love, Hope, Belonging," recalls a day revising poetry on Lee Maracle's porch in Toronto, how gratitude and honouring the writers who came before us reminds us the desire to write is a desire to be seen, and in turn, reading is a form of recognition. While she waits for a cab to pick her up, I can't help but think how poetry is an extension of belonging, an off road.

And finally, Sto:lo poet Lee Maracle's poetics soar through the night sky, and drive us all the way home with "Belly bulging," and "Old Tapes."

September 2019

Section cover image "A hum at the edge" by April White (lithograph, 2019).


Emptiness was
never part of her
roots
Save all of us


they say silence is an attribute to
the mind
effortless almost weightless
who said it perhaps me
wanting to be useful to this
process
exploration is suddenly a journey
challenging us
to be accepting of our inner belief
systems
recognizable only when we
become non charitable
towards our mind and body
tired alone abused by a system
you thought was respectable
signals force themselves to
emerge
an insiders beacon reconstructing
a voyage quietly evolving into a
unknown narrative
constantly reshaping a landscape
visionary no longer respecting due
process
clarity of broken down truth
revealed


Food source
grows without
any effort
Rightfully so
Michelle Sylliboy

Susan Musgrave

More Than Seeing

There is a moment before the kingfisher dives,
the eagle swoops, the small green ducks disappear
like the breeze in the low hanging cedar branches
over the river; there is a moment before I name
the kingfisher, the eagle, the ducks when I am not
the observer, I am the dart of light, rush of wings,
the trusting wind; I am grace: an end of living
in awe of things, a beginning of living with them.

What We Do

when the wind bites into our skin
when a loved one is unkind, when
a freshly slaughtered deer rises
from the dead and teeters down
the stairs onto the strangely ominous
road; what we do, at first, is to feel
lonely, the kind of loneliness a bird
feels when trapped inside a chimney
flue, not knowing which way to go.
For a long time we might sit and listen
to the desperate fluttering of wings
as they surrender to the choking dark.
We might boil water for tea, stroke the cat.
We don't always know what we will do.
The doe lifts her head and I see where
her blood has pooled and it quietens me.
I walk with her in the wind a little way.
The lover who was unkind watches
how everything unfolds — the cat,
the trapped bird, the wounded doe.
He sees that to love and be full of fear
at the same time is to journey through
the helplessness of each moment:
brief, mystifying, unholy, done.

Life in the Uncontainable World

The salal, the cedar, spruce, hemlock,
the river that empties into the sea
and every year changes its course.

The birds that wait at the river mouth
for the cockles and rock scallops
the tide brings them to eat.

Two a.m. I lie awake in bed trying
to remember the best recipe
for apple pie. I have so many recipes
for apple pie; the sheer number keeps me
from sleeping, worrying because somewhere
in the emptiness of the uncontainable world
there is bound to be a better recipe
for apple pie, one I might never discover.

Brian Brett

Turkish Delight

Lovers through the centuries,
flesh born and born again,
muscle, fat, skin, and desire,
over and over, unexplained
we find each other.

We lie down together in cemeteries.
We kiss beside train stations.
We touch and touch again, O how
I have known the fullness of your body
without ever penetrating it.

The kiss beside the tracks,
wrapped around each other,
my hands up your blouse
fondling your breasts and nipples
while the Turks and Gypsies, refugees
in the camp gawk and flash high signs,
and guard us unconsciously
from thieves and thugs, because love
is loved in every country.
We are free together, lost
in this exotic moment before
we pull apart into two continents,
and all the centuries of love and a future
are poured into our candied kiss.

shalan joudry

Depths

(for those who dance)

some days i hear the bones rattling
as they pebble against each other
in my mind
not heavy at first
until eventual exhaustion seeps in
all this gravity of grief
we are tethered to

with no other resolution
we round dance
our feet drumming
pounding down dust to stone
believing this endurance will one day
break us all
free

Ceremony For The End Of Day

when the heron flies home-bound at dusk
lifting on the last current of warm air
the river route is long and arduous

with the hardness of flight peaked and tempered
go ahead, remove your ornaments
watch your hands articulate the unlayering
a ceremony of undoing
hang your garments with certainty
acknowledging how many generations survived
and how today you filled up space

walk barefoot to the water
inhale like gravity
rattle loose the fragments lodged
where you never thought would heal
let your breath reach all the places you didn't trust
would keep you steady

sip from your cupped hands
roll it over you like a thunderstorm
and exhale
so slowly every bit of you melts
sap going back to ground
roots throbbing from thirst

they shake their feathers
fold their wings
and rest

Rachel McCrum

Breast Snout of the Earth Pig

in response to Oana Avasilichioaei's translation of Catherine Lalonde's La dévoration des fées

Look, the job is to be a bitch.
To be The Bitch.
Laced with vinegar and spilt milk gone sour,
the crystal ball long cracked and rolled under the pisspot.
This country has always bred witches.

Heavy titted, full hipped.
Muck raker, crone of the outskirts,
beaten back and unbowed,
covenless. To the point.

Aslant, askew, and above all knowing you
where you came from
who you are
you who are air and unsure

Two squint eyes and the knuckle slap.
Badger nurture. Rough love.

The archetypes come calling
from dark places in the forest
for our own good.

And for all this we'd still
bury them alive
if we could.

Sue Goyette

Anthesis (an excerpt)

Burning flowers, prepare for the next season. Low chimneys
dividing dispute between farther and pure fire; exhausted
silence startled into silence. The long lament south of the sinking: a
vivid and stubborn premonition. No one remembered the exodus
from family taking every day and all night. Smouldering for her
younger edge, always more and then towards. Is the girl leaving
an emergency? She was and barely looking away.

Out of winter, bare trees work art in her talk: go on, go finish making your road, won't you? She was different from this living, she stayed before she left, detached twice, and now was fading a name. She knocked on it and heard her mother. You owe me a boiling forecast, weather landing like winter on practically everything. Her father bellowed the edges quietly. His hand and her mouth were opposite and that was why words were important.

His anger grew a side door. The woods slowed down on weekends and though it was cold, another cloud spent the morning thinking about the sound of cedar. A mistake hissed a bare moon. Her voice over the whirr opened her for the singing. The effort ached payment daily and her mother was her daughter. She couldn't remember when it had happened. Medicine for the heart pains, plumply smoking the edge off things.

Incredulously her father shrank; small green branches stuck out of her head. What would gut her? She was high and brand new. Fresh weather opening all over handwritten specials. A bell coughed and the burning inhaled. Do you speak enough, it rifled. She left her breath out. The emergency was reciting each price. Pardon? Counting a system, a storm, a centre of something larger lingering wider.

Her singing beneath the flowers could cyclone a family but the clouds were taking the trees. We all scream for the right window. The weather sighed deeply but it didn't matter any more. They were exhausted, swirling pink lights communicating with downpours. Weed smiled languidly at her, drawled a tongue that tasted her breath. Her anger laughed hot water and a long knife. It wanted to celebrate.

The dark starved the clock. It owed her some pirouetting. Trouble kept her numb. She went into red nail polish and pulled on the outskirts. Someone planted a small house against her going. The trees opened out loud and blushed. She could entrance a few moments in a soft, serious voice. Do you want something beautiful and wild, extensively alone? A poem about navigating the opposite direction from a lighthouse?

Anna Swanson

Portals

All words except title transcribed from garbage found while swimming at the Punch Bowl, St. John's, NL.

As a child they were a dim
peripheral, something

sideways. Appearing
to the eye only

as they were about
to close. A hum at the edge

of a formal garden
stroll which made necessary

hasty side-leaps into a hedge
or flower bed. Never,

thank god, the street.
Later, they daylighted

as doors: painted hardwood,
a mosaic entryway. Inert

until sparked to life
with words: *a world in which,*

where we, etc. The place
on the other side re-made

as spoken & looking,
as parallel universes often do,

otherwise much like this.
Now I dive towards the perfect

doorway of my outline,
the rippling of a beaded curtain

about to part. Now I surface, wet
with crossing.



Tanya Evanson

A Single Organism

Molds look for high end products
Screen from the head through a wire known as change

Rather than all that, become random
Water, pulp, part of the process, translucent in space

This thin wet finish
The finish is still 64% water

Centuries old clay and other powders sink to the bottom
Sides of old solids rise, sink, and end up middle

Machines make a defining blast as they fuel out
So loud it's difficult to hear the room empty

There is no more proud busy now
There is only inhuman sound suddenly swarming

The at once empty
Eden

Nolan Natasha

If You Need Me, I'll Be In Summerville

Today, in the waves
a giant grey head.
He's friendly
they say later on the sand.
I'm on another beach now
whiskey breath
near miss
with poison ivy and all day
the ghost of an itch.
Sailboats
moored 100ft out and
are they happy? How far
have they come? All night
the waves toss in.
The birds
sleep too. I wonder about
the tenor of their dreams,
cast across the water like
fishing line. My skin and
your kisses buried in salt
and bug spray. My back
to the sunset, lights blink
on the islands. Warning!
Warning! Like arms,
the binoculars pull the birds
in close.
In the bathroom
this morning, you checked
my beard for grey, but found
mostly red. We were swaying
ever so slightly, almost
dancing.

Michelle Porter

Love, Hope, Belonging

I am thinking now about love and hope and recognition. But mostly about recognition. I am on my way to see Lee Maracle to talk about poetry and I think how I am beginning to believe — and have always believed and have never before believed — that in order to move toward love and in the direction of hope, you need to recognize your own self, to see where it is you fit and where it is you don't, and just sit with that. Well, walk with it, if you can't sit still, like me. Moving in any direction is important. Maybe toward a river? Anyway, in other words, you need to belong, I suppose.

First belonging, then love and hope. I don't think it matters what order the love and hope come to you because one leads right to the other in endless circles, or maybe in the trails of the infinity symbol, the symbol belonging to us Métis people? But it's belonging that starts the circle, or is the centre of each and every circle you live. The start or the centre, or both? I don't know, I haven't figured that part out.

But I am trying to figure out the belonging part, the recognition part. Like so many other Métis. Like so many other Indigenous mothers, daughters, grandmothers, communities, people. And yes, I suppose I did purposely put mothers, daughters, and grandmothers in there, but not the fathers, sons, and grandfathers. The women are the centre, the belonging. The men are connected in the circling around the core and are so, so vital to the hope and the love. But it's at the centre we begin.

So let's begin. I've been thinking about love because I've been reading *#IndianLovePoems* by Tenille K. Campbell, a Dene/Metis writer from English River First Nation in Northern Saskatchewan. The love she tells about in her poems is the love of the coming together of bodies for sexual connection and pleasure. And though the geography of bodies in the act of sex is storied with so much love and humour (call him/her/they baby when you forget the name of the eager partner who is moving above your body, on top of your body), the poetry is also about just knowing how to come together with a separate

being, a new grassland of touch, or an unknown continent of self, and then pull away again and return to your own self.

I'm interested in Tenille's poetry because she writes about the kind of unashamed, independent, solid, loving that can only be had once you've found a space of recognition for yourself, once you know yourself well enough to know that you belong to yourself. This kind of love is about the present, about being in the here and now in the body you've got to share with this world. The kind of love that allows you to sit with yourself and walk with yourself and that's okay. Without this, you know already, love can become toxic. Or, as they say now, co-dependent. You've got to start with that core, whatever that is for you. Whatever it is for me.

I'm talking about this on an individual physical body level, but I mean it on the community level too. The core of community is belonging. Belonging to the land. We've got to figure that out before our communities will move easily in those circles of love and hope that sustained them for generations.

I've been thinking about hope because I've been reading *Hope Matters*, the collection of poetry written by Lee Maracle and daughters Columpa Bobb and Tania Carter. Hope must matter, this mother and daughters say in so many different ways in their shared poetry-making. Hope is creative because it's built on a vision for the future. Hope is always looking ahead; hope is what takes us on our trails. Hope is created in the present and hope is built with materials from the past. Yet, hope without proper direction can be toxic. The future we build emerges from how we choose to remember, to understand, and to story the places we've come from — that's what Lee Maracle taught me. So, hope also comes after belonging. Hope needs a recognition of your story of self and the story you are trying to become. As a person or as a community.

As a community, you can say hope is the story of the ways your granddaughters and grandsons will belong to the land after you are gone. Or, more practically, you can say hope is the story your community tells about taking back the land, about getting bison back on the land, about the fish swimming in clean, clear rivers.

Recognition has been hard for me to find. I could say belonging but I use the word recognition, because it wasn't until I really fell into the recent abundance of Indigenous literature and stories that I began to recognize myself.

That I understood the full community to which I belonged, or could belong to if I could bear to belong to anything after not belonging at all for so long. Thank you, Katherena Vermette, for the Métis communities of women you wrote about in *The Break*. Thank you, Marilyn Dumont, for writing poetry about the old trails and the Red River carts. Thank you, Dawn Dumont, for the laugh-out-loud stories of growing up with a mother who moved on and on.

I've been thinking about recognition because we were always moving on and moving on to the new place, to whatever set of walls my mother had rented for our next temporary stay. Fifteen different schools in twelve years. A shy kid. I lived in my mother's stories and in our trips to see our cousins and they gave me just enough sense of belonging to keep me from starvation, but I didn't feel I belonged anywhere in the present because we moved away from every community we began to belong to. Because so many people in my family were and are still grappling with the legacy of intergenerational colonial trauma. Because I was a white-skinned poor kid moving around Alberta, a girl who didn't 'look' Métis until people saw her with mother and then they figured out how to treat us all. People in the new places we moved to didn't know us or our people, didn't love us, didn't have any hope for us. And it wasn't until I stayed in one place long enough to read books by Indigenous authors and to listen to the stories told by Indigenous women that I began to recognize myself, to see myself, to begin to sit with myself and walk with myself and learn the story that I am part of and the story I could become.

And so, as I leave Lee Maracle's porch, the one with the trellis and the climbing bean plants, I am trembling with the sense of belonging she has been so generous with and so able to gift to me and to the other poets who were on that porch with me. Not everybody can give in this way. The enormity of it stuns me on this day in Toronto. And, waiting for a cab to take me to the next place I am going, I think how in ten days I am going down to see my auntie-elder in British Columbia, the one who held onto all the stories so she could share them and kept all the music so I could hear the old songs played as they were back then. And I see the cab coming and I think maybe I have finally begun to recognize myself, to walk with myself long enough that I can contemplate what love and hope will have to do with me and the trail I am walking, the communities I am walking within, and the relations I am carrying with me.

Lee Maracle

Belly Bulging

you force your presence
from this dark wet womb
I thrust you upon an electrified world

I unpack swaddling clothes
wrap and unwrap you between
popping toast and frying bread
pouring sweetwater across your forehead

I hook a hammock to peeling papered walls
gently nudge the board
you sway to the occasional pull on the string
I knit future as you nestle to nap

now and then I rest
retreat to dreamscape
the hum of auto traffic
influences your journey

surviving requires effort,
elbow grease mindless ministrations
housekeeping, employment and sleep
even public transit halts for you

dishes clatter as breakfast answers night dreams
fills day with hopeful prayers
outside above the solemnity mothering
I can hear your sisters laughing

Old Tapes

I want to return to the day you dreamed me into being
before the old tapes played all the yeah rights
and we'll sees, before you diced my character
and the dream of love inside you died.

I want to return to that first smile, the first look
aliveness in your eyes fill mine with beauty
that frumpy old café and the waiter so plain
so plain that you looked breathtakingly lovely

I want to return to the dream you yarned about me
and love you until the dream becomes our reality
until my touch burns holes in the recordings
floating about in your amazing mind

This amazing mind wanders across pages
of old pain, dodging emotional results
impact of touchless nights, invasions of privacy
words fill with emotional subtraction

Beliefs lay waiting in the narrow passageways
of the maze inside your mind, the maze you wander
in, captured by the inability to push up belief
make love real, come alive, make it you

I want to return, begin again, and slide across
the doorways of the maze, fly overtop it,
bust the wall, burn it, kill all the old demons
fill it with dreams of me, of you, of us

Contributors

ROY J. ADAMS, semi-retired professor of Industrial Relations (McMaster), published his first literary poem at age 74 in 2014. His work has now been published in Canada, US, Australia, UK, and Singapore. His first full poetry book, *Critical Mass*, was published by Silver Bow Press in 2019.

MARY BARNES, of Ojibwa descent, is a graduate of the University of Waterloo and a winner of the Tom York Award for short fiction. Her poetry has appeared in literary journals such as the *Prairie Journal*, *Tower Poetry Society*, and *Voicings*. She also has a forthcoming book of poetry with At Bay Press.

BRANDI BIRD is a Saulteaux and Cree poet from Treaty 1 territory currently living on Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh land. Their work has been published in *Poetry is Dead*, *The Puritan*, and *PRISM international*. Their debut chapbook, *I Am Still Too Much*, came out Spring 2019 with Rahila's Ghost Press.

J.D. BLACK was born in 1951 in Montreal. After stints in railroad and golf course maintenance, he went into library work. He was at the McGill University Music Library for over thirty years, latterly as Audio-Visual Coordinator. Poetry became a major interest only after he had turned fifty.

SELINA BOAN is a moniyâw/nehiyaw poet living on the traditional, unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. She was the 2018 winner of *Room*'s poetry contest and has been published widely, including *Best Canadian Poetry 2018*. She works as a poetry editor for Rahila's Ghost Press.

NICOLE BREIT is an award-winning essayist, poet, and online writing instructor living on the unceded territory of the Skwx̱wú7mesh people. Her work has appeared in *Room*, *Event*, *Brevity*, *Hippocampus*, and *carte blanche*; her lyric essay, "An Atmospheric Pressure," was selected as a Notable by the editors of *Best American Essays 2017*.

BRIAN BRETT is the author of thirteen books including his memoir, *Uproar's Your Only Music*, which was a *Globe and Mail* Book of the Year selection. *Trauma Farm: A Rebel History of Rural Life* won numerous prizes, including the Writers' Trust award for nonfiction. In 2016, he received the Writers' Trust Matt Cohen Award for Lifetime Achievement.

LAURIE BRINKLOW, a long-time "islophile," teaches Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island. She is particularly interested in the power of place and story, and their impact on identity. She has published in academic journals and books, and is the author of *Here for the Music* (Acorn, 2012).

JAKE BYRNE is a queer writer whose poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Bat City Review*, *PRISM international*, *Lambda Literary*, *The Puritan*, *Plenitude*, *Poetry is Dead*, and *The Fiddlehead*, among others. He is a settler based in Tkaronto, in the territory subject to the Dish With One Spoon covenant.

ANTONY DI NARDO'S most recent book, *SKYLIGHT*, includes the long poem suite, "May June July," winner of the Gwendolyn MacEwen Poetry Prize for 2017. His work appears in anthologies and journals across Canada and has been

widely translated. Born in Montreal, he divides his time between Cobourg, Ontario and Sutton, Quebec.

JO-ANNE ELDER is a writer, translator, and community worker. She has translated over twenty literary works, three of which were finalists for the Governor General's prize. Her collection of flash fiction, *Postcards from Ex-Lovers* (Broken Jaw Press, 2005), won the WFNB's inaugural David Adams Richards Prize, and her chapbook *Blessings* was published by Frog Hollow Press in 2018.

TANYA EVANSON is an Antiguan-Canadian writer and performer from Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. Winner of the 2013 Golden Beret Award, she tours internationally, has released four audio recordings, and is director of The Banff Centre Spoken Word residency. She has two poetry collections *Bothism* (2017) and *Nouveau Griot* (2018), and moonlights as a whirling dervish.

ALYDA FABER'S second poetry collection, *Rain in all the ways it falls*, will appear in 2021, with Goose Lane/icehouse poetry, the publisher of her debut, *Dust or Fire* (2016). She lives in Halifax, NS.

SUE GOYETTE lives in K'jipuktuk (Halifax), the unceded and unsurrendered land of the Mi'kmaq peoples. She has published six books of poems and a novel. Her latest collection is *Penelope* (Gaspereau Press, 2017). Sue teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Dalhousie University.

MACKENZIE GROUND is a nehiyawiskwew from Enoch Cree Nation and Edmonton, Alberta, Treaty Six. She currently lives and studies on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem) peoples as a PhD student at Simon Fraser University.

SOPHIE HAMIDOVIC is a self-taught artist and illustrator based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her artwork is heavily inspired by the beauty of nature, as well as her personal life experiences. She uses a mix of digital and traditional mediums, her favourites being graphite, gouache, acrylic, and photoshop.

MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS has published three collections of poetry: *A Possible Landscape*, *Drowning Lessons*, awarded the 2005 Trillium Book Award for Poetry, and *Slow Curve Out*. In 2019 she won the Great Blue Heron Poetry Contest and was runner-up in the Edna Staebler Personal Essay Contest.

MAHEEN HYDER is a Pakistani poet and mental health therapist specializing in suicide and trauma among refugees, immigrants and non-status folks. She is currently working on a theatre project that questions the morality of drone strikes in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Her work has appeared in *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *The Puritan*, *The Fiddlehead*, and *Bosphorus Review of Books*.

SHALAN JOUDRY is a multi-disciplinary narrative artist. She lives with her two daughters and partner in their community of L'sitkuk (Bear River First Nation), Mi'kma'ki. Both her first book, *Generations Re-merging*, (2014) and her next poetry collection (2020) are published by Gaspereau Press.

JÓNÍNA KIRTON, a Red River Métis/Icelandic poet was sixty-one when she received the 2016 Vancouver's Mayor's Arts Award for an Emerging Artist in the Literary

Arts category. Her second collection of poetry, *An Honest Woman*, was a finalist in the 2018 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize.

EVA KOLACZ is a poet and professional painter. She immigrated from Poland to Canada in 1981. She is a member of the League of Canadian Poets and the Ontario Society of Artists. Her first book, *Whatever We Are*, was published in 2019 by Hidden Brook Press.

HEGE JAKOBSEN LEPRI is a Norwegian-Canadian translator and writer. She had her first story published in English in *J Journal* in 2013. Her most recent work is featured in *The New Quarterly*, *PRISM international*, *Carve Literary*, *Hobart*, *Agnes and True*, *Belletrist*, *Crack the Spine*, You find her on her at: www.hegeajlepri.ca

LEE MARACLE is a member of the St o: lo nation. She is the author of a number of award winning and critically acclaimed literary works. She is Traditional Teacher for First Nations House at U. of T. and teaches in the Indigenous Studies program. She holds an honorary doctor of letters from St. Thomas University, is a Senior Fellow of Massey College, U of T. A recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal and the Order of Canada.

RACHEL MCCRUM is a poet, performer and workshop facilitator. She has taught and performed in Greece, South Africa, Haiti, and Canada, and toured her first book *The First Blast To Awaken Women Degenerate* (Freight Books) across Ireland, Scotland and England in 2017. She is now delighted to call Montreal home.

SOFIA MOSTAGHIMI is a Toronto-based fiction writer, teacher, and editor. Her work has appeared in *The Journey Prize Stories 30*, *The Unpublished City Anthology*, *The Puritan*, *Joyland Magazine*, and as a digital short for Platypus Press, among others. She is currently working on completing her first novel.

SUSAN MUSGRAVE has published more than 30 books and received awards in six categories — poetry, novels, non-fiction, food writing, editing and books for children. She lives on Haida Gwaii and teaches poetry in UBC's Optional Residency MFA in Creative Writing Program. Her most recent poetry collection is *Origami Dove*.

NOLAN NATASHA is a queer and trans writer. He has been a finalist for the CBC poetry prize, the Ralph Gustafson Poetry prize, the *Geist* postcard contest, and the Thomas Morton fiction prize. His debut poetry collection is *I Can Hear You, Can You Hear Me?* (Invisible publishing, 2019).

CECILY NICHOLSON is Interpretive Programmer at the Surrey Art Gallery. She is part of the Joint Effort prison abolitionist group and author of *Triage*, *From the Poplars*, winner of the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize, and *Wayside Sang*, which won the Governor General's award for poetry.

ARLEEN PARÉ has published five books: *Paper Trail*, *Leaving Now*, *Lake of Two Mountains*, *He Leaves His Face in the Funeral Car*, and *The Girls with Stone Faces*. Originally from Montreal, she now resides in Victoria, where she lives with her partner, Chris Fox.

BARBARA PELMAN is a retired teacher and poet, in Victoria, BC. She has three books of poetry: *One Stone* (Ekstasis Editions 2005), *Borrowed Rooms* (Ronsdale Press 2008), and *Narrow Bridge* (Ronsdale Press 2017) and a chapbook, *Aubade Amalfi*

(Rubicon Press 2016). Her glosa, "Nevertheless," won *The Malahat Review*'s poetry contest in 2018.

E. Alex Pierce is the author of *To float, to drown, to close up, to open* (U of A Press, 2020) and *Vox Humana* (Brick, 2011). As Senior Editor at Boularderie Island Press, her most recent publications are *Aubade: Poetry and Prose from Nova Scotia Writers* (Ed. 2018) and *Salt and Wild: Shelburne County Anthology* (Ed. 2019).

Michelle Porter, an award-winning journalist and poet, is a citizen of the Métis Nation and member of the Manitoba Metis Federation. She has called Newfoundland and Labrador home for almost ten years now. She is currently the nonfiction editor with *Riddle Fence* and is near completion of a creative writing MA at Memorial University. Her essay "Fireweed" was published in the special Indigenous Voices issue of *Grain*.

Gabriel Robichaud is an acadian actor and writer from Moncton. Since 2011, he published three poetry collections (*La promenade des ignorés*, *Les anodins*, *Acadie Road*), a play (*Le lac aux deux falaises*) and is traveling the country's stages. He is the new director of the Collection Théâtre of les Éditions Perce-Neige.

Ingrid Ruthig is the author of *Slipstream* and *This Being*, winner of the 2017 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. Her work has appeared widely, most recently in *Resisting Canada* (Véhicule Press, 2019). A 2018 Hawthornden Fellow and editor of several books, she is currently working on another volume for Porcupine's Quill's Essential Poets series.

Clarisse Baleja Saïdi is a writer based in Toronto. She earned her MFA from the Helen Zell Writers Program at the University of Michigan and is the recipient of fellowship support from the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Hedgebrook, and more. "Containers" is her first publication.

Saman Sarheng is an editorial illustrator who dabbles in painting & comics. He is currently working on publishing his short story collection.

Anna Swanson is a writer and public librarian living in St. John's. Her first book of poetry, *The Nights Also* (Tightrope Books, 2010), won the Gerald Lampert Award and a Lambda Literary Award. Her writing has also appeared in various anthologies including *The Best Canadian Poetry in English* and *In Fine Form: The Canadian Book of Form Poetry*.

Michelle Sylliboy is a Mi'kmaq interdisciplinary artist who was raised in her traditional Mi'kmaq territory We'koqmaq First Nation, Cape Breton. She is currently a PhD Candidate at Simon Fraser University in Philosophy of Education. Her educational pursuits are to reclaim her original written komqwej'wikasikl language through revitalization dialogues by planting seeds using art and poetry as a vehicle to share the Mi'kmaq people's original written language.

Émilie Turmel was born in Montreal. She now lives in Moncton where she is the Executive Director of the Frye Festival. Poet and performer, she has created and participated in several literary performances. Her first book, *Casse-gueules* (Poète de brousse, 2018) won the Prix René-Leynaud (Lyon, France) and was a finalist for the prestigious Prix Émile-Nelligan.

ARIELLE TWIST is a Nehiyaw, Two-Spirit, Trans Woman Originally from George Gordon First Nation, Saskatchewan. She is now based out of Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is an author and multidisciplinary artist. She has work published with *Them*, *Canadian Art*, and *CBC Arts*. *Disintegrate/Dissociate* is her first collection of poetry.

JEAN VAN LOON'S first poetry collection *Building on River*, published by Cormorant Books in April 2018, was shortlisted for the Ottawa Book Prize. Her stories, poems, and reviews have appeared in literary magazines in the US and Canada and in *Journey Prize Stories 19*. She holds an MFA from UBC.

MARGO WHEATON'S debut poetry collection *The Unlit Path Behind the House* won a Canadian Authors Association award and was shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Award, the Fred Cogswell Award for Literary Excellence, the J. M. Abraham Award, and the Relit Award. Margo's an associate poetry editor at *The Dalhousie Review*

APRIL WHITE is an artist who works with watercolour, animation, and print media. Her artwork questions societal understandings of vulnerability and control through commonly experienced involuntary actions such as yawning, sneezing, laughing, and crying. She recently moved from St. John's, NL to Montreal, QC where she is working towards her MFA degree in Print Media at Concordia University.

Roy J. Adams • Mary Barnes • Brandi Bird
J.D. Black • Selina Boan
Nicole Breit • Brian Brett • Laurie Brinklow
Jake Byrne • Antony Di Nardo
Jo-Anne Elder • Tanya Evanson • Alyda Faber
Sue Goyette • Mackenzie Ground
Sophie Hamidovic • Maureen Scott Harris • Maheen Hyder
Shalan Joudry • Jónína Kirton

The Fiddlehead

Featuring Fresh Literary Foraging!

Eva Kolacz • Hege Jakobsen Lepri • Lee Maracle
Rachel McCrum • Sofia Mostaghimi
Susan Musgrave • Nolan Natasha • Cecily Nicholson
Arleen Paré • Barbara Pelman
E. Alex Pierce • Michelle Porter • Gabriel Robichaud
Ingrid Ruthig • Clarisse Baleja Saidi
Saman Sarheng • Anna Swanson • Michelle Sylliboy
Émilie Turmel • Arielle Twist
Jean Van Loon • Margo Wheaton • April White

55
7 72006 06004 2

$10.00

GENUINE CANADIAN MAGAZINE