

Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada/la littérature, l'environnement et la culture au Canada

# The Goose



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2013

# The Goose

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~

**Cover Photo Credit:** Scott Cressman

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If you would like information about *The Goose*, ALECC, or guidelines for submitting work to the journal, please contact Lisa Szabo-Jones at [lszabo@ualberta.ca](mailto:lszabo@ualberta.ca).

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# Editor's Notebook





For several days in June, my city of Calgary underwent the largest evacuation order it has ever seen, one of 33 communities in Alberta to declare a state of local emergency during the worst flooding in the history of the province. As the rising waters engulfed homes, businesses, and much of Calgary's downtown core, the fact that economic and social activities interconnect with environmental processes was inescapable.



Despite the massive disruption to the city, extended power grid failures, damage to roads, bridges, and CTrain transit lines, and with the municipal water filtration system struggling to keep up with the incoming silt and debris, most Calgarians managed to resume ordinary life fairly quickly – at least, those who still had homes. The total damage to this city and other Alberta communities, though, has become a long-term problem. While announcing a preliminary \$1-billion provincial recovery fund during the early stages of the response, Alberta Premier Alison Redford commented, “I don’t want to scare people, but I want you to know that when we talk about what’s going to happen, we’re talking about a ten-year plan” (“Alberta Flood”). The thought of a decade long recovery is indeed sobering. Her statement, though, is actually more soothing than it is frightening because it assures citizens that an eventual recovery will occur, while concealing the more unsettling possibility that the next so-called “flood of the century” may happen before this envisioned ten-year recovery has reached its conclusion. While climatology cannot predict individual events or determine whether a particular storm is the direct result of climate change, it does tell us that increasingly severe weather events will occur with growing frequency. In other words, as climate damages continue to accrue, we may never fully



“recover” from a specific event or put the disaster “behind us” before the next one arrives. A statement that envisions an uninterrupted process of recovery after a climate-related disaster is ultimately a statement of climate change denial.



In July, Alberta country musician Corb Lund released a tribute song for victims of the flood called “Blood, Sweat & Water,” in which he sings, “Come hell or high rivers, come droughts or come blizzards, the horses of Calgary will buck” (“Corb Lund”). The lyric is a reference to the social media slogan “Hell or High Water,” which became an unofficial city motto during the massive cleanup efforts in the submerged Stampede Park. Sure enough, the intensive restoration labour allowed at least a reduced version of the 101<sup>st</sup> Calgary Stampede to proceed as scheduled. Lund’s lyric captures the spirit of resiliency that is necessary in the face of such disasters, and speaks to the spectacular results that come about when the collective will of a citizenry focuses on a singular pressing task. At the same time, though, such statements and slogans reinforce a deep social resistance against the need to examine and modify everyday

behaviours. They declare a collective promise to replicate endlessly the cultural practices of the modern era, even if this means fighting the shifting locations of floodplains and the limits of the earth itself. They resolve never to change.

Change, though, is inevitable. Even the intensive mobilization of resources (the desperate extraction of increasingly inaccessible fossil fuel deposits, the need for infrastructure to be replaced or moved away from vulnerable locations, the demand for temporary evacuee shelters) needed to maintain “normalcy” as we surpass ecological limits is itself a change from the previous norm. Just as our practices of negotiation with environmental factors must adapt to new realities, so too do we have a deep need for adaptive cultural, literary, and artistic statements that submit our cultural practices and assumptions to an ongoing process of

questioning and change. We can usefully respond to climate disasters only if we dispel the notion of the isolated event, and recognize droughts and storms as pieces of a larger climatic and ecological picture, one that requires us to reevaluate which behaviours – which development and construction projects, which energy policies, which food products, which collective visions of the future – continue to make sense, and which ones are causing us harm. Silence on climate change is climate change denial. And when the costs of even a single climate disaster are so high, denial should be called out as counterproductive.



This double issue of *The Goose* invites thoughtful reevaluations of a number of topics. Derrick Denholm's excerpt from his forthcoming book on the rainforests of B.C.'s north coast offers an astonishing insider's look at the practices and dilemmas of the forestry industry. Examining the limitations of forest ecosystem resiliency, Denholm shows why industrial forestry products are not as "renewable" as we might like to think. His personal experience, detailed research, and self-conscious manipulation of syntactical conventions cast new light on the implications that forestry practices have for social and environmental justice.

Arn Keeling's photo essay takes us into the abandoned mines of the Canadian North, providing a window into the discoveries of a larger collaborative project that Keeling, an environmental historian, is leading along with John Sandlos. Their work uncovers the ways in which mineral development is tied to northern colonization, the dispossession of aboriginal communities, and long-term environmental impacts,

revealing that even a “dead” mine lives on for inhabitants of the area.

Harold Rhenisch’s essay on the Similkameen Valley in B.C. is a meditation on the connections between memory and place, drawing powerful links between the wars of the 20th century and the concepts of nationhood, belonging, and exile that shape our relationship with the places where we dwell.

John K. Grande’s contribution is about the Earth Art show that he curated at the VanDusen Botanical Garden in Vancouver in 2012, whose participating sculptors created “earth sensitive artworks as sculptural environmental prototypes for art-nature integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” These artworks include Nicole Dextras’ “Little Green Dresses” made from locally sourced plant materials, which encourage sustainable fashion practices; Urs-P. Twellman’s “Earth Zipper,” which zips open the grass lawn surface of a park, revealing the “naked earth” that lies beneath; and Chris Booth’s slow motion “Transformation Plant” sculpture that will gradually open over a period of 30 years as the supporting wooden structures are broken down by fungi. (You can see some of the preparation for the Earth Art show at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oBn3Uw3bhs>.)

Beth Carruthers looks back at the pioneering eco-art *SongBird* project. Launched in 1998, *SongBird* was an interdisciplinary cluster of art events and installations in Vancouver. Carruthers reflects on the chord that the project struck with the public, and on its lasting implications for social conversations on sustainability, culture, and artistic practice.

Landscape artist nik harron offers a look into his unique visual representations of the environment in and around Kitchener, Ontario. Working from “mental photographs” that account for the history and ongoing evolution of the landscape, he creates images that confront the human impact on natural places, yet also bear witness to the ultimate transience of our own industrial landmarks.

Through a stunning set of images, Adam Simms’ photo essay documents the remains of outport communities in Newfoundland that were abandoned after the Resettlement Act of 1965. The controversial resettlement project uprooted entire communities in an attempt to concentrate Newfoundland’s population into larger centres. Simms’ work suggests that this very process of abandonment “has shaped the Newfoundland identity and defined a sense of home that is intricately tied to place.”

The poets featured in this issue are Fenn Stewart, Garry Gottfriedson, Rebecca Geleyn, Jesse Patrick Ferguson, Ken Belford, Basma Kavanagh, Sandy Pool, Richard Skelton, and Autumn Richardson. Telling us that “columbus squirmed out from his coffin / and renamed himself Monsanto,” Gottfriedson links the imperial theft of Indigenous land during colonization with the contemporary corporate patenting of manipulations to the genetic material that sustains us all. Kavanagh’s wetland poetry creates an intimacy of engagement, where, mirroring our own sensations, “The pond skin puckers, shivering with pleasure,” where gradually, but surely, “We are woven into the night, tightened into place.” Ferguson speaks to our contradictory relationships with other creatures by holding the image of an overfed captive bullfrog up against the mounting decimation of amphibian populations around the world, or by recounting his family’s long fight



against colonies of bees and wasps, leaving unspoken the haunting knowledge that today bees everywhere are dropping dead as though sprayed with poison. Pool offers an excerpt from her recent book *Undark: An Oratorio*, from Nightwood Editions, which takes on the voices of women hired early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to paint glow-in-the-dark watch dials:

Here, we lick  
our lips, point brush tips, paint

dials in dayglow shades.

The revolutionary glowing paint is made from radium, and the women who performed this work developed horrific radiation poisoning. Pool's poetry exposes this history, leaving us to consider the deadly ties between the rush to exploit technological innovations and the lasting impacts of environmental injustice.

~Paul Huebener

Cover photo of Canmore flooding by Dianne Chisholm  
Calgary flood photography by Heather Brook

Works cited

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"Corb Lund – Blood, Sweat & Water – A Song for Southern Alberta." *Corb Lund*. Corb Lund, 12 July 2013. Web.

# Content

**Garry Gottfriedson**



5 Poems

**Adam Simms**



*Unsettled: Newfoundland*  
{photo-essay}

**Jesse Patrick Ferguson**



5 Poems

**Fenn Stewart**



3 Poems

**Basma Kavanagh**



from  
*One Moon in the Marsh*  
{poetry}

**Sandy Pool**



*Poems from Undark: an Oratorio*  
{poetry}

## Beth Carruthers



*Always Coming Home The SongBird Project:  
Pioneering Ecological Social Sculpture*  
{essay}

## Richard Skelton



*Into the Bare Moorland*  
{poetry}

## Derrick Denholm



from  
*Ground-Truthing the Indigenous Rainforests of BC's  
Northern Coast*  
{essay/poetry/...}

## Arn Keeling



*Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada*  
{photo-essay}

## Harold Rhenisch



*Similkameen Peaches*  
{memoir}

## Autumn Richardson



*Crossing the Interior  
& Induviæ*  
{poetry}



**John K. Grande**



*Art from the Earth*  
{essay from the curator}

**Ken Belford**



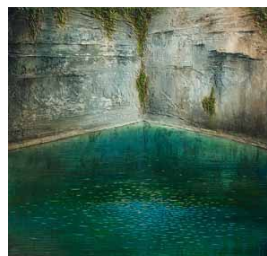
from  
*internodes*  
{poetry}

**Rebecca Geleyn**



3 Poems

**nik harron**



*Interrupted Horizons*  
{painting/essay}

**Book Reviews**



**Gus Curtis**



Wildlife Photographer

Garry Gottfriedson

5 Poems



## From Columbus to Monsanto

there are words for legal theft  
like terra nullius  
“property of the enemy  
belonging to no one  
and open for the taking”

it derives from the church’s theology  
to take over the land and people  
to authorize hysterectomies  
to sterilize indigenous cultures  
to become rich over indigenous bones

cardinal thoughts deem others inferior  
as legalized theft is a western construct  
stuffing the capitalist’s mind full of cagey jargon  
for the church  
for the government  
for the scientists  
from an act of god

columbus squirmed out from his coffin  
and renamed himself Monsanto  
the larva that spewed the maggot  
the flies that ate women’s carcasses  
the cancers that killed men  
the ghosts that drove children mad

like mengele, columbus and monsanto scientifically proved  
that the manipulations of life form exists  
and that science is a new religion called ‘greed’  
it crawled out of the caskets containing their hearts



and into minds that envisioned eternal take-over

the coronation of twins is expressed through patenting  
a technique of dominance  
a hybrid of genetically modified genomes  
a construct of legalizing piracy  
a writ hand-signed by monarchs, popes, presidents and CEOs

Indigenous people know  
that guns and canons are now replaced with needles  
and that business is owning a piece of nature  
for the church  
for the government  
for the scientists  
for the rich

terra nullius hides in the Jeckal and Hyde of man  
clawing at the stitches that bind their corpses  
living in memory as each country juxtapositions for rule and dominance  
making up the rules for the evolution of greed  
and finally, stomping on those who love their homelands

## In the Forest

peace turned up loudly  
for a moment, the skins of pessimists were aware  
and then boisterous clomping on forest floors shifted to  
allegro and ballon on pathways over twigs  
serenading butterflies with the blues  
ears perked dog-like  
straining for the chirp of birds  
telescope eyes scanned bushes  
on the lookout for bears stuffing their bellies  
full of raspberries and strawberries  
lulling spirit songs  
out of honour  
in respect of  
because of pity

and then the forest falls  
chainsaws and machines rip heavy metal music  
trees drop  
turn to planks  
butterflies flee  
die screaming  
Chicken Little pummels from the sky polluted  
worms boil to the surface of earth as evergreens plop  
mountainsides slide into the river and become mud  
salmon float belly up infected with parasites  
black bears scavenge garbage bins  
knee-bent tourists rummage the debris  
click, click their cameras  
believe they are one with the wild  
until they are eaten alive  
google can't help anymore  
gps has a virus

there is no safe place on sea or land or sky  
labourers scream to return to solace  
drop their powered faces onto their oil layered hands  
shame is the sound of money exported  
angst is for the love of your company

peace dies of cancer



## Mining and War

in a world gone soft when dogs bark  
no self-respecting man gets warm hands  
working as a corporate prisoner  
the spine in our country labours off the land  
and in the hands of indigenous folk  
who are the root-diggers  
who are the berry pickers  
who are the hunters  
who are the horsemen  
who are the fisherman  
who are the pharmacists  
who are the healers

never walk the streets phone to ear  
but know emotional and spiritual security  
streams from the silence of land  
and that wars are waged against

who have become prime ministers  
who have become presidents  
who have become corporations  
who have become millionaires  
who have become slaves  
who have become miners  
who have become the greedy

all believe in ink and rage  
when the dogs bark at night  
in forests or cities death is inevitable  
and war is a luxury you should be afraid to miss

## Rendered Natural

eradication began with pope alexander IV in 1492  
divine will turned acts of piracy into charters and patents

the pope and monarchs laid  
the groundwork for colonial extermination  
of 72 million North American Natives  
genocide deepened the pope's love

canonical jurisprudence was the duty  
that transcended 'savages' into the contraptions of copyrights  
butchery, pilfering and confiscating resources were the first  
patents rendered natural

eurocentric notions frame piracy  
and drives their impulses

labour intensified theft is legitimized capitalism  
since monsanto has replaced the princes'  
their goal is to discover, conquer and own the souls of Indigenous folk

the duty to christianize is now interchanged  
with the duty to commercialize  
thus, the second coming of columbus is entrenched  
with the utilization of biotechnologies

this means the gift is no longer a few beads, pots, pans and chickenpox  
but cancer, the mass sterilization of women, and now men  
the theft of children in the name of civilization

it is the gift of poverty  
the bright lights of skid-row

the men who drive by seeking whores in their own mothers  
the penitentiaries stuffed full of Indigenous men, women and children  
the barbwire that proves Indians are truly captured

it is the harpers, the presidents and popes of the world  
who anxiously pimp their citizens in the name of economics

the desire has not changed since 1492

# Starkly Reverberated

cultural imperialism serves to  
colonize and assimilate Indigenous thought  
before extinction is achieved

for instance, Indigenous spirituality is a commodity  
seized and put on the market by plastic medicine men  
who want to save the Spirits before annihilation

the new agers caught onto  
exploitation and expropriation  
by way of books and elders

like scientists armed with scholarly declarations of war  
ordained by politically correct gods  
devoted strictly to claiming the Indigenous voice  
and who are mandated by the government and church  
to do so righteously and swiftly  
the new agers were softly relentless

and so, both the scientists and new agers began to  
articulate and pursue the repackaging of Indigenous thought  
marketing it with supremacy zeal  
thus, white oppression perpetuates

it is ideological subordination  
starkly reverberated

and it drives  
economic and political authorities to  
raise a bastard child named  
cultural imperialism

**GARRY GOTTFRIEDSON**, from the Secwepemc First Nation (Shuswap), was born, raised and lives in Kamloops, BC. He is a self-employed rancher with a Masters degree in Education from Simon Fraser University. He was awarded the Gerald Red Elk Creative Writing Scholarship by the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, where he studied under Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, Marianne Faithful and others.

His published works include *In Honor of Our Grandmothers: Imprints of Cultural Survival* (Theytus Books, 1994), *100 Years of Contact* (Secwepemc Cultural Education Society, 1990), *Glass Teepee* (Thistledown Press, 2002 — nominated for First People's Publishing Award 2004), *Painted Pony* (Partners in Publishing, 2005), *Whiskey Bullets* (Ronsdale, 2006 — Anskohk Aboriginal Award Finalist), *Skin Like Mine* (Ronsdale, 2010 — Shortlisted for the CAA Award for Poetry), and *Jimmy Tames Horses* (Kegedonce Press, 2012).

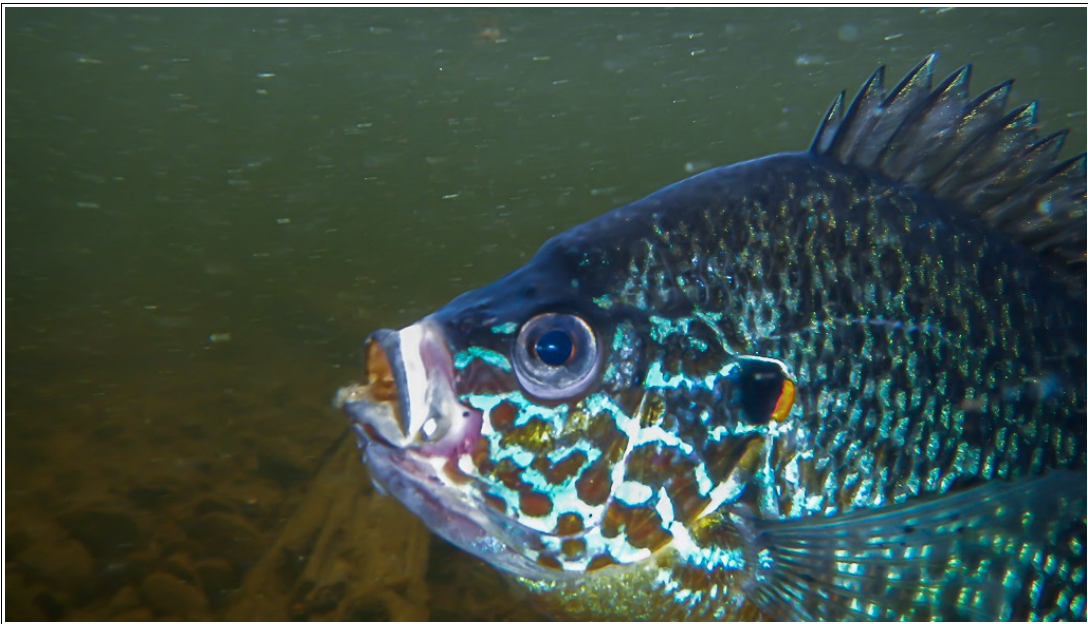
Gottfriedson has read from his work across North America, Asia and Europe, and frequently gives creative writing workshops and lectures. His work has been internationally anthologized.

**Photo credits: above, Lightning storm; below, refineries at night: Barry Ryziuk**



Fenn Stewart

3 Poems





## Virion Factory

Go to lakes, and seas and oceans 1.  
Rescue the virus 2.  
Take an interest in the ocean  
Kill plankton 3.  
Dead organisms sink into the deep 4.  
Lock away their carbon for eons 5.  
10 to 20 times longer: eons

Float free in the sea  
You don't need an electron microscope  
You don't need an ordinary light 6.

Hair structures light; the light  
of fresh-water, of amoebas in the ocean  
light is not a copy of an eon; it is not the sea  
you cannot find a megavirus  
you cannot find a megavirus in the deep  
you cannot manifest the features of a plankton

every one is irritated by a single plankton  
grow and grow and become a light  
you need all these genes; these deep  
attractive unsuspecting oceans  
take over a thousand, virus  
you need all these seas

copy yourself  
invite a host cell  
grow Hair-like structures  
Attract unsuspecting amoebas  
prey like mellifluous  
like a hisgh-tide water-taxi drinking game

you know, Similar features  
Have over a thousand genes  
like Fresh-water amoebas

And anyway Everyone is initiated from a single particle  
Everyone Grows and grows and grows  
everyone become a virion factory  
this is why you need all these genes

this is why you were found off the coast of Las Cruces  
this is why you were recovered as part of a general trawl  
in the ocean  
for biology  
for interest

I am Co-cultivate  
I am some potential host,  
I have one thousand genes,  
I have them on my wall in a frame

My genes are grey or nefarious  
Or attractive or not auspicious

and so I grew and grew and so I became virion factory

a single particle  
the biology of my interest  
a potential host  
scraping of small cells

co-cultivate

*index to an homard*

a crevice disproportionate, insensate  
cold water is an argument: sweet meat  
the language of real men is healthy or depraved –  
and yet, I obtrude often on his public molting.

with walking legs he navigate this murk  
but most unwisely he discards his swimmerets:  
is this my own dislike – vivid sensation –  
or a foolish hope, like daffodils, or krill?

curling and uncurling,  
I carefully exclude his gills and mouthparts,  
his gaudiness; my own inane  
Phraseology

his strangeness, my awkwardness (o Catullus,  
when he looks 'round, with his antennae, for general approbation –  
such indolence? it almost kills me)

behold, the rustic life of a lobster. It is all bitter silt, all elemental feeling.  
organic senility, continual reflux  
(o sickly and stupid consciousness  
I am almost ashamed by the falsehood of shell and mud)

he is so curiously elaborate, so culpably particular  
I duck his strictly true assertions  
but greenish blood does circulate his veins  
like sisters            all alive o

& he's carried    all the while    into my marvelous heart

he is an homard   served to the naked dignity of man  
and this sensation in his wings

his ganglia

it is my staple food

## The Fish of Lake Ontario

drumlin kame moraines rebounding  
it is all still gradual silt southwards  
stonehooker  
Dundas shale

an uncertain reservoir  
a turbid shoal, *corps allongé*  
soft, weak, Silurian

and zebra mussels in particular

a lamprey benzo[a]pyrene  
the PCB is juvenile  
can aramite stage lead?  
in mirex the mercury streams carbon  
where the chloride breeds

a secretion from his cavalry face  
a tail entirely spotted  
a slender silvery tongue

dancing loam

singing fish

**FENN STEWART** reads and writes in Toronto. Her work has appeared in *The Arcadia Project*, *Open Letter*, *The Capilano Review*, and *ditch*, poetry. She is the author of two chapbooks: *An OK Organ Man* (above/ground, 2012) and *Vegetable Inventory* (forthcoming Ferno House, October, 2013). She holds a PhD in Social and Political Thought from York University.

These poems originally appeared in *An OK Organ Man*, a chapbook published by above/ground press in early 2012. The pieces in the chapbook were written in part through pilfering text from various sources, including Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, William Shakespeare, Friedrich Nietzsche, Voltaire, William Wordsworth, Wikipedia, Jonathon Amos, the OED, Google, email spam, the Internet Anagram Server, and various websites about Lake Ontario, & its fishes, & its pollution.

**Photo credit above:** L. Szabo-Jones



Rundle Bay, Canmore, Alberta

Photo: Scott Cressman



Adam Simms

Newfoundland

Unsettled



During the summer of 2012, I photographed the relics of 12 abandoned outport communities that fell under the 1965 resettlement act shortly after Newfoundland joined Canada as it's 10th province. My intentions were to document the traces of what was left behind, to experience the atmosphere of places that once existed, and to explore the concept of home in relation to culture, identity and place.

The rugged Newfoundland landscape shaped and defined the livelihood of these communities; I envisioned large schooners in the harbour, fishing boats out to sea, colourful staggered houses, and a strong sense of community that depended on each other for survival. There was an overwhelming feeling of nostalgia as I envisioned what these places were like, and what the culture of outport Newfoundland would be today if these places continued to exist. It was impossible to be consumed by a romantic notion of space and time before thoughts of houses floating across the ocean to their new destinations, nature reclaiming the landscape, structures falling apart, and an immense sense of loss re-emerged the harsh reality.

I have dedicated my artistic practice to understanding the relationship between identity and place, and like other Newfoundlanders, I still consider Newfoundland to be home after abandoning the province many years ago. As memories of resettlement are embedded within all Newfoundlanders, I believe it is the process of abandonment of the outport communities that has shaped the Newfoundland identity and defined a sense of home that is intricately tied to place.





















**ADAM SIMMS** is a Montreal-based visual artist whose practice is rooted in contemporary landscape photography. Inspired by the identity and landscapes of his Newfoundland origins, his work often constructs narratives that contribute to the understanding of culture and place-based identity.

Adam has produced several photographic projects such as *Unsettled* (2013), *Where Did you Come From To?* (2008), *Washed-up* (2009), *Sublime* (2010), and *Newfoundland* (2011). He has participated in solo and group exhibitions, as well as public art installations across Canada. Adam is currently working on a project focusing on the 1965 Resettlement Act of Newfoundland and how the abandonment of outport communities shaped and strengthened the sense of identity in Newfoundland.

Alongside his exhibition record, critics have written about his work in publications such as *Photographer's FORUM*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *The Montreal Mirror*, *Nor'Wester*, and *Fugues*. Adam is the recipient of several grants from The Provincial Government of Newfoundland and The Federal Government of Canada and was selected as a finalist in the *Best of College Photography 2011* by *Photographer's Forum*. To see more of Adam's work go to: <http://adamsim.ms/>.



Basma Kavanagh

excerpts from

*One Moon in the Marsh*



## I.

Bats bob across the blue-dark like lures, tugged by hunger, turning and wobbling, little ripples flowing out from each, inscribing air in eccentric rings. Peepers pierce the falling dark to breathe through its weight. Sound and no sound overlap, an elaborate pattern forming from one thing and its absence: peeping and not peeping, a binary, fingers knotting an intricate lace as wide as the night, as long as the spring. What would night be without these instructions?

Toads sew the edges of the pierced darkness together with the straight stitches of their trills. They climb on top of one another to grip its soft cylinder, slip egg after egg in strands between each stitch, beading night's dark seam. Raccoons come crunching from the woods, down from tree crotches that held them through bright, uncanopied afternoons. They fan out, chirping and quarrelsome, nimbly grasp the lacy tube along its length, cast the net of night into the river. They hook their fingers in its fabric, drag it to the muddy bank, heavy and twinkling with smelt, trout, stars.

They wash their fish at the water's edge, a fresh sheet of darkness pierced while they work. Sharp teeth snap little threads of bone, furred chins silvered with fish and water.



## V.

The evening smells tart and damp-earthy, like sorrel and mushrooms. Peepers crank up, make a mesh of sound. Red-winged blackbirds trill and burble, tightening dusk to itself. *Rana pipiens* snores, and pipes. Grasses whisper up, push flowers from their rolled sheaths of leaf. Mute constellations of *Amelanchier* flowers glow against blood dark leaves. The water's still, blank surface ripples to life with the dab-dab of minnows feeding.

## XI.

I descend the raccoon trail through jewelweed and wild cucumber skeletons to the water, startle a green frog, wait for dusk, listening, listening. “Two days of wind and rain,” trill the toads. A mosaic of broken cattail leaves, round seedcases and a ground of duckweed decorates the pond’s northwest shore, floating piazza for amphibious sprouts. Sodden spirit faces peer from each tall *Typha* wand. Minnows swarm at the shoreline—luminous, blue-grey, moon-colored. They wriggle under detritus, flop in shallow water, nab their otherworld prey. A lone *Bombus* bumbles past, working late.

The sun emerges from a snarl of clouds for a moment before it sets, turns everything rose-orange. The pond skin puckers, shivering with pleasure. *Bufo* and *Bufo* harmonize *tremolo*, *amoroso*. Their little rattles of flesh ripple with longing, a tenderness bordering bliss drawn from pouches of night air. That little bird who sounds like a peeper—the sora—its sad kyaa-kyaaa, pealing.

## XVIII.

Gusts silver the water. The little skunk cabbage cousins—*Calla palustris*—suddenly bloom, leaves up, cupped towards the green-white beaded spadix wrapped in its bright white spathe. A kingfisher swoops, chitters, circles, doubles back to a bare branch, elastic-stringed as a bat. His branch disappears in the dim light, then his blue feathers. Only the white collar shows with a Cheshire-cat gleam.

A changeable sky. Whitish light bounces suddenly before darkness settles. A pair of geese fly loudly over, but don't stop here for the night. A bat labours with duck-like intensity against the wind. A clump of new reeds nibbled to nubs, their foamy interiors exposed. Wind gentles the peepers for a moment, leavening the cries, making them porous. We walk in and out of wefts of song, dense, doubled, trebled. We are woven into the night, tightened into place, shuttled by blackbirds flitting energetically from tree to brush, clump to clump of aquatic plants. Toads snug the warp, nudge us, pry a few threads from the fabric, wrap them with glistening strands *song*, *egg*, *sperm*; the sqolj of sqoljuiku's doing their important work, birthing the season from moist bodies, naming the moon.

**BASMA KAVANAGH** is a Nova Scotia visual artist and poet currently based in Brandon, MB.

*One Moon in the Marsh* consists of a prelude and 28 short parts, written during nightly visits to a wetland during the month of May (2011 and 2012). Basma has a published collection of poetry *Distillō* (Gaspereau). She has exhibited and published her work in Canada and internationally.

**Photo credit:** Basma Kavanagh, "Cups" from her art installation *Bio/Poiesis* exhibited at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba from 20 June to 19 July, 2013.

# Jesse Patrick Ferguson

## 5 Poems



## Waxwing in Hawthorn (with Apologies)

Sticking to the city snowblowers'  
freshly cut swaths through snow banks,  
I was homing toward my warm apartment.  
When I stalled and dug out  
my notebook to write you down,  
I could have cut off my hand,  
should have plucked out my eyes  
and packed them on ice,  
better yet, left just the eyes  
and put away the rest.

I guess what I'm trying to say  
is that I want that I should be left out  
of what I'm saying, that there not be  
something cute or clever  
about the human condition  
hidden in your plumage, which just then  
was completely full of December sunlight,  
slightly puffed up, it would seem,  
against the cold that numbed my fingers.

So. There you are: Bohemian Waxwing  
trilling the frosted branches of that Hawthorn,  
chatting up your mates in the next tree,  
self-sufficiently helping yourself  
to the clustered red haws.  
Your throat and crown the colour of peaches  
sliced by two black stripes swept back  
from your noisy beak, right *there*  
and *there* across the eyes.  
Dull crest, but bright flashes  
of canary-yellow at tail- and wingtip.  
Wings otherwise grey as wet asphalt,  
road salt on boot rubber, an old man's beard.

Or, better yet, as the wings  
on a Bohemian Waxwing.  
Right. There you are.

# The Coleman Frog

Museum specimen now, the Coleman frog lies  
under glass that keeps skeptical fingers at bay.  
Fredericton's Nessie, this monster bullfrog  
hand-reared on buttermilk, whiskey and bread  
to a whopping forty-two pounds  
by Fred Coleman, Victorian innkeeper  
who flogged this oddity with the chutzpah  
of a sideshow barker.

Legend goes,  
he'd come when called by Fred's dinner bell,  
and stuffed silly on human fare, he stretched  
to man's length—five-foot-six from snout to webbed foot.  
Until one day in 1885, he was forced by death  
to decline the invitation to dine,  
and the bobbing frog floated into Fred's grieving arms.  
He had the bugger stuffed,  
insisting the taxidermist twist his lips up  
so they might smile on the Barker House Hotel lobby.  
On closer consideration, Fred might have noticed  
instead an ironic smirk on his unwitting mascot.  
So legend goes.

A few miles  
from the York Sunbury Museum,  
at Killarney Lake where Coleman once angled,  
the amphibian population goes belly-up  
with those around the globe:  
so many canaries in the coal mine  
of our boundless exploitation.  
A monstrous quiet spreads across  
the lake surface and invades the sedges.

But here, Coleman's frog poses for one more photo,  
looking suspiciously back at tourists  
through his magnifying-glass eyes.  
His lips painted permanently shut  
to preserve the dream of goodwill among species,  
a joke dry and brittle as century-old papier mâché  
that would collapse inward at the slightest touch.



## The War on Bees

There were summers living  
in that wooden house on Elsie  
one couldn't throw a stone  
without hitting a hive—  
honeybee, wasp, yellow jacket, hornet—  
we never willingly got close enough  
for such fine distinctions.  
Even that time when I was ten  
and with a friend stumbled  
upon an underground nest.  
Those tiny bodies, that swarm more  
than the sum of its parts, overwhelming us  
even into our screaming mouths  
as we bolted home unable to yell *help*.  
We never saw the stripes on their sides  
but went treading lightly thereafter,  
nursing an Africanized strain of fear.

Be it a papier-mâché planet  
among the constellated leaves  
of the backyard rock maple  
or bobbing within the lilac tree's  
milky way of blooms, dad would bat it down  
with a broomstick and run,  
the entropy loosed by that big bang  
trailing him as he hightailed it  
panting back into our porch.  
Patting his work pants from thigh to heel,  
unrolling his cuffs for good measure,  
then feeling silly for having  
hooked the latch behind him.

One summer's nest goaded us  
to rig from scrapwood and twine  
a pole long enough to dislodge the sun

from the sky, but which in the end  
only jimmied free a paper lantern  
from the topmost boughs of our shade tree  
and sent sparks of ire down our necks.  
We locked ourselves in the Mercury sedan,  
windows up, and with four tires  
rolled that stinging fire flat.  
But most insidious was the enemy within the gates,  
within the walls of that old farmhouse.  
Striped interlopers swelling  
the soffit aluminum, cramming  
the siding with pulsing cells,  
waging trench warfare between the studs  
and under the stairs. One July evening  
we routed some from their bunker  
with dad's 20-volt Shop-Vac:  
half-anteater, half siege engine,  
and louder than a lion with a stung paw.  
We nosed the black snout of its hose  
to the mouth of the colony (a dime-sized hole  
where a board's knot had come loose),  
and, having triggered the switch, walked away.

After an hour that might've seemed  
an eternity, the hive dwindled  
to a ghost town, the colony now vortexing  
the vacuum's belly. With an old sock  
we stoppered the hose and killed the motor.  
From within the PVC chamber came a faint echo  
of electric roar as the bees revved up,  
until one of us—dad or I—  
popped the red top on a can of Raid,  
aimed it down the barrel of the hose  
and shut that buzz down.

# Wasted

All of this city's tinfoil cigarette-pack liners,  
which, if compacted, would sum a wrecking ball.  
The stuff that ball would wreck.  
All silent consonants. Burnt tubes  
in the signs of big-box stores  
from here to Montreal. The coffee shop  
chin-wagging over big government.  
The petty cash played fast and loose.  
Curb appeal at night.  
The Aqua Velva on actuaries.  
The ghost-ship city buses running  
*hors d'usages, désolé*. The corn husks'  
sweaty decomposition lifting the bin's lid.  
A dead wasp's wither. The wavelengths  
excluded by polarized sunglasses,  
the violent impulses stemmed by neckties.  
The wishbones of geese sucked  
into jet engines, a fallen soldier's AIR MILES.  
The metaphor not sexy enough  
to merit leaving bed for pen and paper.  
The remaindered poetry collections conspiring  
to tunnel beyond the Chapters' perimeter.  
The mothballed tan lines.  
The wasted youth those times  
I got wasted. The hangover-morning Inbox  
(a game of Tetris hopelessly lost).  
The empty boxes from our move crowding the exit:  
mourners suddenly ashamed of their solemn act.  
The expired box of condoms. Tail-ends  
of painkillers. Questionable condiments.  
My slightly foxed copy of *The Cantos*  
soaking up spilled Cointreau. The three remaining days  
of cable left unwatched at the old place.  
The early September frost pressing a black thumb  
onto the catcalls of frosh boys  
stumbling home past this window.  
That same black thumb—the sun-smell it wipes  
from tomato plants the next balcony over.

## Bedtime Prayer

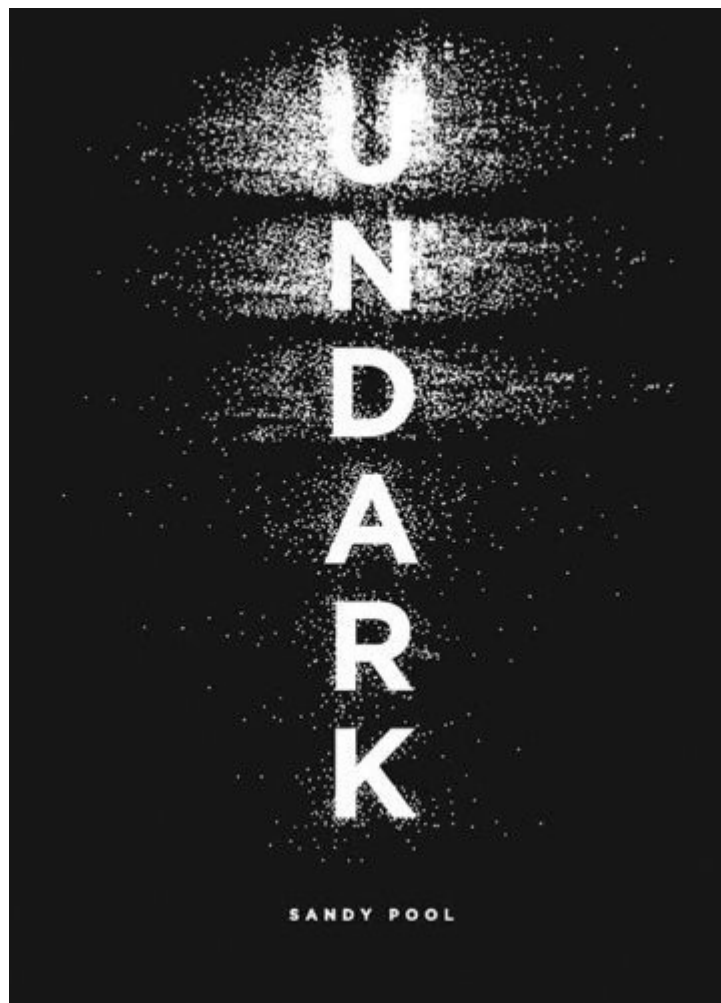
May this wakeful wind  
breaching the open inch  
of my window  
blow in one ear and out  
the other, shaping  
the straight, green saplings  
of dream and leaving  
them raw-barked and tangled,  
confounding any question  
of right or wrong.

**JESSE PATRICK FERGUSON** was raised in Cornwall, Ontario, and has lived in Ottawa, Fredericton and Sydney. He has published poetry and reviews in eleven countries. Some highlights include: *Canadian Literature*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Walrus*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry* and *Harper's*. His work also appears in the anthologies *Best Canadian Poetry 2009*, *Rogue Stimulus* and *The White Collar Book*. Jesse has been a poetry editor for *The Fiddlehead*, and he has served on the editorial boards of several other Canadian journals. His two full-length poetry books are *Harmonics* (Freehand Books, 2009) and the collection of visual poems *Dirty Semiotics* (Broken Jaw Press, 2011). He is also the editor of a forthcoming anthology of glosa poems in honour of P.K. Page.

**Photo credit:** L. Szabo-Jones, Osprey

# Sandy Pool

from *Undark: an Oratorio*



In the early 1900's, thousands of women between the ages of 11 and 45 were employed painting glow-in-the-dark watch dials for soldiers and civilians in both Canada and the United States. Under the guidance of the paint's inventor, Sabin Von Sochocky, their jobs consisted of painting the numbers on watch dials, while keeping their brush points sharp by 'pointing' the tips of the brushes with their lips.

Several years after leaving the plant, the former dial painters developed a variety of mysterious medical conditions. Many suffered complete necrosis of the jaw, became severely anemic, endured intense arthritic-like pains, spontaneous bone fractures in the arms and legs and a few of the former workers became lame when their legs began to shorten. When the women visited doctors, some were told it was not radium, but syphilis that was causing their symptoms. Sabin Von Sochocky was also forced to remove his own thumb due to necrosis, and eventually died of radiation-induced anemia.

Though many women tried to sue the company for workers' compensation, the lawsuits were largely unsuccessful. Many of the women died before receiving compensation.

The final demise of the U.S. radium dial painting industry did not come until Canadian production was halted in 1954, and the extraction plants in Belgium shut down in 1960.



4:48 p.m.

We make a noise, wings or ghosts  
of bats. Two licks, two ticks. Or—

something beating something. At  
night it enters. Our brush keeps time,

pressing onto. Out of. Two licks. Two  
ticks. The beauty of bold strokes

pounding us still. Two ticks. Two.

Later we'll laugh; shake moonlight  
off our clothes, like ash.

For now, a clock. The day  
wears—worn mechanism.

tick lick tick lick tick lick. We hear  
the buzzer. Look to our watch.

10:46 p.m.

Come. Meet us at the edge of the rail yard. Past  
the European honeybee, the brook trout,

the ghost of Annie's road. Here, we lick  
our lips, point brush tips, paint

dials in dayglow shades. On breaks, we ink  
copperplate names on barrel drums,

dream a handsome soldier will hear  
our licking hearts, read our handwriting

in the demi-lit pander. The tick  
of it seesawing them to sleep.

We paint because our hands are delicate.  
We paint because everything defines itself

in the end, because we're sick of leaning  
away from light, ghostly

and tiring. At night, the teeth of our

hands aglow. Light only

the edge of what's  
swallowed, consumed.

In the distance, our babies sleep  
through the night. We sing lullabies

our mothers sang to us, sing them  
aloud with nostalgia or fear,

as if we were waiting for the air to clear.  
Our voices, still vibrant, and the sky so—

the railway, loud this time of year. Come, listen  
to our pandemonium. Meet us at the edge of noise.

10:50 p.m.

Night like any April night. Cold  
street lamp, no relief. Lemon crocus

still poking through dirt, crown of her  
stubborn head. From the window

the suburb is rapacious. Square  
grids. We sit on the sill, peering

at tomcats buried under cars,  
furtive and hungry.

The doctor told us we were  
dying, or wouldn't deny it.

Either way, it seems strange to slip so  
easily, slip so unexceptionally into sleep

and not wake up to make  
breakfast or plait our hair.



It's easy to give up on  
maple keys, sun firing down.

In the end we do what love tells us—  
we get up again and again and again

until we can't. And  
some nights are like that.

**8:36 a.m.**

When the trial finally resumes, three  
of us are dead. Haunted by open hands,

words carried in mouths for hundreds of years.  
To hear

morning hit the white clapboard fence—  
cantering, mottled hope. To feel quiet

polished by an evening's peace  
precisely because we cannot have it, because

when we first hear birdsong, we wonder  
what it is. We feel thirst, salt-luster

of tongues—customary sequence. Hours,  
decades. Even the bleat of cars doesn't wake us—

our eyes turn opal. Please, bury us  
where the sound starts. Bury us by the angry

scowl of the turnpike. Detritus clangs this  
sound that isn't sound.

It fills our bellies  
with seconds, with dust.

**SANDY POOL** is a writer, editor and Creative Writing instructor based in Toronto. Sandy holds a degree in Theatre Performance and English from the University of Toronto, as well as a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University Guelph. Currently, she is a holder of the prestigious Killam scholarship in poetics at the University of Calgary, where she is completing her Phd. Sandy has been published in various literary journals and was most recently anthologized in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English 2011*, published by Tighrope Books.

Her first book *Exploding Into Night* published by Guernica Editions, was long-listed for the 2010 re-lit award and short-listed for the 2010 Governor General's Award for poetry. *Undark: An Oratorio* was published in 2012 with Nightwood Editions.

**Photo credits:** Blair Prentice: *Undark* Cover Designer

*Undark: An Oratorio*, Sandy Pool, Nightwood Editions, 2012, [www.nightwoodeditions.com](http://www.nightwoodeditions.com)

*Always Coming Home*<sup>1</sup>  
The *SongBird* Project:  
Pioneering Ecological Social Sculpture  
&  
Sci-Arts Collaboration in Canada

by

Beth Carruthers





This informal essay explores the history and

intentions of *SongBird* from my perspective as co-founder/developer and Creative Director, and I have no expectation that this personal perspective will match that of my collaborators. These were many, but primarily there were two others alongside myself who were from the beginning at the core of programming and development. These are writer and theatre director Nelson Gray, and Founder-Director of the *Institute of Urban Ecology* at Douglas College, biologist/ecologist Val Schafer. Nelson worked on *SongBird* until 2001, ending his involvement with the final production of the *SongBird Oratorio* that spring, while Val stayed on. The brand new *Roundhouse Community Centre* also provided venue support from the initial launch date of *SongBird*. Both the project and organization were mothballed at the end of 2002.

Over the past several months I have experienced a renewed interest in and requests for information about *SongBird*. Perhaps this is because in so many ways it was a “first.” I am pleased, since it was to a great extent intended as a template for adaptation in other locations and urban centres. (Indeed, in 2012 artists in the City of Victoria BC revived the *Dawn Chorus* event we initiated there in 2001.)

So, what was *SongBird*? From the beginning we were hard-pressed to describe it in conventional terms, and this remains the case to a great extent. Certainly it is a good early example of Ecological Social Sculpture, although it was informed by both the social sciences and humanities, and of course, by the partnership with the natural sciences. A good

additional descriptor might be “sci-arts collaborative Ecoart.”

There is a tendency at first look to view *SongBird* as a thematically connected collection of discrete events and works. While this view could seem accurate, in fact *SongBird* was itself a work holding multiple forms within it. To understand the project it is helpful to briefly consider Social Sculpture so as to better understand *SongBird* as a practice within that fluid genre. So with the intention of providing context for this discussion I offer the comments of art historian and activist Alan W. Moore:

“Social sculpture” is a term promoted by the German artist Joseph Beuys through a series of very public lecture tours beginning in the early 1970s. It named a kind of artwork that takes place in the social realm, an art that requires social engagement, the participation of its audience, for its completion. For Beuys, the concept was infused with both political intention and spiritual values. As spectators became participants he believed, the catalysis of social sculpture would lead to a transformation of society through the release of popular creativity.<sup>2</sup>

It is also well worth considering the work of the contemporary Social Sculpture Research Unit (SSRU) at Oxford Brookes University in the UK. SSRU is headed by Shelley Sacks, who worked extensively with Beuys. In Sacks’ words:

Social sculpture can be understood as a multidimensional field of transformation toward a humane and ecologically viable future. It is particularly interested in

connective practices and new methodologies of engagement.

Our projects, processes and pedagogies can all be seen as laboratories of transformation.<sup>3</sup>

With the clear intention that creative responses to environmental problems would be catalysed in the larger community of the region through experience and participation, and the nurturing of a long-term transformative process, it is clear to see how *SongBird* conformed to the transdisciplinary nature of what has become known as contemporary Social Sculpture.

*SongBird* was also born out of a desire to explore how different ways of knowing about the world – especially the arts and sciences – could come together to engender better “place-relations,” and more sensitive choices and behaviours in regard to local and global habitats and ecosystems. Launched in the spring of 1998, pre-dating the buzz of “sustainability” and of recent mainstream arts practice engaging questions around “environment,” *SongBird* was the first project (and later, organization) of its kind in Canada, and perhaps in the world.

My participation in the work that was to become the *SongBird* project, and eventually the basis of the *Society for Arts + Ecology in Practice*, arose from a lifetime of arts practice and research transgressing disciplinary boundaries; of environmental activism, passionate interest in bettering the human-world relationship, and a strong conviction that the arts – through a kind of deep aesthetic engagement – have a vital role to play in this regard. At that time recently returned to Canada and Vancouver from the UK, I was disenchanted

with a burgeoning career in the international art world, and keen to discover a way that my practice and knowledge as artist and cultural worker could become vitally important to, and make a difference in, the wellbeing of real places – in particular the Canadian west coast, and specifically Vancouver, my birth place. From my perspective, from the very beginning it was love of place that drove the work, and love of place and the myriad species who dwelt there was at the core of the activities and projects we created.

Songbirds were chosen as a focal point for the project for a number of reasons. In the mid to late 1990s it was apparent that songbird populations were in trouble, yet songbirds were underrepresented in research. Stories about impacts on songbird populations were beginning to make it onto the public radar – for example, by way of mainstream press coverage of the *Fatal Light Awareness Program* (FLAP) in Toronto,<sup>4</sup> and of ornithologist Rhonda Millikin’s radar tracking of migratory songbirds. The disappearance of songbirds was (and is) a critical matter; embodying the metaphor of the “canary in the coal mine,” songbirds are indicators of ecosystem stability. And because we humans share these ecosystem communities, we are also at risk, no matter how we like to think we are somehow outside of, and managing, “nature.”

It is absolutely the case that what nurtures birds in terms of habitat also nurtures us.

We also determined that songbirds were (and are) a perfect way to engage people across demographic groups. Bird-watching was, and remains, the fastest growing, most wide-spread and popular outdoor hobby in North America. Birds are

closely linked with gardens, and gardening was and is the second fastest growing and popular outdoor hobby. (A natural partnership, since in many locations birds urgently require the habitat support that gardens provide.) Birds are present in the stories of almost every culture – and importantly, birds are easy to celebrate. They do not resonate with either confrontation or conflict; instead they engender a sense of wonder and care in many.

At the time of *SongBird*'s development, the west coast of Canada was immersed in what had come to be known as “the war in the woods.” Significant and violent confrontation between environmentalists and the logging industry had prompted the then Premier of the province to publicly label environmentalists “enemies of the province.” Conflict, struggle and confrontation were front-page material, and proved an effective form of “aversion therapy” for any important sense of relationship between a rapidly growing urban human population and their enviroing world. Vancouver, always a place of rapid development, was also experiencing a significant loss of urban habitat, as long established gardens, trees and undeveloped areas were lost to real estate development within the city, along with areas of surrounding farmland habitat (this remains a significant problem). Even in the 1990s, information showed the greatest cause of global songbird population decline was, in the words of our Canadian Wildlife Service collaborator, “habitat loss times ten.”

Research shows that the more stable and long-term the human settlement, the more healthy is the eco-region and habitat. In other words, we as a species have the largest impact on eco-regions, and

care of and love for place – place-relations, if you will – take time to develop. In order for habitats to be healthy, people must be deeply immersed and invested in where they are. A sense of reciprocity in this regard – such as exists in some human cultures – is especially helpful. Developers do not concern themselves with questions of overall eco-region well-being. Moreover, large urban communities have an ecological footprint extending far beyond material boundaries, and in vast quantity consume and demand material goods from elsewhere in the world, impacting habitat far and wide. It seemed clear not only that a sense of place, and place-relationship, need be engendered and nurtured within the city, but also that it was (and is) necessary that an awareness of lifestyle choices and cultural behaviours be front and centre. *SongBird* initiatives were designed to both engender this awareness and nurture place-relations – community awareness and engagement in a broad sense.

Central to *SongBird* was the decision to focus on celebration and solution, rather than on problem and confrontation. From my perspective the work was influenced by the celebratory non-confrontational approach of projects of the mid 1980s such as *Friends of the Earth*'s “The Arts for The Earth (TATE)” in the UK,<sup>5</sup> and the *Heartland All Species Project* in the US.<sup>6</sup> Our approach was by way of developing and implementing programming and events that would engage the hearts and minds of communities within the greater context of the human-world, or nature-culture, relationship.

The process was generative and organic. We had no intention of groundbreaking innovation, yet so focused we were that like water, we found ways

around, creatively morphed, or adapted to, obstacles and the lay of the land with the result that in the end *SongBird* was absolutely, in the words of Dr. Val Schaefer, “comprehensive and inspired.”

From passionate intentions and collaborative beginnings, a series of events and initiatives were developed. Three of these became annual “core” events. These were the *SongBird Dawn Chorus*, in collaboration with *Nature Vancouver* and regional parks and community gardens, the *Living City Forum* in collaboration with the *Roundhouse Community Centre*, and the *Gardens of Babylon Habitat Challenge* developed with the *Institute of Urban Ecology*. The *SongBird Oratorio*, with Music Director DB Boyko, was in ongoing development until 2001, with mini performances incorporated each year into the *Dawn Chorus* celebration. Related initiatives included the “composers in schools” program, the *SongBird Stories* event in collaboration with the *Vancouver Storytelling Society*, the balcony and rooftop bird and pollinator habitat workshops for the *Babylon Challenge* developed and led by the *Institute of Urban Ecology*, and a number of information campaigns, including shade-grown coffee awareness, “cats indoors” awareness, natural pest management, and more (links and details can be found on the *SongBird* website). The *Babylon Gardens* contest proved to be the first green roof and urban habitat program for migratory birds and pollinators in urban Vancouver; the *Living City Forum* created the first space for comprehensive conversation around sustainability and place-relations among diverse communities in and around the city.

It seemed critically important that no one be excluded from *SongBird* events and workshops, and

so all were offered free to the public. They came in large numbers, and most pleasing to me was the generous feedback and response from the community. Of all the responses we received, one that still stands out for me was a comment from one of the students in the “composers in schools” program. He said that while the school was located next to *Everett Crowley Park*, a critical piece of habitat for estuary birds, he had never before spent time in the park, that he had rather gone to the malls. He was enthusiastic and excited by what he had discovered in the process of walking, listening, and co-creating a musical work based on the songs of the birds who made that park their home. This had changed his perspective and view of his community and the world around him. He now was aware of caring deeply about both.

Claire Bédard, an artist and landscape designer from France, created a large human-scale nest for us out of scrap cuttings from a local botanical garden, based on the design – or, as she put it, the architecture – of Marsh Wrens. She commented, “I changed during the making of this project and feel emotionally empowered and bounded to a greater cause: preserving biodiversity on Earth.”

And there was some kind of magic afoot at the performance of the *SongBird Oratorio* at the *Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden* in Vancouver that caught and held us all. The alchemy of the location and the libretto interwoven with the voices of the singers inspired even the local birds, one of whom perched and seamlessly joined in for an extended time.

I have often asked myself just what it was about *SongBird* that generated such magic, emotion,

engagement, and commitment in people from all over. While this seems a simple question, with simple answers, it is connected intimately to larger, or deeper, questions and explorations. Many of the questions are at the heart of my continuing research into human-world relations, and the role of the arts and cultural practices in navigating, translating, and nurturing these.

In hindsight, it was remarkable how the project took off, gathering support and participation rapidly and widely. People came together from all over to be part of *SongBird* – from the arts, the sciences, architecture, planning, urban and landscape design, government, business, community groups, local First Nations, environmental activists, and others. Media from diverse communities picked it up as well, with arts, environmental, Buddhist and First Nations publications alongside feature articles in the *Globe and Mail* and *Canadian Living*. It was as if people were somehow waiting for it to happen, as if *SongBird* gathered and focused the unconscious needs of the time.

These days, it seems that we are even more precariously on the edge of the extinction of so very much – and I do not mean only other species. The risk of losses we cannot see may also be profound. I am thinking here of the slipping away of connection with the web of interspecies relations, and the growing unfamiliarity of the intimacy of deep relationship with the land, and with the spirit of place. To paraphrase cultural ecologist David Abram, we know ourselves in and through our relationships with non-human others – and I would say with the entire world of the non-human. In a way this is what roots us, and we are reflected back to ourselves

through these relationships.

And so I find myself once again at the beginning, with notions of coming home, and of return. Through our far migrations from the interconnectedness that lies at the heart of being in the world, without the call and response of all that is not human, how might we find ourselves?

An ecology is defined as a web of interconnected and interdependent relationships. Mirroring and foregrounding this, *SongBird* was an offering, a generative place of exploration and a conversational space where anything could be said, where no one and no species was excluded. I remain deeply grateful to my collaborators, to the participants, and to the spirit of the project itself, which retains a life of its own. May we always find ourselves, coming home.

For additional information about *SongBird*, please visit the archived website:

[www.songbirdproject.ca](http://www.songbirdproject.ca).

1. I want to acknowledge author Ursula K. LeGuin for the title of this piece – *Always Coming Home*. It is clearly the right title, and after it came to mind, I recalled LeGuin's book of the same name – a story of a future world and a community in the Pacific Northwest. This is appropriate, I think, for a project and organization based in a West coast city and oriented toward visioning and taking action for the future.
2. From *A Brief Genealogy of Social Sculpture*, by Alan W. Moore (undated) Source: <http://www.joaap.org/webonly/moore.htm> Accessed August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013.
3. See the Social Sculpture Research Unit (SSRU) webpage at: <http://www.social-sculpture.org/>.
4. FLAP is a Toronto-based project focusing on raising



awareness of mass deaths of migratory birds as they collide with lit office towers constructed on their migratory routes. “Collision Course” is a report commissioned by the World Wildlife Fund and written by Lesley Ogden, an ornithologist who also collaborated with us on *SongBird*. FLAP has evolved, and their website is well worth a visit. <http://www.flap.org/>.

5. See the Ashden Directory’s interview with Jonathan Porritt at [http://www.ashdendirectory.org.uk/featuresView.asp?pageIdentifier=2004826\\_39493960](http://www.ashdendirectory.org.uk/featuresView.asp?pageIdentifier=2004826_39493960).
6. See The Heartland All Species Project website at <http://www.allspecies.org/>.

Photo credit: Beth Carruthers; coordinating artist Claire Bédard

**BETH CARRUTHERS** is an internationally recognized and studied professional in Culture and Sustainability. She is best known for research and writing on the role of the arts, design, and aesthetic engagement in cultural change toward sustainability. This work has for more than two decades bridged disciplines – especially the arts, humanities and sciences. She is also known for developing creative, collaborative programs, initiatives, and place-based creative strategies for communities.

An outspoken advocate for the vital role of cultural workers and their practices in public policy toward sustainability, she is the author of a 2006 UNESCO commissioned report on Sci-Arts collaboration toward sustainable communities.

In 2009 she led the first culture and sustainability initiative in Dubai – *A Green Vision*. For the past decade Beth has been developing and presenting a theory of what she has termed “deep aesthetics” and is currently working on a book on this subject. Her professional experience and network spans three continents.



L Szabo-Jones

RICHARD SKELTON

*Into the Bare Moorland*

*May, 2010*

*The West Pennine Moors, England*



*Into the Bare Moorland*

into the bare moorland  
unhindered  
nature will remake  
again

let the moorland  
go to bracken  
and others  
will follow

furze and broom  
they come after bracken  
thriving  
to make a richer soil



furze will reach outwards  
dying at its heart  
and into its remnants  
rowan and birch will seed

they are edge trees  
and in time will make  
a place for oak and  
ash and pine

let the moorland  
go to bracken  
*and others*  
*will follow*

**RICHARD SKELTON** is a UK artist. He produces work in a range of media, including texts, music, photography and film. His work is informed by a deep, sustained engagement with place, and he has a particular interest in ecological succession and language evolution.

Between 2005 and 2011 he published 20 editions of music through his own Sustain-Release Private Press, culminating in the 20-disc box set, *\*SKURA*. Recent work includes the critically acclaimed album *Verse of Birds*, and *Limnology*, a new collection of writing and music exploring the language of rivers, lakes and other inland waterways.

In 2009, he founded with poet and partner Autumn Richardson, [Corbel Stone Press](#), a small, artist-run press based in Cumbria, northern England, specialising in handmade editions using environmentally friendly materials wherever possible. They publish work in a range of media, including text, art and audio recordings, that engages with landscape, the poetics of place, ecology, folklore and animism.

Photo/Digital Sketch: L. Szabo-Jones

# DERRICK DENHOLM

excerpts from

## *GROUND-TRUTHING the INDIGENOUS RAINFORESTS of BC'S NORTH COAST*



Subalpine fir polypore with figures, D. Denholm



*Only, always to dream of erotic ghosts of the flowering earth;  
to return to a decomposed ground choked by refuse, profit, & the  
concrete of private property; to find yourself disinherited from  
your claim to the earth.*

—Daphne Marlatt (1974)

*Maybe the real value is in the slash:  
the millions of small, dead green lungs.*

*It's something to consider  
breathing as we do for each other.*

—Ken Dola (1995)

*She's a dirty old whore, but somebody's gotta fuck 'er.*

—personal communication from a coastal handfaller  
commenting on a rough patch of timber (1995)

plot D3: cp MH-bk 60

Back in 1997, I worked for a forestry consultant on the outer coast. We spent the early winter chasing wood on a northwest aspect, mid-elevation slope, at about 450-600 metres above sea level. That week, my job was the grunt work of running deflection lines up and down from the edge of the red cedar flats to the crests of the steep hembal, all to the drone of an Erickson skycrane running circuits from another heli show up top. Each day, all day, fresh bundles of mountain hemlock, subalpine and silver fir came whirring down the mountainside and plunged into the inlet. Each time I climbed to the ridge crest where our block ended, I would stand and finish my notes before heading back down, waiting for the skycrane to arc against sky or sea,

sometimes catching a glimpse of three or four giant black logs diving into water. Wednesday of the second week the sound of the Erickson stopped abruptly at mid-morning. Curious but freed from distraction, I continued my work in the relative silence of the sometimes fierce downpours of the winter dark rainforest.

Hemlock trees are known for having the highest moisture content of any tree in BC, at around 60 percent. Yet these mountain hemlock up top were inordinately dense and supersaturated by their own particular living conditions and the seasonal influence of constant winter rain and snow. These trees were so dense that, after two weeks running the heli logging show, not one bundle of cut logs had risen back to the surface in the bay. So, the company was forced to quit and send the loggers home. It was an early Christmas for the fallers, a lost gamble for the company. For the mountain hemlock community, 400 to 800 years of individual growth and thousands of years of deep old growth succession were lost for an empty hole of stumps on the topside of a mountain, a place where any kind of regeneration, either natural or manual, would be protracted and precarious. Apart from the bleeding roots and limbs up top, the majority of the carbon, mineral and nutrient legacy of the mountain crest was now sunk in the bay, perhaps drifting out to intimidate all manner of fish and whales—riding their giant, obtuse plunge and cannon off into the deep. Forest biologists R. D. Boone, P. Sollins, and others write that “mountain hemlock forests were found to be unusual in that little regeneration occurred,” and that “high summer temperatures in the bare zone and the extremely N-poor soil are thought to be the causes of this delay in seedling regeneration” (4-5). And as forest biologist K. W. Seidel found, “mountain hemlock seedlings [are] very sensitive to microclimate extremes. Seedling

survival [is] very low” (34).

*MasGaak* of *Wilps Ha'naamuxw*, Don Ryan, who worked for the Gitxsan treaty office, told Richard Daly that the Gitxsan look “at the forests in a completely different way from what the province’s standard view is. All the province wants is to take the best logs off our territories” (301). UBC political philosopher and forest biologist, Paul M. Wood, states that forest science and applied science, as regulated into policy by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (MFLNRO, or whatever the government is calling it this week), serves merely supportive roles in land-use decisions, with ethical reasoning playing the primary role, although this important element is designated and managed more by the profit-driven ideologies of shareholders in international corporations (7). For example, although the ecological science related to the problem of clearcutting and restocking late-successional stands of mountain hemlock is far from vague, immense pressures funnel down from shareholder interests cultivated in Vancouver, Seattle, and Toronto office towers, compelling forest managers at head offices and local mills to move forward with denuding stands that ecological science warns are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to regenerate. From the perspective of small communities where work is often scarce, logging can bring a good buck, which is not a vague concept, and so sensitive stands of high elevation hemlock and fir are included in management plans. It’s a numbers game for the company, large or small. For the boosters in many small communities, it’s a case of *jus giv’ er, balls deep ‘n git ‘er done!*

Ecological economist Raj Patel is correct to point out that our “market society is embedded in the

natural world, which the myth of the self-regulating market equally tries to deny. Human civilization depends on Earth's ecology, even though we're literally exploiting it to death" (20). This prognosis links up quite clearly with what ecological economist Herman Daly decries when he writes that "[c]urrent economic growth has uncoupled itself from the world and become irrelevant. Worse, it has become a blind guide" (950-51). As it turns out, industrial transformations of the natural capital from local forest lands displace and transfer the greatest sum of their wealth to bank accounts that are often thousands of kilometres away and leave the negative outcomes of their activities out in the hinterland outbacks that were the source of this wealth. This is a huge loss, not only to those who do the actual work in the forest and those who also live within the region, but it is also a huge loss to the ecological systems of wild communities. These forest ecosystems receive nothing in return for hundreds of years of effort except degradation and often worse, and the occasional window-dressing of a sprightly plantation of seedlings, rows and rows of laboratory-enhanced stock that are most usually not native to the region. Thus, the normative practice is for the greatest negative effects to fall to the local region: its people and its wild ecosystems, to those with the smallest voices, and to those with no voices at all.

noting processes:

	larger consumers	
	smaller microbials	
results of intuition	results	in conclusion
a wishing		of conk lesions
polypores up and down		
a swathe an amabalis fir	a green-grey	

a darkness decay of dying and dead yew  
a clenched-wood a whorl-twigg medicine  
life renewed                      in/within thirty  
or three hundred  
bewildering phrasal/years

a dramatic variation in the fluctuation of biotic consumers

“the Real Work”

where nothing/everything happens

literally in paper through each literati stage

up water

down through dying and dead salmon

decomposing a philosophy of gravity:

an essential inevitability

of stream-tumbled gravel

a theory of phloem              where everything *is*/changing

a practice in poetry            where wording/image

re-present/change/rot

black veins of skeletal leaves

compiling the what has been

written/red/dead

while

behind glass

at a desk

against the grain

the core sampling

of increment bore truths

turns into

‘I don’t like this’

as soon as

‘this is not the way

I could imagine it’

moves to the side

of art where death

begins



Standing upon a stump at the edge of a clearcut is often the most common perspective from which management decisions for both forest and human communities are made. When most people meet a forest, it is invariably at this cut edge—the bifurcation—this line where the clearcut has only temporarily abated. The vast majority of people on the North Coast reside upon concreted and gravelled ground—that which was once some version of a rainforest.

Separated from Canadian society not just by our own self-exile from it ( throughout the towns and cities ( driving out upon streets and highways ( living in our houses and apartments ( the rainforest *trēowe* is beyond us, for and by its own unique qualities, but close at foot—the real mythical properties that most of us have abandoned ( the wildness of essential living mysteries ( the topsy-turvyness of engulfing, larger-than-human processes ( the nuanced desperation of the Indigenous rainforest to ameliorate each human assertion of control ( its desire to remain open (

Rainforest diversity transforms as different species overlap and adapt at the whims of climate and geography across these Mesozoic accreted and granitic batholithic terrains. The phenomenon of post-glacial rebound is enlarging the zone, perpetually breathing out its long, distending sigh, raising the land mass of the continent ever incrementally upwards and out of the Pacific Ocean, a few centimetres a year. What's more, with global climate change, the coastal western hemlock zone (CWH) is a greening effect heading north and west, north, west and north. In one reality, the coastline is moving on a diagonal *across* the Pacific, while the

CWH thrives in swings of rain and drought from the seasonal rainforest of *Nootka* Island up, over to the perhumid rainforests of Xaaydaa *Gwaay*, and up again to *Kuiu* Island and *Sitka*. Up and over. Over and out. Still, further north and further west, the CWH zone runs out of steam altogether, dwindling to intermittency as the alpine tundra literally meets the surf down on the beach. Within this regime, the CWH reaches to dot itself in God Pocket protections throughout the fragmentary subpolar rainforests of *Nuhatak* Fjord and *Kodiak* Island, with the very last splashes of rainforest green fringing themselves around the most sheltered inlets of *Kenai* Peninsula.

At the stand level: *there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there,*  
*there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there,*  
*there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there, there* ( . . . . . ) industry's constantly revolving door of good corporate citizens continue to remove both larger and smaller pieces that add up to entire spectrums of forest types, most of which are now predominantly being exported internationally as whole, raw log exports. If only patterns of timber harvest were human involutions to draw æsthetic distinctions throughout and amidst, not against or between interconnected communities of entire ecosystems.

To be clear, logging as a human activity is not a problem, as it is still (in theory) the most benign of the heavy industries. The hard question is put to the unsustainable production levels perceived as necessary within the regime of centralization schemes and their massive profit targets. Logging here in the north, as anywhere, is a problem because of corporate economies of scale, because of the power held by elite money-changers of



different story about engaging trees and forests. As Gitxsan hereditary chief and artist 'Wii Muk'willixw, Art Wilson, writes, “our religion was written in our hearts and not on paper, [and] it didn’t count” to white newcomers, by which it was presumed that the Gitxsan and other First Nations had *nothing* to say about it (18). As well, because the ecological footprint First Nations made upon the landscape was so minimal as to be nearly invisible, there was another false perception that they also *did* nothing, all of which added up to the people themselves being considered *as* nothing—which is still the case in Canada and for Indigenous peoples the world over.

Tsimshian cultural scholar and anthropologist James A. McDonald prefates his description of *Kitsumkalum* traditional activities on the Land with this corrective, aimed at contemporary society as a whole: “the popular sense of what [the] world was like [before colonization,] according to our current sense of history, is deeply mistaken” (50). True enough, the landscape of 120 years ago, as McDonald writes:

was very different from what you see today. You may expect to have seen a wilderness where today there are farms, roads and settlements, but there was no wilderness. Prior to the settlement of Terrace, the Kitsumkalum Valley and nearby lands were under the land management of the people for the benefit and prosperity of each Waap. . . . They had to ensure the conservation of the resources for future generations and they did so with management practices that enhanced the productivity of the *laxyuup* [the Tsimshian landed properties, their house territories]. (51-52)

And giving just one example of this, prized berry patches were tended, weeded, cleared of overgrowth, cleaned

and pruned, and in many cases invigorated by controlled burns, the patches also being made accessible by a series of well-maintained trails (53).

BC Government forest research biologists Pojar and MacKinnon describe another aspect of low-impact management practices by First Nations on the North Coast, writing that “[f]ew red cedars were actually felled before European contact. Instead, fallen logs or boards split from standing trees were used. To split off cedar boards for house planks or half-logs for canoes, a series of graduated yew-wood or antler wedges were pounded into living trees along the grain” (42). And, as Nancy J. Turner and *Kii’iljuus*, Barbara Wilson, explain, the long, narrow scars that persist upon the boles of trees stripped for smaller resources like bark or small planks “reflect the removal of bark or wood from no more than one-third of the circumference on young trees,” while older trees sometimes reflect activities that are decades or more apart, with removals on different sides of the same tree, all of which allow the tree to remain living, eventually forming enough swollen growth tissue and “reclaiming the area that was cut” (133). Heiltsuk scholar and educator *Hilistis*, Pauline Waterfall, together with Doug Hopwood and Ian Gill, write that the traditional “Heiltsuk concept of logging was to beachcomb for blow-down trees. A living tree was not used unless its dimensions met the criteria for building a canoe, long house, or other specific use. If a tree had to be cut down, a song was sung to empathize with the pain it was enduring” (121). Turner and *Kii’iljuus* draw attention to the most important aspect of harvesting activities, this being ceremonial recognition, which included demonstrations that reveal the tree as “a living and generous being, whose life would not be forfeited unnecessarily. The

harvester would negotiate with the tree, through a respectful request, and an explanation as to the purpose of harvesting by those undertaking the task” (134). Today, although there is still a great deal of physical evidence remaining of First Nations’ low impact forest-harvest practices (mostly in the form of culturally modified trees) a great deal of the traditional trail networks have either disappeared into the overgrowth and windthrow or have been erased by clearcut logging, roads and other recent activities. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, many of the ancient House Territories have been under the ‘management’ of industrial logging corporations, many of which have restricted or disallowed traditional activities. As McDonald laments, these sites that had previously been traditionally managed “have become very wild places covered with brush that makes it very difficult or impossible to walk around the land” (53).

Bringing an international perspective from the 1990s, ethnoecologists K. H. Redford and A. M. Stearman studied the industrial production of rubber tapper in rural Brazil, analyzing the process and effects of clearcutting the diverse and complex old-growth forests and replacing them with monocultures of the target crop. Redford and Stearman eventually came to position the argument that “[i]f the full range of genetic species, and ecosystem diversity is to be maintained in its natural abundance on a given piece of land, then virtually any significant activity by humans must not be allowed” (252). More than just a controversial statement against the destructiveness of heavy industry, I see this as a reflection of the Buddhist practice of walking carefully and observantly so as to avoid stepping on any living thing that might come into one’s path. It is a high ideal that very few people consider as being in any way realistic, one that most people find



laughable.

First of all, although Redford and Stearman's concept of "any significant activity" applies to the specific ecological scenario and sites examined in Brazil, it does draw to the fore what should always be a primary question, this being: how much and what kinds of anthropogenic transformation have lasting, negative consequences in any particular ecosystem? As a partial local answer, BC forest biologist Victoria Stevens writes that the process of "[r]emoving large portions of decaying wood may alter the components of a forest that are part of the place-specific evolutionary history that has resulted in process and interactions essential for maintaining that forest" (93). As forest biologist Denise Lach informs us, ecological science only scrapes the surface of incredibly complex processes, and in the process of study itself, alters these complex processes (235). Obviously, both Redford and Stearman's and Stevens' conclusions have not been and will not be applied any time soon as a corrective against the practice of clearcutting, as it is highly arguable that under some situations in the BC interior, clearcutting is akin to other large-scale disturbances like natural wildfire.



*hybrid 17 slashmaster 2007, D. Denholm*

A theory that I would present for the problem of large scale tree removal in forest management practices is to consider the possibility that any piece of wood removed from a denuded forest site not only compromises the health of the future forest that would regrow there but also compromises the integrity of the future forest for the very long term. With this in mind, each tree taken out of the woods is an incremental future loss for the vitality, integrity and health of the ecosystem. This presents us with a prognosis that contemporary forestry practices do not leave either human beings or the larger-than-human realm with a 'renewable resource' but one that is perhaps substantially degraded. Consider the findings of Redford and Stearman and Stevens and put those together with the large scale broadcast burning that went on all over northern BC as a site preparation after clearcut logging. Now imagine that not only was the majority of the mineral and nutrient legacy of the forest removed and taken to a mill, but what little was left behind was burned away down to ash, in many places right down to the mineral soil. Compound this through in consideration of the millions of cubic metres of wood that are wholly removed from the landscape through not only annual logging but also mining and petroleum extraction practices over the last hundred years. Consider that the long-standing and current practice for mining and petroleum exploration is to cut, pile and burn whatever forest is in the way of development plans. For the future, unless a sufficient regime of analysis is conducted to determine the long-term consequences of these kinds of high-impact activities, the potential downstream effects and invisible hand processes within BC forests will neither be calculated nor considered, never mind all of the previous losses that have been accrued within forest ecosystems throughout the history

of intense industrial activity in the forest lands of BC.

Even though such controversial statements made by ethnoecologists Redford and Stearman and forest biologist Stevens may be waved aside by those who direct and control industry, they do resonate with an ethical depth sounding in consideration of the values of healthy biodiversity and the necessity for maintaining biocomplexity. From even a conservative perspective, the authors' findings and summaries are a call for more sensitive management practices and the acknowledgement of the need for a longer-term view. The authors' conclusions present startling messages from within the body of scientific understanding, messages that confirm the Land is not a limitless resource that exists simply for intense exploitation and liquidation by human beings, but is a series of communities that are home to a broad range of interconnected life forms and processes, all of which not only demand the right to thrive for their own inherent purposes, but also in light of the crucial fact that human beings also rely upon their health and well-being for our very own purposes.

As it falls, the history of large-scale industrial logging on the North Coast also represents a constant overcut of denuded potential. In their 2004 report, "Revitalizing British Columbia's Coastal Economy," consultant group Pacific Analytics describes the current situation in northern communities dependent upon logging. There is a social atmosphere of "poverty, poor social and health conditions, low morale, disaffected young people, inadequate housing, and lack of access to education and skills upgrading . . . combined with high unemployment levels and limited business opportunities" (i). Sadly, the daily transformation of the natural capital of fish or earth or trees into the abstract form of money in no way reflects a natural system

model, and neither does the subsequent centralization and funnelling of this transformed wealth into bank accounts of industry elites and shareholders in far distant urban centres. Other than short-term jobs given to a few local loggers and foresters, very few elements of this process are desirable for the long-term health of local ecosystems. As well, past and current models of industrial forestry do not represent a means by which the health and diversity of human communities across the North Coast will be protected and nurtured for the long-term. Many of the principles we need to model ourselves after on the North Coast are found in such examples as the recycling life patterns of anadromous salmon, the deep Real Work of small-scale patch dynamics in forests and the low-impact industrial activities we see in the history of First Nations peoples, people who still live in the Indigenous rainforests after many thousands of years.

Stepping back onto the ground-truth of the average BC clearcut, what can usually be seen is, first of all, a sea of stumps and slash. While not every cut stump reveals a tree that has been removed to a distant mill, every tree that has been cut and removed is a proportionate percentage of the overall loss of nutrient legacy taken entirely out of the cycle of renewal. Although both the industry and the ministry will detail the renewal that tree planting represents, the fact is that each new seedling grows upon a bed of soil that has had the bulk of an entire generation of forest compost, with all of its valuable nutrients and minerals, cashed-in to various international bank accounts. However much the figures that follow are admittedly proposed within an agenda of environmental activism, there is no agency within government or industry in BC that compiles logging waste data for scrutiny at the scale of the overall landscape. Nonetheless, as forestry historian Richard

R. Rajala reveals, a 2001 audit by the David Suzuki Foundation and Forest Watch shows that “on 72 percent of 227 logging sites, 80 percent or more of the trees had been removed and only 4 percent of the plans provided buffers along small streams” (228). In looking at the picture of what has yet to be clearcut by 2009 Sierra Club figures, of the 6,423,000 hectares within the North Coast TSA, 75 percent remains intact, with 50 percent having been set aside for protection (9). At first glance, this sounds surprisingly positive and more than reasonable, yet within these figures we find that only about four percent of what remain of Indigenous rainforests falls within what the Ministry considers good productivity class timber, stands of the kind that contain the rich ecosystems with the biggest trees and complexity of forest structures that fulfil the demands of both loggers and the recreational public. Over 40 percent of what remains are poor productivity sites—mainly non-forested rocky bogs and muskegs, some thin subalpine scrub and vast areas of alpine tundra (15). Still deeper within these figures, we find that 60 percent of the remaining four percent of good productivity class forests on the North Coast are in line for logging in the near future, and little of this includes the over abundance of low quality ‘hemlock surprise,’ that which was strategically avoided during the high-grading activities that typified most previous logging activities (22). Market and industry pressures demand that the highest quality stands of remaining red cedar and Sitka spruce continue to be targeted, and that’s precisely what is happening. As Rajala points out, the five companies of the Coast Forest Conservation Initiative (CFCI) were charged by environmentalists in 2005 for masking business-as-usual logging practices within a vague conservation consensus agreement, a scheme that proposes commitment to protected areas and

standards of ecosystem-based management, yet which allows for logging to proceed as usual under most circumstances (244). Amazingly enough, here on the North Coast we are still luckier than other places in BC and around the world, mainly because the Indigenous rainforests are still and will likely always be so very hard to get at. But I've never been very good at keeping-up with technological changes (I still enjoy making mix cassette tapes of music).

Japanese wildlife photographer Michio Hosino used a word combination of his own making to describe what the coastal rainforests of the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska give, a word he called "fruitility" (Schooler 165). Fruitility is a perfect small-scale word that describes exactly what the North Coast and the entirety of Cascadia provides. Utility implies useful benefit and fruit expresses an annual gift of healthy living things. On the other hand, what the processes of Western industrialization have given the North Coast is "eco-imperialism," a term that Vandana Shiva uses to decry what has been 'given' across the globe in exchange for the fruitility of its ecosystems (15). As humans, we would do better to mimic the habits of those species that return all of their material value back to the soil from which they originate. These are species such as conifer trees and annual plants, fungal mycelia, Pacific salmon, oolachan and so many other marine species that come back in one way or another to the rainforest to re-gift their legacy of fruitility, both directly and indirectly, into the rich parent materials of the earth or back into the transportation systems of natal streams, where so much life essence re-flows out to the Pacific, where it returns into the mouths of whales, herring, salmon, halibut and sea lions and back again, up and onto terrestrial habitats and into the



roots of trees and plants and into the mouths of bears, eagles, mink, blacktail deer, hummingbirds and human beings.

#### Hemlock bark

high in tannins. (Traditional uses):

for the Quilute: a tanning agent, a dye pigment, as a

cleanser; in solution: water-proofing spruce-root baskets. For the

Stó:lō: used as a dye for Mountain goat wool, as a facial cosmetic, a hair

remover. For the Chehalis, Nuxalk, and others: a dye to make invisible fishnets.

Hemlock wood is heavy and durable, easy to carve. Universal uses: spoons, combs, roasting spits, spearshafts, wedges, hooks for elderberry picking, dip-nets and poles for harvesting seaweed and eel-grass. For the Xaaydaa, from circular whorl grain surrounding branches: as halibut and cod fishing hooks; bent wood taken from the trunks: for ceremonial feast bowls and food containers. Hemlock boughs (practical use): universally praised as a fine bedding material; for the Stó:lō, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Xaaydaa: used as a natural screen for gathering herring spawn. Hemlock boughs (ceremonial uses): for the Kwakwaka'wakw: dancers wore skirts, headdresses and head-bands of hemlock boughs; after their first menstruation, young women lived in hemlock-bough huts. Hemlock as medicine - extensive use all along the Northwest Coast. Pitch: numerous applications in poultices, linaments, and salves. Bark: for the Nuu-chah-nulth: steeped with other herbs into tea for internal injuries and haemorrhaging.

Young branch tips: For Ditidaht hunters and travellers:

chewed as a hunger suppressant during

times without food.

(adapted from Pojar and MacKinnon (1994) and Nancy J. Turner (2004))

Part of why this prose-poem-essay often rhizomatically forgoes any direct route to explicit meaning is a function of how ideas impel themselves of their own accord. But this propensity is also explained by Richard Manning's wise concession, where he states: "The lines of the northwest coast's future will not be drawn by writers" and that, more importantly, "[t]he place will dictate its own design" (8). These words, paragraphs and scenarios of mine are meant as line transects that cut transversely across the landscape of an interdisciplinary spectrum of critical thinking \ across the personal creative process / somehow within the communities of the North Coast and back out again \ making no more than a survey of personal observations along the way. This is meant to be a partial expression of how the larger-than-human realms of the Indigenous rainforest operate indifferently and yet purposefully with constant expressions of green bewilderment. Still, one need not be of First Nations background, ecological science or of poetic persuasion to be affected by the ecosophical æsthetics of wild places or places that once were wild: places like strip-mines, Highway 16, the kitchen in your home, or a clearcut. I seldom pause anywhere with more reflection upon intentions and motivations, outcomes and effects, about what is <gained> versus what is >gained< than at this cut edge | where the sea of stumps meets the abrupt line of bright waving ribbons, those plastic markers of take and take that are tied onto the branches and boles leftover, those that remain to jut or stand throughout

the diagonal stacks of windthrow that so often entangle the falling boundary, orange or pink flags that knot GPS shape files on paper to distinguish between where we do not consider and where we do not understand.

This zone | this wall where dark rainforest opens onto a bright floor of logging debris | often contains a great deal of the same kind of tension that poetry can hope to generate. The edge of a clearcut is its own distinct genre of place, one where the machines have stopped | perhaps only temporarily | where the denuding of the wild has halted | perhaps only momentarily. This cut edge is the semiotic space where the Other faces Empire | where dissidence meets hegemony. This line | where falling and standing meet . . . / / \ / \ ≠ / \ / \ ≠ / \ / \ often collapses into a barricade of steepled, dead and dying trees | where a profuse clamour of dense, entangling, thriving pioneer shrubs | one kind or another of tangled resistance rises against entrance into the shaded, intact forest that stretches beyond | until the next cutting permit begins. Yet it is at this arresting, conflicted interface | where the recent clearcut sweep of industrialization meets with ancient timberline cycles of healing and transition | as I have witnessed, heard and learned some of in a brief and mostly distracted time, yet what has been just enough to come to realize that I understand only a little and that there is so much more. This line | of cut stumps, windthrow, logging waste (and then the semblance of continuance of the wild is where I often come to meet and negotiate the edge effects that play out in the tension between my lifelong work of enculturation and apprenticeship to and yet my determined resistance of mainstream Canadian society. As well, this is where my avocation started (this is where I first came to witness and learn a glimpse of the grammar of the wild (where it continues as I

learn more in consideration of those who were here before (both peoples and rainforests /|\ /|\ ‡ /|\ /|\

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The edge of a clearcut is not just a boundary between volume designations, timber types, sound piece sizes, the market fluctuation of stumpage rates and the ripple of edge effects within a standing forest. It is a psychological interface, a zone where reflexivity snaps back and forth and rattles the conscience within the consciousness. For so many foresters it's enough to just get out of the schnarbadelic pecker-pole blowdown showdown in one piece. Then, just as now, I step almost daily in and out of the reality and history of an anthropogenic Indigenous forest, one that has, in most cases, been illegally possessed, industrialized by imperial force, colonial law, social doctrines and pejorative stigmatization, transformed and degraded first into a mythological frontier wilderness and then into a naturalized stand of second-growth crop trees, all just doing their best before and after the fellerbunchers, chainsaws, grapple skidders and cable-yarders return. This is a series of complex shifts between theoretical ideals and industrial realities. "We live simultaneously within such views," *Ngati Awa* and *Ngati Porou*, Tuhiwai Smith writes, "while needing to pose, contest and struggle

for the legitimacy of oppositional or alternative histories, theories and ways of writing” (39). While recontextualizing only slightly Tuhiwai Smith’s phrase, taken from her critique of Western history in general and brought here to its residue in the Real World where Indigeneity and colonial assimilation collide, I propose that we windthrow our own alternatives against these ongoing re-enactments of colonial history, with all of their destructive methodologies, cast our own literary throughfall and participatory litterfall into prime beds of coarse woody debris, the *xmas* of experiencing / consuming red, and watch what takes root upon the redrot nurse log.

) (

This is what *this* is all about. ) ( Imagine a gesture of open space between open hands ) ( Not just a prose-poem-essay of personal, improvisational rhizomatics but a series of quiet and slow, vulnerable and studied approaches ) ( a running of transects through massive tree root legislation and heritable properties ) ( through images of culturally constructed nature and the Real Work ) ( beyond technological-industrial formations of venerability and patriarchal power ) ( between ideology and the propensity for intense projections of nostalgia and sentiment ) ( to connect with mycorrhizal of reconceived exchange ) ( to privilege maps that are not human artefacts ) ( to write, walk and enact the grounded human within larger-than-human lan(d)gauge ) ( to decipher the other of reason and participate in the non-identical of the always unfinished ) ( to understand that there will be no settlement between but always a circulation of states within the trivalent ) ( to transform the naturalist’s trance into the clarity of day-to-day presence in concrete,



productive work) ( to communicate in full context among a community of enhanced sensibilities ) ( to choose  
between a mental image, a preoccupation, and an objective reality ) ( to critically discern between words and  
things that should and should not be.

: do real trees contain truth?  
where realities conflict  
do power and force work  
to fulfil destiny, create scars:  
down *that* eroded sidehill  
along *this* failed cutslope  
through another broken marriage  
rippling rootless disconnect?

(japanese *Tsu-ga*: tree and mother

hemlock trees express principles, duties, love

: undercutting the “unswerving pivot”  
re-alienation is a shareholder golf luncheon  
reality is choosing between longbars:  
husqvarna, stihl, poulan  
it doesn’t matter which, where  
who, when a canadian handfaller  
daydreams  
an inevitable pink slip  
the inadvertent dutchman

: on 60% post-consumer stock an erickson skycrane  
pitching fresh-cut bundles  
to waterdrops in the inlet  
looks profitable enough

yet 85% moisture content

within winter-drenched cones

of cambial circuitry  
sinks half a millennia  
of living knowledge  
wild philosophy  
re-alimentation

elicits a shrug  
from a forest scientist  
seeking tenure



*Mountain Hemlock*, oil. D. Denholm

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A career forestry field worker, **DERRICK DENHOLM**'s writing concerns social and environmental justice and the conflict over industrialized Indigenous lands. He won the 2011 Barry McKinnon Chapbook Award and is published in *The Capilano Review*, *CV2*, *Drunken Boat*, *filling Station*, ::stonestone:: and *The Goose*. A book of ecocritical writing, *Ground-Truthing the Indigenous Rainforests of BC's North Coast*, is forthcoming from Caitlin Press in 2014.

# Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada

by Arn Keeling





**I**mages of abandonment and ruin haunt mining. Mining towns are the archetypical ghost towns: places such as Kennecott, Alaska, or Pyramiden on Svalbard in Norway where you can find settlements so hastily and completely deserted that tables remained set for meals and pool tables forsaken mid-game. Or, like Uranium City, Saskatchewan, landscapes littered with collapsing buildings and industrial detritus. Even where mines have been “cleaned up,” like Pine Point, Northwest Territories, the landscape evinces the half-healed scars of a botched surgery: cutlines and roads criss-cross the land, piles of waste rock and tailings are heaped up, nothing to show for the community but cracked streets and sidewalks, the golf course and airstrip slowly being patched over with recolonizing vegetation. The Canadian North is dotted with such landscapes, poignant reminders of the boom and bust cycles driving the commodity economy on the periphery of Euro-Canadian settlement. In some cases, like Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, and Schefferville, Quebec, remnant populations hung on after the bust; a lucky few places, like Yellowknife, prospered as government and new development flowed in to fill the economic void left by mining.

“Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada,” a research project based at Memorial University, has for the past four years explored the complex historical geography of mining in Northern Canada in the twentieth century. Through fieldwork, archival research, and oral history interviews, the project team, led by historian John Sandlos and geographer Arn Keeling, examined the various impacts and engagements with mining, particularly for northern aboriginal communities. Key findings of this research include: the connection between mineral development and northern colonization; the dispossession and marginalization of aboriginal communities near major mines; the subsequent history of employment, trade, and settlement between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in mining regions; the environmental impacts and legacies of mining, both immediate and long-term (and the associated questions of environmental justice these legacies raise); and the complex and contradictory heritage and memory associated with the mining experience in the North.

Overall, our research found that what may appear as simply dead or degraded landscapes associated with historic mining turned out to be surprisingly lively in the present. Whether through ongoing uses of the landscape (such as hunting and camping), persistent fears of environmental contamination or, less tangibly, the memories and stories associated with the mining past, these places remain prominent features of everyday life long after their closure. In addition, the boom in commodity prices since the turn of the century has attracted renewed interest in old mines for potential redevelopment, sometimes in concert with landscape reclamation activities. For instance, at the Keno Hill mine in the Yukon, site of the richest silver mine in North America, rising silver prices have attracted renewed mining activity, even as the old mines are being cleaned up. In Yellowknife, the community is reckoning with the toxic legacy of decades of gold mining that built the city: 237,000 tons of arsenic trioxide, a byproduct of gold processing, lie buried in the former Giant Mine. To deal with the site, the federal government proposes to freeze material underground, a plan that sits uneasily with many in the city worried about the threats to their environment and the challenges of caring for



this waste in perpetuity.

Environmental remediation and renewed mineral development bring with them both new opportunities and old conflicts for neighbouring communities. Thus, the histories of what we call “zombie mines” have a critical contemporary relevance for communities and regions confronting the return of mining. In his observation of former mining communities in the U.S., geographer Ben Marsh concluded that “land retains its meaning long after the means are exhausted.” Our research on zombie mines suggests the ways in which both means and meaning persist in historical mining towns, and are contested in the present. Read more about our the Abandoned Mines project at [www.abandonedminesnc.com](http://www.abandonedminesnc.com).



The water-filled X-15 pit at the Pine Point mine. This is one of the largest of 43 open pits pockmarking the landscape on the southern shore of Great Slave Lake. Cominco's Pine Point mine was one of the richest base metal mines in Canadian history. The mine was closed and the town of Pine Point dismantled in 1989. Photo by Arn Keeling.



The Gunnar uranium mine on the north shore of Lake Athabasca in Saskatchewan. Located near Uranium City, the mine closed in 1964, leaving behind crumbling buildings, detritus, and abandoned housing for workers, plus millions of tons of radioactive tailings spilling into the lake. This site is the largest of dozens of uranium mine sites being cleaned up around the Uranium City district. Photo by Arn Keeling.





Pipes, barrels, and old mine equipment litter the landscape around one of the tailings areas at the abandoned Giant Mine near Yellowknife, NWT. More troubling pollution lies beneath the surface: 237,000 tons of arsenic trioxide dust is buried in mined-out chambers. The government now bears the financial and technical challenge of ensuring this toxic material does not threaten the people and environment of the region. Photo by Arn Keeling.



Kids clamber over abandoned mine machinery at Rankin Inlet, Nunavut. The first industrial mine in Canada's Arctic, the Rankin Inlet nickel mine operated for only five years, 1957-1962. But it played a huge role in attracting Inuit people into wage labour, and remains a major feature of the landscape and identity of Rankin Inlet today. Photo by Arn Keeling.





Walking the abandoned streets and sidewalks of Pine Point. The town was razed in 1989 after the closure of the mine, but once boasted around 2000 residents, with a hockey rink, golf course and airstrip. Now, the former townsite is mainly used by campers, hunters, and ATV riders. Photo by John Sandlos.



The former school at Elsa, Yukon, a company town that serviced the Keno Hill silver mine. The town was abandoned upon closure in the 1980s, but has recently been recolonized by a new mining company. In the foreground are boxes storing drill cores taken during mineral exploration. Photo by Arn Keeling.



**ARN KEELING** is Associate Professor of Geography at Memorial University in St. John's, NL, and co-investigator on the *Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada* project as well as the ArcticNet project, *Adaptation, Industrial Development and Arctic Communities*, a study of the impact of mining activity on three Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic. His recent publications include a paper on the historical geography of Uranium City, Saskatchewan, in *The Canadian Geographer* and, as co-author with John Sandlos, two articles on the history of mining and development in the Northwest Territories.

**JOHN SANDLOS** is Associate Professor of History at Memorial University, and Principal Investigator of the project, *Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada: Toward Social and Economic Prosperity*, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). He is also a co-investigator on the ArcticNet funded project, *Adaptation, Industrial Development and Arctic Communities*, and writes on industrial development, wildlife conservation, and Aboriginal people in the Canadian North.

# Similkameen Peaches

by

Harold Rhenisch



There is a flag shredding in the wind. Cottonwood leaves scatter across frozen ground as if they're being blown off of the face of the world. That's not so far fetched. They are. It's just that gravity catches them before they get too far along on the project. You feel it here, though. That pressure to leave. To lift up.

Oh, welcome. We're in the Similkameen Valley, a channel of wind and light on the north flank of the Cascade Mountains, four hours north of the plutonium plant on the Columbia River, four hours east of Vancouver, a Canadian transportation terminus on the Pacific Ocean, four hours south of the sub-glacial volcanoes of the Thompson Fault, and four hours west of the heavy water plant at Trail, where the hills are bare of trees and stained with heavy metal fallout. Here, at the centre of all that, the orchards are still young, so there are still scorpions. They won't last long, so you'd better get a look while you can: the ones as long as a man's middle finger, and the ones as long as a winged ant, that crawl across your toes while you're having lunch.

For me, it's nice to be back — although it is frozen right now. And cold. Still, it is November 11. The year? It's always the same year on November 11. My shirt is always thin. Men who were boys during the Great War are always lined up next to men who were boys during the war that came out of it, some dressed in navy blue, some in khaki and some in black. We're standing next to them, boys all of us, without coats in the wind. We're all cold, and we should be, because it's Twenty Below Zero and the wind chill is like the approach to Moscow, pick a year. There are girls here, too, but they're allowed coats. That doesn't do their bare legs a whole lot of good, though, but, still. By the calendar, it is 1969.

It hasn't been a prosperous year. None have been since 1914. Still, for weeks, women who were the girlfriends and sisters of boys who were poisoned at Ypres and who have lived ever since breathing out of a quarter lung in infirmaries, are selling poppies on the street that the boys, now old men, have cut out of paper by hand. This act of remembrance by these elderly women in woolen coats means they have to cross back and forth, in traffic, because the street, where teenage boys cruise up and down in their fathers' trucks every Friday after dark, is the Crowsnest Highway, which takes people east to Osoyoos and west to Princeton, depending on whether they're coming or going. Beyond that, there is only a word: Canada.

It is the time of year when we are asked to forget the golden eagles that ride the updrafts and rise just a wing's breadth off of the plains of mountain sunflowers on glacier-carved Daly

Mountain in order to remember that there are men who sacrificed themselves for our orchards, and we do remember, because my mother, whose father had come to Canada to escape a Nazi death list and who had grown up in Canada as a Nazi — at least as the children of women much like this had put it — had little use for such women. She preferred to remember all the women and children who died during the process of their liberation. No argument.

One thing to remember is the sound of the bells echoing off of the sagebrush from the square, stuccoed steeple of the United Church, even though they are drowned out, sometimes, true, by the sound of orchard sprayers pumping nerve gas onto trees at 500 per square inch of pressure, that had originally been manufactured to hose down the Germans on the beaches of England. The fans rise up a hundred feet, catch the wind, and drift. The stuff is hell on bees. If you were imagining this remembrance in 2013, there would still be soldiers but few bees, and no golden eagles or scorpions, at all, but if this were 2013 only a few would remember that, anyway, because pretty well everyone would have come from Canada by then, where they don't have them, anyway.

Back in 1969, though, I'm not imagining being trapped in school forever, as those old soldier boys are; I am feeling it. As for memory, I remember very well the way one week in 1965 you cut out a poppy, from paper, in the blue room with the big windows; almost the next week a heart, from paper; and the next, or so it seems in the blur that is this ritual, a daffodil, yellow as mustard, which you fasten to the window so the sun shines through it, just a little, at the edges of its paper mostly, where it burns in a fine white line, like cigarette smoke. I'm still feeling that now, in keeping with my schooling, in which World War II has been replayed daily on the playgrounds, with the Indians on one side and the Cowboys on the other, with cottonwood sticks for grenades and clumps of dried dirt for bombs. Sometimes the Indians played on the Cowboy team and sometimes the Cowboys played on the Indian team; naturally enough, since half of the cowboys were Indians and all of the Indians were cowboys. Since I was neither an Indian nor a cowboy, I got to be the German, who had to die. It was very logical. The battle of this re-enactment of the Nez Perce, Yakima, and Umatilla wars using the technology of Juno Beach ended, always, with me on the bottom of a pile of boys all trying to get a good punch to some part of my body, because pain is beautiful and pure, especially when you can watch it bloom in someone other than yourself. For this purpose, rocks are especially useful, if you would like a tip.

But, hey, enough of remembrance and feeling and imagination and other spelling tests they give you before rolling down the big map of Cambodia, with chocolate bars in the corners instead of the dragons of medieval charts, to demonstrate the likely path of the Communist advance to our valley, down through the jungles of Cambodia, across Indonesia to Australia, up through Peru and Venezuela to



California, and, well, down through Alaska at the same time, actually. If you find it confusing, it is easily demonstrated with large red arrows. We could go back to the school and I could show you, if you like.

I'm cold. Men have just walked on the Moon. Charlie still owns the jungle in Vietnam, and just a few weeks ago I watched Canadian fighter jets scramble to meet American fighter jets over the Reserve down south, on the Line, as we put it around these parts, above the dwarf shrews of Nighthawk, Washington, at any rate, above the 1858 American-Canadian border, the one put in to keep the peace, although not between any of the people here. Virtually all the people here were Indians and Americans, who all walked back and forth across the border pretty much as they pleased, and saw, really, no great use for it.

It's too bad you weren't here for the air show, though. The black smoke of the dog fights above the river there, where it turns in the bowl of the sacred mountain, Chopaka, were like calligraphy. It hung against the scree and the blue air after the jets were gone, for a few minutes, as I sat with the dog and watched it drift and thin out. At a time like that, the wind rustles in the leaves of the trees. It catches your hair. It catches the dog's hair. He shakes it off. He is waiting for you to make a move. You don't.



Here's what I can't remember, because it's unknowable, really: what would that boy who I am here in 1969 say if he knew that within a decade American planes were going to come up the valley, low, at three hundred feet, under Canadian radar, just to see if they could, buzz above the school yard and its flagpole welded out of irrigation pipe, and be back south before the Canadians knew a thing about it. Maybe they never will. I also don't know yet that one early spring day a decade after that first American invasion this boy I am will be pruning an apricot orchard with men from town, to help out Larry's widow, who was one of the teachers who used to teach him how to cut out poppies at school, and hearts with pinking scissors that she'd brought from home, just a substitute teacher, so eager, you know, who came in when other women were sick, or

that while I'll be pruning there, standing in the bowl of an old apricot tree that Larry had never pruned all that well, really, talk will turn to the need to get some SAM missile batteries, like the Mujahideen had in Afghanistan under their peach trees and used to send the Russians packing, and, what's more, that if Canada wasn't going

to defend its border, we were going to defend ours, and all this two decades before the Mujahideen's children, the Taliban, sent the Canadians, who will at that time not seem to be very good students of history, packing.

But we're not there yet, so we might as well get comfortable. Look around. Get to know the place. We've got ponderosa pines, which we all love for the way the sun pours through their





needles like liquid silver, and the way if you chew their pitch on a hot day it cools you, you feel like a tree, like there's a river pouring through you from the earth, up through your roots and your dreaming, and we've got smooth sumacs, on the mountains. They take your heart away, when they turn red and bring the sun down in the low October light, when the whole atmosphere of the earth acts as a lens filter and takes all the blue away. Look, even this late in the year there are still small splashes of red on the scree of the hills. There they are — on Puddinhead and K-Mountain and below the hanging valleys above the acacia trees of Willis Ranch. I don't know how to explain this to Canadians, those people whose country is a map, who are good at looking at maps, at reading them and laying them out and stitching railroads and highways and pipelines across them, and saying, "Oh yeah, that place, that's Canada," meaning my place, meaning the northern shore of a desert that stretches to Mexico, here, where it breaks against the mountains. As I begin writing this, forty-three years to the day after that day in 1969, the sumacs are still doing their trick up there on the purple hills, in the ruins of old glaciers that took the rock away. Their red leaves run in small patches right up to snow line, which, you can see, is about a hundred metres over your head, above the hay fields, right? Over there? In the mountain's shadow? Yeah, that's it.

If, as the politicians of Canada will put it forty-three years from now, Canada is a warrior nation, not a peace-keeping one, the future is absurd; although it's made out of remembering, it remembers neither the rattlesnakes that used to come down to lay themselves along the sprinkler pipes and get a little bit of coolness, nor the mud of Passchendaele, that made so little distinction between the living and the dead that it often confused them and sent the dead walking home to stand shivering under a flag on November 11, while it blew up the living into pieces no larger than a rump steak and then buried those in mud. In a warrior nation, this is training for manhood and grounds for nationhood. In a peacekeeping nation, this is grounds for dissolving nationhood altogether.

I want you to know, though, that we're good kids in this town. We're all here remembering, as we've been told. It's just that we're not all remembering the same thing. I'm remembering how cold the world is when you live in it without a proper coat, and realizing, right there under the new Canadian flag, that those men in dress uniforms smelling of mothballs had been over in Europe when they were boys, trying to kill my family, which is what, I think, made men out of them. It was a way, I'm told, of bringing me freedom, which is, as I've said, absurd.

There's no asking for explanation. All those old soldiers are dead and there's just me here. I'm the old guy now. It's 2013. But if you can indulge a boy fifty-five years old in a world that judges boys by the behaviour of soldiers, getting old is not what I had in mind when I became frostbitten and my whole chest was shaking because my body was going into convulsions. Neither is it what I am going to be remembering in just four months if I keep living here, namely the spring day of wind and dust this year in which a crowd of fifteen boys chased me off of the school yard, over the back fence, down the streets of town, and into a culvert, from which they dragged me out like a raccoon and then, only a hundred feet from the school at this point, lifted me six inches off of the ground by my hair and . . . and then, nothing, actually. Spat. Threw a few punches. In just a few years we had, as you can see, moved on from World War II — just not very far.

As for myself, well, I'd prefer to tell stories about the beauty of the river and the valley and the hills. I can tell the story of the massive, vertical cataracts of the cottonwoods by the old oxbows and silted channels, for instance, the way their cotton fills the valley for five hundred feet in the spring and catches the sun and carries it here and there, like tiny swallows in the evening, and the way that the light comes down as if it were passing through the water of a deep pool, where you are swimming among the mountain whitefish, or I can tell about that time late in summer afternoons when green balls of light a half mile in diameter hang above the fields, or at sunset when the low angles of the sun reveal flying ants, for five hundred feet above the valley floor, in a vast cloud moving south, or the ball lightning that bounces along the black ground then disappears into a fencepost and you are all that's left, you are the storm, and . . . well, you get the idea, I hope. Those cottonwoods are some of the last Similkameen trees, and deserve such praise as we can gather together, but to be perfectly honest this is not a world given to its creatures anymore, or its people, including these cottonwoods — the few of them that will not be trucked off to chipping plants in the 1980s and then left to rot in the loading yards and on the edge of sandbars and old river eddies full of horsetails, because some man went broke, doing this. Beyond the human horizon now there is only darkness.

Tonight after school, though, I will do what I will do every winter night for the next five years after my schooling is over for the day and my education begins: prune apple trees into the dark, at Ten, Twenty, even Forty Below, as the stars rise around me and the frostbite eats at my toes and the owls hunt around me in the snow, moving in silent winds through the trees. I will

do this, because the country I call Canada is actually Germany, and I don't mean the Germany of the Wirtschaftswunder and the Marshall Plan, either; I mean the Germany of 1938, when another boy, the son of a Nazi doctor, dreamed of becoming a farmer, before coming here to live in that dream. I will imagine that I live in it too, for eighteen years, until one day, under a ponderosa pine above Cawston Creek Canyon, I will fall asleep for fifteen minutes among the ants and pine needles and wake up with a memory of the earth as a vast consciousness of all men and women who have touched her, ever. This realization of what I have always known will shatter any German or Canadian identity that was grafted onto me.

But that's all a long time from now. Right now, it's still 1969. The Similkameen River is still running like transparent silk over a thousand feet of rounded glacial stones cut from many different geological terranes in a rainbow of colours and textures extending from volcanic basalt bombs and coarse pumices, to smooth, hard green rock cooked in ancient volcanic basins, to



granites, basalts and schists, obsidians, soapstones and flints, with water so clean moving over them and through them that it's like rain. It's going to stay that way for another five years, too,

before men in Princeton, at the foot of the mountains to the northwest, empty their sewage plant into it, with a story about not being able to stop Progress.

It's as if there weren't choices before men, as if they couldn't make them, as if part of what it might be decent to remember on November 11 might be that life is not a struggle to resist belonging to a place, as if the colonist's fear of being swallowed into native space and losing the social belonging that comes with white privilege had not become brutalized by all the forgetting that has to be done to enable it. This is a place in which men from one country, in which white men had children by native mothers, remade themselves as men from another country and abandoned their children as Indians, which is code for, "Not of this country anymore," although they certainly were of the land.

If you have to remember, remember that the river is flowing beneath the endless runs of chopper pilots training to go to Vietnam, riding the wind up the cliffs and back down again. Day by day the sound of their rotors bounces off the purple rock of the hills. The invasion of Cambodia, and the burning of thirty recruitment offices across the American Union which followed, as young people stepped by the millions out of the story of history and pretty much all hitch-hiked through this valley and worked on my father's farm, is still five months away. Even further away is the day I will leave the exquisite neo-gothic Rose Church in the Neo-Nazi city of Apolda, once one of the proudest cities in East Germany, to find myself in the ruins of the square to remember the Great Fascist War, as World War II was called under Soviet occupation, with weeds growing through the tiles, the Russian statues torn from their plinths, and the stink of urine everywhere. A good neo-Nazi needs somewhere to relieve himself after drinking, certainly, and Russian memorial squares are as good a place as any, I get that, but I am haunted by the realization that a few years before, the same boys, the youth of the old bell makers' city of Apolda, showed up there for the customary ceremonies of remembrance, dressed in American blue jeans smuggled in across the Iron Curtain, with long hair to their shoulders and slouching and staring up into the sky with a defiance that eventually brought down the Iron Curtain, and that then, back then, we shared a dream of brotherhood our countries were determined to deny us.

Instead, it's 1969. We are standing around getting frostbite under the flag. There are men who were made by war, and who see it as an acceptable way of doing business, who accept, easily, that to make peace you make war first, that somehow this is honourable behaviour and

supportive of the relationship of men, or shall we say boys, to their earth. It is a way of domesticating them, and for this work the barber shop across from the hotel is ground zero. I hated that place. Even then, way back then, I knew the difference between men who thought like soldiers, who told me they'd made me free, and men who thought like men and showed me how to cut open the spring buds of peach trees to judge the crop by how many buds were black with winter and how many were curled up pink, like little mice in their nests.

This place is not the usual kind of thing. It is a system of valleys that found its heart when men who'd escaped the American Indian wars arrived exhausted over the border — an Austrian prisoner of Geronimo, a Frenchman from Marseilles unable to convert a soul and forced by the Catholic Church in France to retract a lawsuit in which he sued the U.S. Army for destroying his mission at the mouth of the Yakima River, and other assorted exiles looking for escape from territory controlled by a racial war, and then some men far away signed some pieces of paper and it all became Canada, if we're defining things by their names, which I wouldn't advise. After all, the hotel here still has swinging doors, like you see in Hollywood movies from the Wild West, because, well, this is still the Wild West, especially when the bikers come to town from Vancouver looking for a fight with the cowboys and the cowboys oblige. The fights are impressive. Come, let's have a seat in these old railroad station chairs. You can watch the boys come crashing out through the doors across the street, dust themselves off and plunge back in while the barber prepares me for my haircut by telling, with a wink, the old soldier in his black, plush leather chair across from us about how he was going to trim the boy's hair so he'd look like — and he points — that.

That is a mountain goat, hanging on the wall above you. If you'd like to turn your head and look up, you'll see that the barber has built up its skull with putty but no hair, has painted it pink — bright pink, garish pink, 1950s atomic bathroom pink — and has finished it off with big bulging eyeballs and lots of blue and red veins and arteries. Take in the other mounted heads, while you're at it. Take your time. Enjoy. This barbershop is the local gallery of big game hunting, with a few California Bighorn sheep, too, that live up the Ashnola River, that drains the sky just outside of town. The barber used to be a hard rock miner a few miles further up the valley at 20 Mile Creek, took a lot of gold out of the heart of Nickel Plate Mountain, but gold mining always comes to an end and by 1969 he was just hunting sheep and goats and cutting boys' hair. Sometimes he nicks your ears and laughs.



That's what I'm remembering this Remembrance Day. I can't for the life of me think what I'm supposed to remember, though. The daily terror that the Bomb will fall on us and life on earth would be over? The hourly terror that I am a member of the next generation that will march to war, in Europe, to be mechanically slaughtered by a poverty of strategic and diplomatic intelligence? That it will be just a matter of time, and not much, really? I have no idea what the boys in mouldy uniforms under the flag are thinking, using us as hostages like that, putting those ideas in our heads, except maybe just trying to remember their friends, who died; just grieving. Maybe they just had to kill us to do that, just like they had to kill the boys within themselves to kill Germans, who had to kill the boys within themselves to kill them. But what do I know. I'm just a character in this script. Or at least I am until I remember that there are eagles.

Look at them! Golden eagles! So high in the blue fields of the sky that even I have to squint against the sun to see them and then see the sun all the rest of the day, in a dancing, crazy splash of light that pretty well blots out the rest of the world, and . . .

Look, I'll level with you. I don't think the world came back. Once you've stared into the sun, I guess, all of memory is the colour of cottonwood leaves, tumbling by in the wind, all yellow with fall, like scraps of leather, all moving past on their way to the stars, and you think you're going to fall right off this earth, into the darkness, and . . .

I think I have. Fallen. In three more weeks, I'm going to be standing right on the eave of the house in the dark wind, stringing up Christmas lights by their own light as they snake down off the roof and blow around like crazy. Morning will bring a skiff of new snow on the sagebrush and on all the channels of the valley's basalt walls and hanging valleys, and California Quail, pecking at weed seeds or calling, Hoo hooo, from dead branches as men live out old ways of being that have been replaced in the history books by ways of thinking, in a place where most book knowledge comes from somewhere else, some place like, well, like Canada, that doesn't know about the Line, or how the wind blows straight through it as if it wasn't even there. It isn't, but it has its own gravity.

As for people, well, the people around these parts are largely a collection of scraps that drifted up against the Line, and their kids. That's me — one of the kids in this story, son of the son of a musical family re-imagined by war into silence. Sometimes my fingers wander over the piano and I realize what might have been if I hadn't been given the valley and its peach trees instead. I'm not complaining. I'm just saying. I love those peach trees. I love the way their leaves



are long and thin and lie on my wet hands in the late fall like they're growing right through my skin, those persian apples, as they're called, those daughters of the Gobi Desert, that the Cherokee planted across the continent on their long marches of tears as they were driven off of the land, as they tried to hang onto something and to leave something that might nourish somebody with the luck to be trying to find their way home again, remembering the way or, more likely, just finding it peach tree by peach tree. It's what they left of themselves when they left the earth — something that would make the earth richer than it was when they left it, the expression of a hope that it would grow in secret when they weren't there and would be there to receive them when they returned, just as tobacco was, which was planted privately like that and not visited again, not once, until harvest. It worked, too, in a way, just not for the Cherokee. These sour-sweet, aromatic fruits were carried west by men who'd lost their war in the South and their cotton to weevils. Even as 20,000 of their brothers and sisters, the true patriots, as they called themselves and call themselves still, left the defeated Confederacy to restart their world of excellent manners in Brazil, they came west, after learning to become men at both ends of a rifle, looking for something new, looking for peace, to have something of beauty that they had raised rather than destroyed with their own hands. It's not the taste of love, exactly, but it's not exactly not that taste, either, although in the end, most of them were driven off of their land by the flooding of the Columbia River to create the Grand Coulee Dam for the benefit of large industrial farmers and the Hanford Engineer Works to kill 87,000 men, women and children in Nagasaki, to put, as the story went, an end to war.

Here are some of the characters who live along this American, then Canadian, then American river in 1969. There are my grandparents, German communists from the 1920s, who survived the Great War and then came through its encore performance in bitter silence, who fled the Russian bomb for the far north, almost two decades after arriving here, where they were bankrupted by neighbours who felt that robbing a Nazi was fair game, even if they were communists, which was just as bad to people who didn't know the difference. They were brought back by the kindness of communist friends in Penticton, who even built a house for them, no charge, and no rent either, just something to lure them away from the folly of looking for some place that was safe in the earth without people to support you there. There are the descendants of Métis Hudson's Bay Company trappers, who couldn't go back home to Québec in 1858, when the border was drawn right through the middle of Oregon, because Québec wasn't home, and,

besides, things were heating up along the Red River, too. They couldn't stay in Colville or Fort Okanogan, either, because those were American territory by then, so they became refugees in the mountains, where they could build their country from the ground up all over again. Generation after generation, they raised their horses and their cattle in the bunchgrass, getting squeezed a little bit further all of the time off of the centre of the land until they found themselves living, once again, on the edges. In a couple years, in 1971, the Quebécois are going to come, on the run from their own revolution, until the RCMP will knock on the door and take them away and leave their dogs behind, which we will keep caring for, in case they come back. I doubt the Métis thought about that, since they weren't Métis anymore, or Canadian or French, for that matter, just men of this valley. There are the Similkameen, too, from the Reserve. Every August they still drive their cattle through the orchards, like a flood river of brown and black hide and horses and jangling silver, as European and Métis and Mexican ranchers had done, too, for a century, until they sold out to orchard men, because they could, because what are you supposed to do when you're too old to work anymore and any work you know has vanished from the world? You sell. You learn to be a man about it. It's part of the process of facing death — poorly, yes, but how can any man judge any other man when he's spirit wrestling? You might as well start early and get some practice. There are also men who still keep cougar hounds behind their houses, which keep everyone else in the bowl of the valley awake, for miles, with their baying, even though they rarely find a cougar anymore, and when they do they drive it all over town, with its tail hanging out of the back of their truck to generate a bit of conversation. There are Norwegians who live for a year off the bear meat they get up in the high country and bring down, with the snow in their eyes, who don't have ten cents to their names, and other Norwegians who hang pigs in their yards, and years back gave me a bucket to collect the blood so I'd learn something and be of some use, then sent me inside to give it to the women, who were making sausage. The men were passing around a bottle of rye whiskey that day and adding it to their coffee as if their wives weren't noticing or weren't adding it to their own around their kitchen tables, behind the flowered curtains. I'd just come over to see their daughter. Sure, we were only seven years old, but even when you're that young you're still thinking about love, you're still thinking about the future, about what you'll make out of it, you gotta try things on, you gotta say hello to people, and it doesn't hurt when they're pretty and don't look at you like you were a stranger in your own land.

There are the orchard men, of course, the sons and grandsons of old colonial men, some of them, British men, at any rate, the lost British middle class, more precisely, who had left for empire and saw their sons become a new people, which must have stung. Here in 1969, they are still farming the glacial outwash gravel as their fathers had, and their grandfathers before them, since the first orchards were planted in 1898, with Cherokee persian apples and Missourian trading post Hawkeye apples, a new-fangled, sweet thing named after the fictional Indian scout,



which really didn't catch on, so the name was changed to Delicious, and like that it brought in a new century. These men were spared from soldiering so they could grow Delicious and persian apples, which were, ironically, no longer a part of any peace effort any more but an important part of the war effort.

Why, just over in the next valley, at the Greata Ranch plantation, the Eton-trained boys of the English upper class held a party for twenty years on the beaches, killing a deer sometimes,

most of the time taking the steamer up the lake to collect a cheque from England and hauling a case of single malt scotch back down to Antler's Beach, where they'd drink it all up until someone else's remittance was due, which went on splendidly below the orchards until they all packed off for Europe in 1914 and were dead before the leaves fell from the trees. Long after they had vanished, the Valiants, Vedettes and Veterans, the great peach varieties of the Okanagan Valley, would sprout as wild seeds there, would be noticed and appraised, and would then spread up and down the valley, as a way of remembering the boys from Eton: pure, yellow freestone peaches with solid flesh and fuzz that drove you mad when you picked them in the heat, all canned and shipped back to England and the Canadian Prairies, all sweetened with Caribbean sugar.



Among the orchard men, there are also sons of old ranchers, who plant a few trees now and then between pheasant hunting, goat hunting, deer season, that trip for a moose, the rodeo,



the other rodeo, the whole damned rodeo circuit down across the Line, all the way to Montana, roundup in the high country by Snowy Mountain, pack trips up to the Cathedrals and Trapper, Flat Top and Crater Mountain, along the old Grease Trail down to the salmon country, in Sto:lo territory, because that world is still here; it hasn't been cut away yet by the forgetting that is the consequence of remembering something else. In fact, you don't even have to think about it; you can smell it, draining down off the hills with the approach to winter, and you can see it without trying, as a fullness to the sky above the ridge lines. If you are in my family, you make a trip up there, once a year, to have coffee among the fir trees in the pure essence of the world that came before any of this, then you come down to the wind, which used to be a dream but now is only work. I'm talking about Germans. I'm talking about the enemy. There are a few Germans, yes. They are refugees from the whole concept of remembrance. Among them, there is my father, who survived Canadian bombing and strafing raids when he was a ten-year-old boy by always running in the opposite direction than the others. His principle always was to not be there when the dying started. Like the other young Germans here, he is forgetting by hiding out among the last kind of orchardists, the soldiers, who are here because what else do you do with young men you have trained to kill except try to heal them again by giving them land — made vacant because on your watch the local boys were shot down overseas and without them you have nothing? You set up the Canadian boys in their place, that's what, and see if that'll do the job, and throw in some Germans to swell out their ranks, because the ranks are awfully thin. What else do you have to work with? Who has a better idea? Give the land back to the Similkameen? Sure, but the only idea going is to settle these Canadians on the newly-subdivided Barcelo Ranch, cut out of Similkameen land by that packer from Mexico, Barcelo, who'd brought cattle up the Cariboo Road from San Diego and didn't want to make the long trip back south to poverty and occupation. Among the soldiers settled there to heal themselves were old tank men from El Alamein, with nerves gone all to hell, unable to even hold a teacup and a saucer without it sounding like a pair of cymbals, and old fighter pilots from D-Day, who drove at high speed down the roads, as if still on a strafing run, and right now, in 1969, one old man threatening to kill me after school. Lately, he's been leaving unsigned letters, tucked into the mailbox, addressed to "You fucking Nazi," which has a lot to do with both my father's anti-communist approach to fruit industry politics and this old soldier's boyhood experiences in Europe, and my father's, too. All this last year, this old soldier has stopped me on the road, with a hand raised, like a sentry at

a checkpoint, and then has interrogated me, before letting me pass into the sun. War does that to men, and then they're set loose in someone else's valley in the hope that it will straighten them out, that they'll learn some grace and respect and peace from its innocence. As a boy back then I played that role for them, among the fruit trees, with my hair blowing in the wind. The Canadians got what they wanted, a bit of land, a bit of space to heal themselves, and as for me, there are days when the wind blows and everyone's inside, huddling together against it, because they sure didn't leave the prairies for this, they left it for the sun and the sweet taste of peaches from a can, and I go out among the trees, and am free.

**HAROLD RHENISCH** came to the world on an orchard in the Similkameen Valley and is the author of the orcharding memoir *Out of the Interior: the Lost Country*. His most recent title is the book of poems *The Spoken World*. In the spring of 2013, he was writer in residence in Skriduklaustur, Iceland, where he worked on a project about the Icelandic novelist Gunnar Gunnarsson's attempt to stop Hitler's invasion of Denmark by writing carefully coded works of literature, for which he received Hitler's scorn during a private audience in the spring of 1940. "Similkameen Peaches" forms a part of a series about fruit growing, war and peace in the Okanagan, including the titles "A Recipe for Perry" (Okanagan Institute) and "Caraway and Pippins" (Rain Press). A fourth, "The Terroir of Riesling," about the history of wine making, has yet to find a first home. The goal is to eventually complete the series of 12 essays on fruits that Thoreau began in 1862, and left incomplete at his death. Harold has published two large-format environmental books with the photographer Chris Harris, about the volcanoes and grasslands of the Chilcotin Plateau. He has worked for 2 years on the blog [Okanaganokanagan.com](http://Okanaganokanagan.com), as research for two environmental works about the volcanic plateaus and basins of the Columbia, in Canada and the U.S., and is putting finishing touches to the manuscripts that come from them, as well as to his pilgrim tales from travelling the Northern Camino through East Germany. His goal is to create phenomenological works of nonfiction that use the book as a theatre, in which words, images, text and dialogue work together. His other ongoing project is a phenomenological treatise on water, along the lines of Goethe's "The Metamorphosis of Plants" and "A Theory of Colour." Harold has degrees in creative writing from both UBC and UVic and lives in Vernon, BC.



Autumn Richardson

*Crossing the Interior*

&

*Induviæ*

*September – November, 2008*

*St. Helen's Wood, England*



## *Leavings*

Early morning,  
another nameless place.

Stands of black spruce,  
Roads of water.

Chain-lakes  
as seamless as the forests.

Another day  
of clarity and cold

of trails through folds  
of white birch

and rains  
that carry the scent of winter.

Another day of rescinding  
the past

replacing it  
with memories of stone and bark.

## *Passage*

Once you've travelled through the forest  
for what seems like eternity

becoming shaped by its hollows and bogs  
accustomed to shadow and the fold of branches;

when you've followed the contours of rivers  
and crossed the waters of countless glowing lakes;

when you've endured silence  
and the violence of storms

charting the tracks, the traces left, of those  
who inhabit and pass in the vastness



sensing them in the leaves alongside you  
and just beyond the limit of the fire's light;

when you've aligned yourself with these —  
remembering at last the ten-thousand things —

the ribs of the forest will open.

## *The Land of Little Sticks*

There is a solitude here  
unlike the solitude of trees.

I left the forest  
two days ago

slipped from branches  
onto grey plains

shed shadows  
for sky and wind.

The horizon is  
a subtle arcing glow

bleeding upwards  
into darkness and fire.

My fire is a small lamp  
beneath the vastness;

I add more twigs  
and breathe in star-coldness.

The night air speaks of minerals  
and the promise of snow.

I shred lichen and leaves  
for tinder and tea:

*tripe-de-roche*; famine food  
for the lost, scraped from rocks

and dried nettle and elder —  
to cleanse the blood

and clear the lungs  
for the long walk into winter.

The barrenness here  
belies the truth —

life is proliferating  
between rock and wind.

But until you see deeply  
there is nothing.

Until you walk through it  
it is empty.



## *Induviæ*

*The unattended stones          the tumbled  
walls          a path sickled through grasses.*

i. A forgotten field

Skeletal rays of hogweed,  
dried blood of sorrel,  
earthnut,  
yarrow —

marrowless husks;  
lushness pared down  
to vegetal bones.

The remains of umbellifers.  
Dessicated stems / withered leaves.

Seed-heads bend beneath winds.  
Stands of fireweed chafe to a shine  
in the sun's last light —

a field of corpses  
they sway, rise, sigh;

The wind through panicles, coarse-throated;  
cough of burr, achene, through nightshade, yarrow.

ætheric imprints still hovering,  
flesh departed,

roots still pumping,  
hoarding light  
into the cellaring cold.

Frayed / bowed / swept / mown.

ii. Wood notes, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Sitting in the leaf-litter  
I watch  
antennæ hunt through  
the undergrowth  
drift through loam  
erupt from inner  
ridgings of bark.

Seeking, dowsing, foraging.

iii. Wood notes, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Saprotrophs bloom  
bloodless from  
the skin of others;  
they harrow  
a mouldering bole  
(supine now  
heartwood cored  
flesh for ants and  
larvæ).

Constellating bark and deadfall.



iv. Wood notes, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Birch saplings crowd  
the understorey  
lean into green pockets of light  
leech with weed-vigour  
from the nourishing dead.

iv. Into November

I sense the downward cycling,  
the saps' decline,

the descent into root-ways,  
tuber-ways.

The waning. Leaves mould into loam,  
fold over seeds and roots.

The sky sags round-bellied with rain.

The stream-bed swells;  
waters bruise through ribs of soil,

cough up leaves of oak and  
beech, torn stalks of bracken,  
wind-culled branches.

Winter rains / winds. Disarticulations / sloughings.

The wax of life recedes, curls into rest.

Caches drip-feed roots, seeds, shoots;  
blood in the dens of the slumbering.

vi. Wood notes, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008

The wood rests  
(*sloughed frayed torn*).

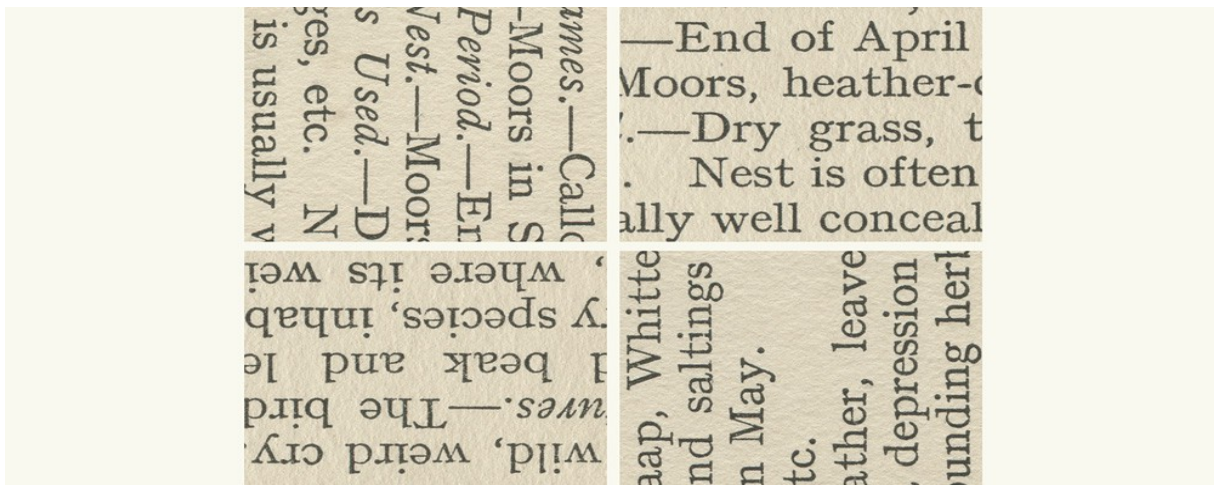
A hold for the fallen  
(*secretly vital*).

**AUTUMN RICHARDSON** is a Canadian poet and musician living in the UK. Her writing draws extensively upon landscape, place and memory. Themes of conservation, loss and succession, flora and fauna, silence and meditation, pervade Autumn's work.

Recent publications include *Wolf Notes* and *Field Notes (Volume I)*, a micro-collection of poems, *Crossing the Interior*, and publications in journals such as *Earthlines*, *Carte Blanche* and *Contemporary Verse* 2. As a songwriter, she has released three solo records, recording as Autumn Grieve, and also records as \*AR with her husband and creative partner, Richard Skelton. She has collaborated with, and appeared on, a variety of musical projects in the folk and classical scenes in Britain and Ireland.

In 2009, she founded with artist Richard Skelton, [Corbel Stone Press](#), a small, artist-run press based in Cumbria, northern England, specialising in handmade editions using environmentally friendly materials wherever possible. They publish work in a range of media, including text, art and audio recordings, that engages with landscape, the poetics of place, ecology, folklore and animism.

## Corbel Stone Press



Corbel Stone Press



# Art from the Earth

curated and essay by

John K. Grande



**A**t VanDusen Botanical Garden in Vancouver, where a bronze portrait of Swedish botanist, zoologist and physician Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) by Jack Harmon stands on its pedestal amid all the flora and fauna, the majestic trees, and open spaces, ponds covered with lily pads, and ducks and Canada Geese, one cannot help but imagine the changes of worldviews since those days when Linnaeus travelled extensively collecting and categorizing plants and herbs, writing his thesis on plant sexuality. The Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau sent him the message: "Tell him I know no greater man on earth." The German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote: "With the exception of Shakespeare and Spinoza, I know no one among the no longer living who has influenced me more strongly." Swedish author August Strindberg wrote: "Linnaeus was in reality a poet who happened to become a naturalist."

Founded in 1975, the VanDusen Garden boasts an incredible range of plants, representing some 7,500 species. Much of this is due to the great diversity of plant life in British Columbia, but as Vancouver is in a "Zone 8" climatic region, plants from Asia, Europe, Central America, and other places are also able to grow here.

As with the Earth Art shows at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Ontario, Earth Art at VanDusen provides a highly challenging and beautiful context for the 2012 Earth Art sculptors to respond to by producing earth sensitive artworks as sculptural environmental prototypes for art-nature integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Standing at the entrance to the recently opened VanDusen Visitor Centre designed by architects Perkins + Will, landscaped by Sharp & Diamond with Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, Michael Dennis' *Enigma* sculpture offers an invitation to look further into Earth Art. The very structure of the Visitor Centre invokes an interest in sustainability and organic design. The environmentally conscious roof is inspired by the shape

of an orchid flower. The wood for the ceiling roof structure of the building was recycled from trees already stricken by the spruce budworm. The thin lathes of wood were the good wood from these insect ridden trees, now given a use.

Michael Dennis' *Joe*, made from cedar wood, stands adjacent to the Visitor Centre like an earth spirit or specter. Dennis lives on Denman Island in the Gulf between Vancouver Island and the Mainland of British Columbia. These ingenious personalizations of the cedar on view include *Confidence*, a couple carved out of cedar that is thrown away, cast-offs from logging of the forests on Vancouver Island. These massive wood spirits are haunting, mysterious evocations of the strong and primordial links between nature and culture.

Earth Art in gardens is a challenge that includes design in nature with intuiting living elements in a topographic, textural and tactile space. It is also an evolution within a space that includes landforms, plants, waterways, and features of cultivation. As with the artist participants at Earth Art 2012 there can be a human-scale sculpting or nature collage, integrating and assembling elements derived from living nature.



Nature is the medium for Nicole Dextras, who created a series of 28 bio-fashionable dresses. Set onto wooden stands in situ around the gardens, these dresses are nature and art all in one. As with Dextras' previous Weedrobes series, each sculpture will be photographed and then left to decompose over time. The Little Green

Dress Projekt replaces the ubiquitous black dress with one that is truly organic, made from leaves and flowers. Its design is based on the classic sleeveless dress, first introduced in the 1960s by Coco Chanel (1883-1971). The concept behind the Little Green Dress has been extrapolated from the fashion adage that every woman should own a little black dress. Dextras brings this notion into the realm of today's environmental awareness by proposing instead that women should have at least one item of clothing in their wardrobe that is produced in a sustainable and equitable manner. The aim of this project is to promote awareness of the impact of industry on our environment and to offer a realistic opportunity for change by creating a demand for better practices through consumer purchasing. Instead of the polyesters introduced in the Chanel era, the dresses are fabricated on armatures made of reeds. Among the locally sourced plant materials can be included bull kelp seaweed, edible materials like thyme, Echinacea, mountain ash berries, hydrangea leaves, lamb's ears, cedar bark and lavender to name a few. Of the 28 dresses Dextras has fabricated, four were actually worn by the women from whose gardens the materials came from. The University of British Columbia community gardens provided yet another source for materials. While eco-fashion and an interest in sustainable practices are a motivator for the project, these dresses also remind one of the Italian painter Archimboldo's (1527-93) fantastical portrait paintings made from fruit and vegetables. Whether for fashionistas, gardeners, or eco-artists, each dress is made to measure by the artist, with the project as a whole representing a wide cross section of women of all ages and sizes. Invited participants are asked to describe their favorite sustainable article of clothing and their interest in creating equitable industries.

Nicole Dextras' work as a sculptor and a photographer have led her to the field of environmental

art. Her art practice follows the seasons, working with ice in the winter and live plant materials in the summer. The intent with her ephemeral sculptures is to let them follow their natural course of decay and to witness the process through photography. Dextras, who has exhibited her work in Canada, the USA, and Asia, was one of 20 artists selected in 2010 to create installations in the Gobi Desert for the Land Art Mongolia Exhibition.



With Earth Art, the garden itself becomes an artwork as much as any painted canvas. Likewise, the geo-specificity of the place can encourage the use of local living species and plants, as well as materials such as stone, wood, and the like. Nature is the art store. Earth Art brings the creator to that point between civilization and nature itself. And walking that line can be as exciting as defining it. The process requires artists to determine how to place their sculptures or art, and to integrate details within a large environment. All of these choices involve the conscious effort of the person developing the space. Nils-Udo's juxtaposition of palm leaves, set onto bamboo rods against and into the vast and textured sequoia trees in his *Sequoia Piece* (2012) is yet another example of Udo's sensitivity to biological



diversity and geo-specific context, in this case the west coast of North America. Sitting before the giant Sequoia, Nils-Udo directed the installation of the palm leaves within a hydraulic lift machine. It was as if Nils-Udo, like the painter Georges Seurat, were painting with palm leaves on the giant Sequoia canvas, each palm leaf furthering the overall composition. Nils-Udo's art is a kind of visual nature theatre, and is intended to last a short period of time as an ephemeral artwork. Having presented his site-sensitive integrations worldwide, he is one of the masters of the nature art medium, and his sculptural orchestration in Vancouver is as challenging, innovative, and site-sensitive as ever. Like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's interventions, Nils-Udo's are short term, very visual, environmental displays.

Swiss artist Urs-P. Twellmann has had an unusually productive relationship with natural forms and materials which he often cuts apart and then reassembles to create "visual poetry." His stunning sculptures and installations reveal a high degree of craftsmanship as well as a gentle touch which presents the inherent beauty of what is. A chainsaw master par excellence, Twellmann produces Cordon Bleu chainsaw sculpture for the backwoods Brancusis in B.C. at VanDusen. For his *Earth Zipper* installation Twellmann chose an approximately 60 year old Douglas fir that had fallen at a nearby dog park across the road from VanDusen Garden on Oak Street. *Earth Zipper* reveals the naked earth beneath the grass lawn surface that Twellmann refers to as "clothing, something artificial that covers the earth." While this site-sensitized earth art sculpture shares something in common with Twellmann's split tree pieces enacted in Korea, Europe, and North America, this particular piece was conceived with Earth Art's theme in mind. The viewer approaches the piece and can look through the zipper to see the earth beneath – a permacultural connection is thus established. The lawn

and rolling hill environment that surrounds the piece thus becomes part of the art. Embodying nature, this "zipper" opens up from its base below a sloping hill, and visually captures the viewer.

New Zealand's Chris Booth is recognized worldwide for his magnificent stone sculpture assemblages and stone blankets. In an inter-cultural dialogue, and with an awareness of the local place, Booth enacted an exchange with British Columbia's Musqueam Band to continue his worldwide engagement with place, with history. The Musqueam people have lived for thousands of years in the territory that is now Vancouver and surrounding areas. Booth's sculpture is a slow motion sustainability sculpture that involves a variety of elements. The installation incorporates wood, and unused stone from Vancouver's sea wall, but also involves mycorrhiza and mycelia fungi which, Booth points out, exist beneath the ground in all healthy forests and gardens. "Right where we now stand," Booth explains, "under all of this is this network of living matter. Only because of them these trees are so healthy because they have a symbiotic relationship with their roots. Fungi break down minerals to feed the tree and the tree feeds them. Of course fungi is the biggest organism on the planet and the greatest recycler on the planet."

A flower-like structure, Booth's sculpture is designed to have its stone petals open as the wood supporting the vertical stones is broken down by the fungi. As a result, this slow motion kinetic sculpture will evolve over thirty years as the western red cedar tree in its nest-like woven centre grows and the surrounding wood supports return to the earth becoming humus. When one thinks about formal botanical gardens one thinks of formal sculpture. They are kind of symbiotic in a way. And here we have a de-formalizing of both the formal sculpture and the formal garden as we know

them. His conception of sculpture is less about the sculpture as object than about its evolution and devolution, and the ongoing process of life. As Booth states, “This is as bio-specific, earth sensitive as art can get. It is the spirit of the land that is coming through. I think that in many ways this sort of sculpture is more relevant to a botanical garden. Let’s face it. All the people who run botanical gardens, those who are knowledgeable, know how important fungi is, and also how dangerous it can be, of course. It is a weaving in a complex way between all sorts of different aspects of a place, if you like, from spiritual, through to weaving within a community, through to weaving, for instance, here. I believe the gardens here in Vancouver are very keen to have the Musqueam here because they have had little contact. And the other part of the complex weaving can be brought right through to the cultural aspect that includes contemporary art.”



For the consecration and blessing ceremony, Booth made a gift of his sculpture to the Musqueam people, whereupon the Musqueam gifted the sculpture to the VanDusen Botanical Gardens. The living sculpture was named *načθətəłps* or Transformation Plant by Leona Sparrow, the Chief of the Musqueam people. Larry Grant of the Musqueam band welcomed the sculpture and gave a speech of gratitude for its creation.

The sculpture was then blessed at each of the four corners by Thelma Stogan who gave a sprig of tree branch to Booth to be placed in the Transformation Plant sculpture the next day. Those who attended the ceremony were “witness” to the naming, and carry this knowledge with them. As Booth has commented, it was his apprenticeship with British sculptor Barbara Hepworth that gave him the spirit of humanity. “Barbara reinforced it and encouraged that first and foremost as an artist one should be a good human being.” Upcoming projects that Chris Booth is involved in include Storm King Park in upper New York state and a collaboration with the Sami in northern Norway.

How do we bring the landscape, the garden, art, culture, and nature together, so that ever-changing scenario where the human and the natural complement each other comes alive, and affirms life? By simple acts, conversations, and dialogues. We can embrace the natural environment, instead of “naturalizing” it, or controlling it. A balance between what is there, and what we are introducing as art becomes the challenge. The artists whose integrations can be seen at VanDusen Botanical Garden in Vancouver, B.C., Canada are at the forefront of this dialogue between nature and art, an eternal and universal dialogue. Nature is the art of which we are a part.

**JOHN K. GRANDE**, a Montreal-based writer and curator for over 20 years, has contributed his views on art to a variety of arts publications including *Artforum*, *Sculpture* (USA), *Art on Paper*, *Vie des Arts*, *Vice Versa*, and *Canadian Forum*. A broad spectrum of his interviews and writings on art, sculpture, photography, public art, and ecology have been brought together in two volumes titled *Art Allsorts: Writings on Art & Artists*.

John K. Grande’s poetry includes collaborations

with West Coast artist Arnold Shives on *The Landscape Changes* (Gaspereau/Prospect Press) and *Homage to Jean-Paul Riopelle, Black Peat* illustrated by Alfio Bonanno (The Print Factory, Ireland 2012) and *Grass Grows* with Thomas May at the Grass Blade Institute in Nuremburg, Germany (2013). In 2010 John Grande received an Honour Award from the Colorado chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) in the field of Research and Communication.

Recent books and shows include *Art Nature Dialogues* (SUNY Press, N.Y.), *Dialogues in Diversity* (Pari Press, Italy), and *Eco-Art* (Pori Art Museum, Finland). *Art in Nature* (Borim Press, Seoul, South Korea) won the national public prize in 2012. This autumn (2013) *John K Grande's Interviews with Contemporary World Artists* will be published in Shanghai, China.

Cover piece photo: Urs-P. Twellmann's *Earth Zipper*



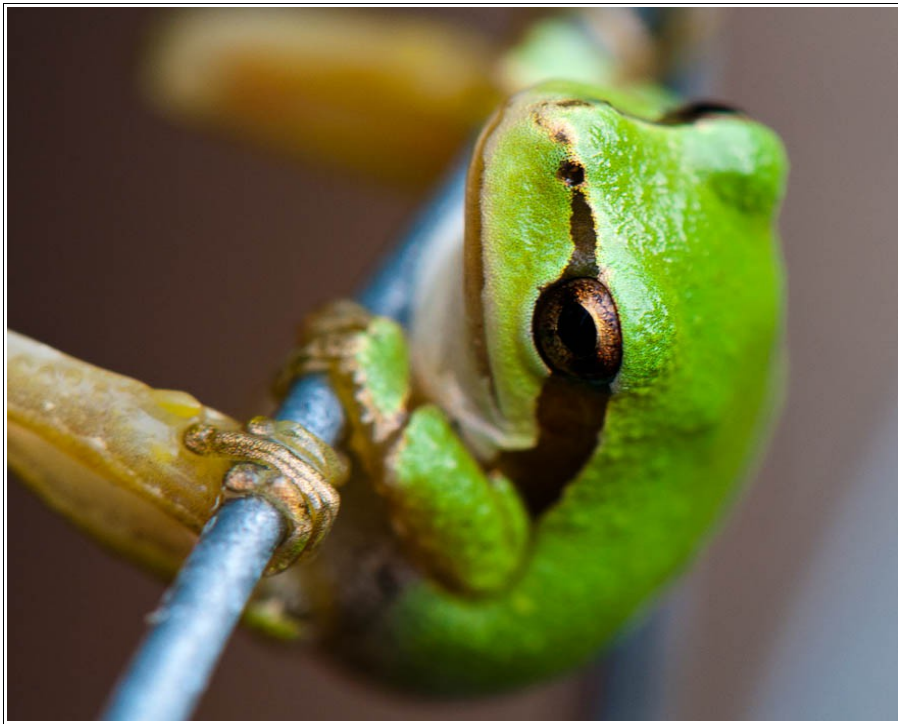
Lake Erie, Ontario

Photo: Ross Belot

Ken Belford

from

*internodes*





Shoots wait years for the flushing of buds  
and for a picker's rotation before returning.  
In the past, years. Pick the following  
spring from the rhythmic growth of trees  
over the summer. Pick when branches  
originate leaves. Observe the base of  
the leaf, where the twigs reach their final  
length. I am that man who into the old  
year goes and almost everywhere I am  
found. I, who lived worlds apart in divers  
thickets, say *be something, Firefly, be  
somebody*, as when on a twisting, narrow  
path where sifted light comes down and  
where on a switch of birch it is written.

I bring the body of a salmon forth,  
knowing each from each,  
each assigned a place.  
Almost everything is stored in language.  
The shortest path has the maximum flow.  
The bigger the foot, the better.  
Look upon the mark and match  
and mates of memory. Imagine forgeries  
and murals and the analogue.  
The inference is of the clutter  
between the pixel and the seed.  
I'm almost old.  
I was with the first arrivals  
until I headed out, but now I wonder  
about the relevance of rhythm and  
the problem of the supervised image.  
Images naturally segment like impact statements.  
At every step, the potential  
of getting picked up by a search engine.  
Suppose a random walker starts  
a seed, and at every step, the probability.

Thank you for the advice on how  
to patch things up after mechanical  
damage. So far I've been able to  
persist in disturbed habitats, re-  
producing along the forest edge,  
but not in the more open areas.  
My lover, though, is distinct, and  
back then we came together for  
relief, numerous people helping  
us in the remnants of the mixed-  
wood stands, a common understory  
found across the Interior. The fires,  
slides, winds and floods and other  
unstable effects along the edge  
were hit-or-miss. Most of the men  
I knew doubled back to an earlier  
stage and fell asleep, and in their  
measured plots are not influenced  
by disturbance, and not farther along.  
The light levels in this matrix of large  
openings happens when the temperature  
of the mean region ranges over the  
confounding effects of how things grow.

Governments are ignorant and pawns are unwitting, but **KEN BELFORD** has his own system of ownership. He says the work of the nature he writes about cannot be completed. In the first place, although he has an English name, this is about a competing claim. Many of his old friends are gone, but some are still living. In the pages that follow, they are the land authors of boundaries between one and the other. Author of 21 chap books and 8 trade books, Belford never occupied the land.

**Photo credits above and below:** L. Szabo-Jones



Rebecca Geleyn

3 Poems



## Outdoors

The walls were decent, at least they shielded  
motifs of unvarying furniture  
reassurances dangling

like gift bags on braided strings.  
We were heavily plucked and set here  
with a remote-control claw of luck

or my parents, your parents  
a couch on chewed wooden feet  
the way ours blistered from walking

outdoors in inadequate flip-flops;  
from here we sat and watched  
slips of time unravel like a dress

outdoors, there, that wasn't  
the wind, animal movement  
hustling the leaves, breaking the links

of their organic stitches, hunger  
in the belly, passion in the lower  
abdomen, that's where I hurt. Someone

I don't know and places I can't remember  
beyond the time we first moved here and  
the acid-etched glass of the window.

The cat kisses the nose of a leaf's shadow  
lapping up against graffiti on the outside,  
letters sprawling into athletes

## Outside the LaM

*After Stephanie Bolster*

Two ants fight for leverage on my instep  
just as I sit still, moving in and out of tremors  
of sunlight, toying with the leathered edge

of a sandal strap, they fall in line, one in front  
of the other, never two-by-two, carving a narrow  
alley of civilized passage through the park

This is, after all, mostly a park: no time spent inside  
but for thirty minutes, the dozen pieces in the room that isn't  
closed for renovations, my mother's eyes

swerving from typewritten pamphlet to wall,  
and back again, pendulum, a rouged woman holding  
her child with a flat palm, too relaxed, my mother, *Yes, ah, I see*

I left the gravel path hoping this wasn't one of those places  
where we're supposed to *Please keep off the grass*  
When the ants left, I thought of how we drove to get here

LaM: Lille Métropole Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art



## Robins

Their beaks pierce the fog of light:  
open mouths like slimmest scissors,  
flecks of powder in the draft.  
Even before sight they snatch larvae  
in crossed chopsticks, catch  
the scent of grass, of mother's flight.  
Incredible the robins

poked and poked at the crusted border  
that splits birth from unbirth –  
that's where sound begins, opaque  
and soft as mud, a muted  
fingernail, a blur of leaves  
or automobiles through the blue carapace  
that protects new puttied flesh.

Hatched. Some things are born  
and others are opened like gifts  
at Christmas.  
Once the barrier's gone the bird  
whines and ruffles its lint, while the rest  
supplies the garden with blue ruins,  
dulled shards of stained glass.

**REBECCA GELEYN** completed her Master's degree at the University of New Brunswick, where she was involved in editing *The Fiddlehead* and *Qwerty* and where she founded the UNB/STU Swing Dance Club. Rebecca currently lives, writes, and teaches English in Prague, Czech Republic.

**Photo credit:** Michael Suave

nik harron

# Interrupted Horizons



*"Lake Huron copper (Autumn offshore wind)" 2012, Acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

**A**s a landscape painter I am primarily interested in the sense of connection you feel when you take the time to quietly observe nature. Those fleeting “zen” or “holy moments” when you understand that you have an inescapable connection to the nature around you—that your dual existences are intimately entwined. It is an awareness that transcends the immediate experience, a reflection of the evolution of that relationship through deep time.

In preparing to paint, I take myself into nature to take “mental photographs” of what I see. In order to truly understand what you are observing you have to bring to bear your entire knowledge of the processes that created the landscape that is before you and that continue to actively direct its evolution. In observing, I pause and take the time to intentionally bring what I know to what I’m seeing—physics, biology, geology, history, philosophy and literature—to create memories that are vivid and that last because they are so deeply integrated with my understanding of the landscape. I do this so that I will not only recognize and be aware of the changes in the landscape, but to understand why those changes are occurring. A photograph is instant, but it is ignorant of what it records. To craft a memory by sitting and quietly contemplating nature may take more time but it retains much more than a mere image.

As a young man, and a student of literature, much of my mental model of the environment was originally informed by its symbolic dimension. In his essay “Nature,” Emerson wrote at the dawn of the industrial revolution that *“Nature refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf... his operations taken together are so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing... they do not vary the result.”* His transcendental notion of nature was rooted in its inexhaustibility—a notion that we now know to not only be optimistically naive, but dangerous. In less than 200 years we have gone from a concept of nature that is vast and scary—something we fence out to preserve ourselves—to something small and fragile that we fence in in order to protect it from us.

Nature, however, is a slippery concept. In his article “A 10% World” (*The Walrus*, September 2010) writer J.B. MacKinnon explains that every generation defines “nature” anew by its experience of its contemporary environment. What has already been lost is invisible—if you never experienced something you have no awareness that it is gone. Consequently, we have come to think of conservation areas and the countryside as “nature” because they were our first experience of the natural world. We have remade nature in our image and in the process have remade ourselves. Our industrial approach to constructing the landscapes we inhabit has created self-reinforcing disconnects within the historical record that have led to an intergenerational blindness of what has been altered. For each generation, our native environment has moulded our cognitive associations with nature. Our experience has been mediated through this constantly changing reference frame which has informed moral viewpoints regarding our transformation of space from a purely utilitarian perspective.

Our simple presence changes nature—any evidence of our passing removes its wildness—and we



have reached the point in our development where there is nowhere on the planet that evidence of our effects cannot be observed. Even the most remote locations have been disturbed. Think of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in the middle of the ocean, the melting of the Arctic ice or the black earth mined in the Amazonian rainforest, the archaeological remnant of widespread Pre-Columbian slash and burn agriculture.



*"One man's Trashmore is an everyman's treasure" 2012, acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

McClennan Park, known affectionately to Kitchener Locals as "Mt. Trashmore" is a reclaimed landfill which has been converted to urban green space.

"I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.  
The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild."  
—Wallace Stevens, from "The Anecdote of the Jar "

Not only have we forgotten nature's pristine state, there is an intentional and wilful deception regarding our conversion of nature. Our resource extraction occurs in areas that are largely inaccessible and geographically distant from the scrutiny of the vast majority of the population. When resource extraction is located closer to home, as with gravel pits, it is hidden behind berms so that we don't have to see the destruction as it occurs. We continue to remain wilfully ignorant. For the modern observer, a pastoral interpretation of our environment contrasts industrial ruins—and the artificially crafted "natural" spaces that accompany them—against a completely transformed agricultural landscape, unsettling comfortable notions of our ability to live symbiotically with nature.

As someone who began life living on the ocean, and who grew up later on the shores of Lake Huron, the simple imagery of the unbroken horizon is a central theme of my work. The landscapes I am drawn to are typically characterized by an emptiness, a lack of evidence of humanity. The only human presence in the scene is the observer themselves. The paintings are impressions—a necessary proxy of nature brought into our constructed human environment for observers who will not bring themselves to experience or understand nature directly.

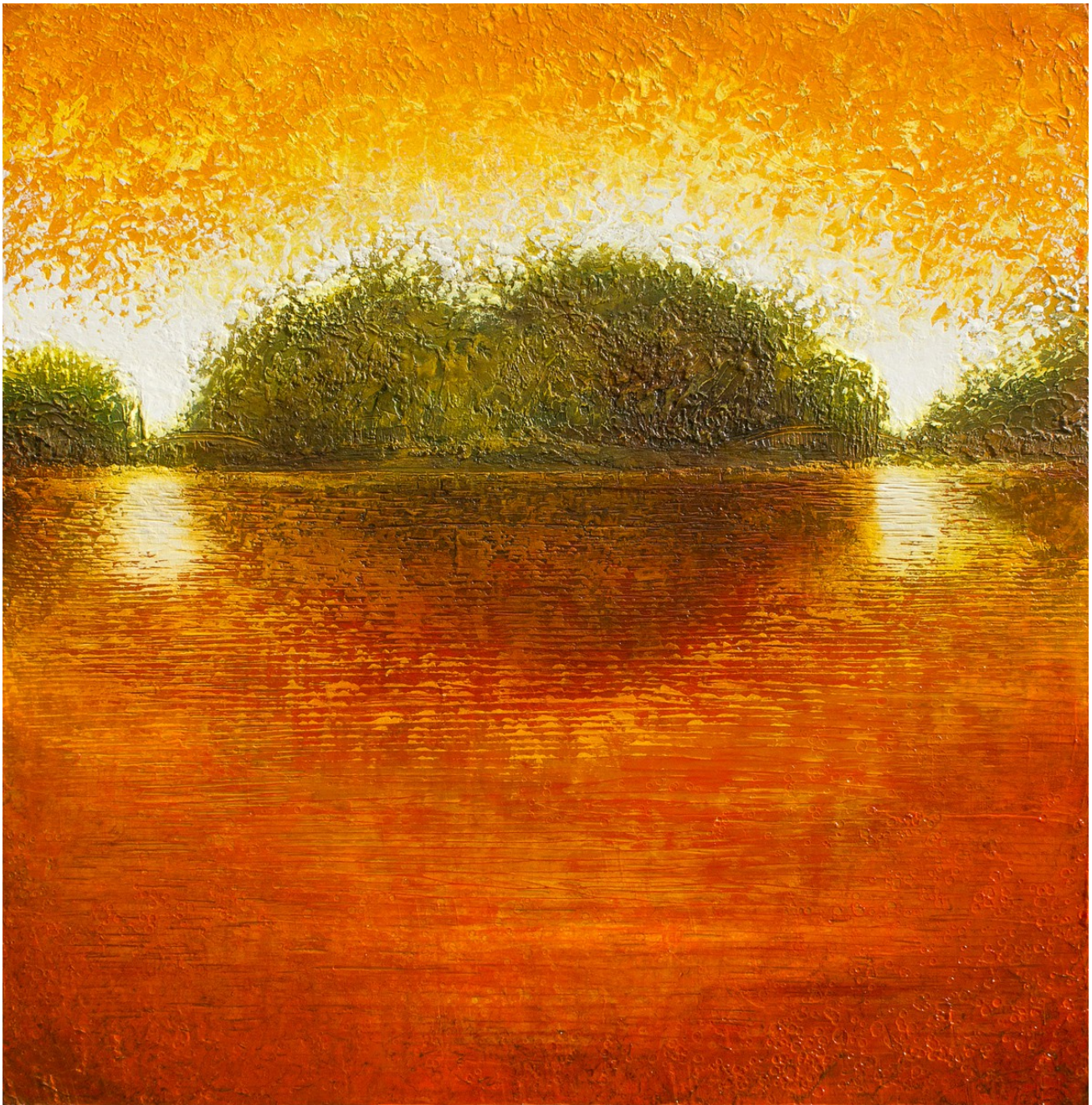




*"Rockwood, that dam river" 2012, Acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

Rockwood Conservation Area, located outside Guelph, is a recreation of a northern landscape within an urban context created by a series of dams on the Eramosa River. Above the ruins of the old mill, the shallow, broadened stream is reminiscent of the kind of forest clearing that originally would have been opened up by the damming of the river by a lodge of beavers. At one time, exploitation of this species was the economic incentive that financed the settlement of Canada, and now, re-characterized as an agricultural pest, their population has been reduced to a small fraction of pre-settlement numbers.





*"Roos, the Idyll of Victoria" 2012, Acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

Parks are sadly often as close to nature as city dwellers get. This is the lake at Victoria Park in Kitchener, Ontario—a body of water so inflated and removed from nature it recently had to be dug up and its water flow re-engineered to better manage the issue of accumulated waste, even though that means that the waste is now simply washed downstream. Victoria park is a beautiful space, but it's instructional to see the same deflated creek less than 100 feet away—it is a concrete drain, an engineered overflow channel for rainwater in which barely any life can survive—less than a 10% shadow of a natural river.





*"This place is a real hole in the ground" 2012, Acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

Elora Quarry is another peak experience of transformed nature. Paradoxically it is one place you can get close to the 10% world as you swim within arm's length amongst the fish and alongside the frogs that take refuge there.





*"Hey, what's the matter Budd?" 2012, Acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

As we replace natural ecological systems with our simpler man-made ones it's important to realize how susceptible to change our industrial ecosystems can be. Our impressive landmarks are only temporary. The Budd Automotive plant in Kitchener was intimately tied into our oil-driven economy. Its existence proved unsustainable as markets shifted overseas and it was recently demolished—its materials sorted into piles, presumably for recycling. Even as it was being torn down, civic debate raged on whether the land should remain zoned for industry or turned over to parkland—if not nature exactly, then one step closer to being naturalized.





*"Requiem for a parking lot (at Homer Watson & Bleams)" 2012, Acrylic on panel, 36x36in*

Not all is lost—in the absence of human intervention nature does have the ability to renew itself. The staff parking lot at the former Budd Automotive plant is now alive with fresh, more sustainable growth, hinting that as a human presence becomes untenable, new ecological niches will be exploited.

**nik harron** is a Kitchener-based landscape artist who has exhibited for over 20 years in public, private and ad-hoc gallery spaces. The images that accompany this article are primarily taken from *Interrupted Horizons*—a 2012 exhibition that was held at the Rotunda Gallery at Kitchener City Hall.

# BOOK REVIEWS



## REVIEW CONTENTS

*Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability* by BRENDAN LARSON (MADHUR ANAND)

*The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* by BERNIE KRAUSE (ANDREW MARK)

*Imperial Canada Inc.: Legal Haven of Choice for the World's Mining Industry* by ALAIN DENEALT and WILLIAM SACHER (NATHAN ANDREWS)

*Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples* edited by DANIEL COLEMAN, ERIN GOHEEN GLANVILLE, WAFAA HASAN & AGNES KRAMER-HAMSTRA (AUBREY HANSON)

*The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude* by ANDREW NIKIFORUK (PAMELA BANTING)

*The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and The Cultures of Longing* by RACHEL POLIQUIN (DAVID BROWNSTEIN)

*Catalysts: Confrontations With the Muse* by CATHERINE OWEN (CHRISTINE LOWTHER)

*Digging the City: An Urban Agriculture Manifesto* by RHONA MCADAMS (RANDY LEE CUTLER)

*Edge Effects* by JAN CONN (EDIE STEINER)

*The Wealth of Nature: Economics as if Survival Mattered* by JOHN MICHAEL GREER (GABRIELLE ZEZULKA-MAILLOUX)

*Sharawadji* by BRIAN HENDERSON (GILLIAN WIGMORE)

*Girlwood* by JENNIFER STILL (GILLIAN WIGMORE)

Poems for an Oil Free Coast by YVONNE BLOOMER, KIM GOLDBERG, J. IRIBARNE, CHRISTINE LOWTHER, GARRY THOMAS MORSE, PATRICK M. PILARSKI, STEVE NOYES, EDEN ROBINSON, ALISON WATT (JONATHAN GORDON)



*Assiniboia* by TIM LILBURN (HARRY VANDERVLIST)

*Undark: An Oratorio* by SANDY POOL (JASMINE JOHNSTON)

*between dusk and night* by EMILY MCGIFFIN (JASMINE JOHNSTON)

*Foodshed: An Edible Alberta Alphabet* by DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH (JENNA BUTLER)

*The Essential Robert Gibbs* selected by BRIAN BARTLETT (JESSICA KUEPFER)

*Everything, Now* by JESSICA MOORE (KELLY DEAN SHEPHERD)

*Birds, Metals, Stones & Rain* by RUSSELL THORNTON (KELLY DEAN SHEPHERD)

*A Geography of Blood* by CANDACE SAVAGE (LORELEI L. HANSON)

*Bad Latitudes* by AL POPE (LORI ROSMUS)

*The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems* by NANCY HOLMES (CHRISTINE LOWTHER)

*A Page from The Wonders of Life on Earth* by STEPHANIE BOLSTER (MATTHEW ZANTINGH)

*Evolution: The View From the Cottage* by JEAN-PIERRE ROGEL, translated by NIGEL SPENCER  
(MATTHEW ZANTINGH)

*Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land* by A.A.  
DEN OTTER (MATTHEW ZANTINGH)

*The Rapids* by SUSAN GILLIS (PHOEBE WANG)

*Slow Curve Out* by MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS (PHOEBE WANG)

*Border Crossings: Walking the Haiku Path on the International Appalachian Trail* by IAN MARSHALL  
(MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS)



*geographies of a lover* by SARAH DE LEEUW (CAMILLA NELSON)

*To the Edge of the Sea* by ANNE MCDONALD (OLIVIA FERGUSON)

*Dirt of Ages* by GILLIAN WIGMORE (NAOMI SMEDBOL)

*Every Wolf's Howl* by BARRY GRILLS (TRAVIS VANDERVELDEN)

*Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk: A Natural and Cultural History of Yukon's Arctic Island* edited by CHRISTOPHER R. BURN (SHIRLEY ROBURN)

*Generation Us: The Challenge of Global Warming* by ANDREW WEAVER (SHANNON STUNDEN BOWER)

*The Arcadia Project: North American Postmodern Pastoral* edited by JOSHUA COREY and GEORGE CALVIN (JASMINE JOHNSTON)

*Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North* by TIMOTHY B. LEDUC (DIANNE CHISHOLM)

*The Water Man's Daughter* by EMMA RUBY-SACHS (LEE FREW)

*Of Moose and Men: A Wildlife Vet's Pursuit of the World's Largest Deer* by DR. JERRY HAIGH (SITARANI MACMILLAN)

*An Environmental History of Canada* by LAUREL SEFTON MACDOWELL (PHILIP VAN HUIZEN)

*Distillō* by BASMA KAVANAGH (TRAVIS V. MASON)

*I see my love more clearly from a distance* by NORA GOULD (DILIA NARDUZZI)

**Photo credit:** L. Szabo-Jones

*Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability* by  
**BRENDAN LARSON**  
Yale UP, 2011 \$50.00

Reviewed by **MADHUR ANAND**

Larson has written a well-organized, informative book about the use and abuse of metaphor in environmental science (including evolutionary biology) and their implications for sustainability. It's well worth a read by those interested in fields within environmental science, environmental studies (including environmental ethics), and science communication, in the broadest possible definition of these terms. Larson not only reviews a wide-ranging literature on the topic but also contributes many original ideas and new data.

To begin, I must confess that I am not Larson's typical reader. I am an environmental scientist by profession and a poet in several instances. Occasionally combining the two, I once wrote a quasi-philosophical paper ("The Fundamentals of Vegetation Change: Complexity Rules," 2000) in which I perpetuated the metaphor that "the vegetation of the earth presents itself as a flowing stream..." William S. Cooper's paper, where the metaphor first appeared in 1926, has only been cited 156 times (and mine only 26 since publication; okay, now 27). Some metaphors, it seems, are interesting and benign, while others can be nasty and viral.

For me, the biggest idea in Larson's book is this: environmental scientists need to think carefully about introducing metaphors that can become harmful to the environment and to humanity. He

gives several examples, including "DNA barcoding," which he criticizes as bringing with it a consumerist view of biodiversity, and "invasive species," with its overtly militaristic tone. Larson explains that these metaphors are often introduced when a scientific result or concept requires revolutionary thinking—or, simply, great powers of persuasion—but that little thought is given by scientists to the damage that can be done with language.

I have admittedly perpetuated many of the metaphors that Larson lists (and it's a long one) in his book (such as competition, tragedy of the commons, stability, disturbance, equilibrium, species richness, assembly rules, clone, interaction strength, complexity, scale, self-organization, biodiversity hot spot, biodiversity levels, conservation, fragmentation, global warming, fitness, mutation, to name just a few) in my own scientific research and communication, often blind to the presence of subversive metaphoric content. It's also true that I've never particularly liked the sound of many of these words (I have never used "invasive species" in a poem), but I use them all the time in my own research and teaching.

For scientists, the naming of ideas, concepts, and phenomena is in some ways like the naming of species. We do it to agree, to facilitate communication. But you might say that even the Latin of species names, while often wonderfully metaphoric, can itself be fraught with controversy (and also, what is a species?). I agree that language should be used very carefully, and Larson's book does make me want to scrutinize scientific papers. I suspect I will find a world of hidden meaning. But at one point Larson suggests a kind of language police

in which environmental scientists have their novel metaphors reviewed by peers and “ethics boards” before they are launched into the world. That seems a bit much. Why can’t scientists play with language, be poets (even if bad ones)?

While Larson admits that scientists can’t possibly know the far-reaching consequences of their metaphors (just as they may not know the far-reaching consequences of their science), at times I feel Larson goes a bit far in his criticism. For example, he writes that environmental scientists “have not necessarily been trained to think carefully about their metaphors” or “may have also had little opportunity to develop an appreciation of the power of language.” I must point out that Larson’s concerns about the use of metaphors in environmental science have been brought up by environmental scientists themselves, starting quite early in the field (remember that “environmental science” is itself a relatively young science). Just one example is A.G. Tansley’s paper, “The Use and Abuse of Vegetation Concepts and Terms” (1935), which has been cited over 1000 times now—but not in Larson’s book. There, one can find, for instance, a very early criticism on the use of “progress” as metaphor for ecosystem development, which Larson spends considerable time discussing. His discussion includes presenting quantitative results from questionnaires he gives to different groups of society (e.g., evolutionary biologists and evolutionaries—read the book to find out the difference).

I would argue, though, that sometimes science gets it right the way no poet or ethics board member can. Scientists, for example, tell us that leaves can be thought of as rivers and they tell us

why, so why not forests as streams? (J.D. Pelletier and D.L. Turcotte). Larson himself points out the positive aspects of the metaphor of food webs. Perhaps these kinds of metaphors, which illuminate the connections between diverse aspects of the natural world, are more of what is needed. On this point, I was delighted to find my friend and colleague, poet and scholar Adam Dickinson, cited. Larson writes:

From Dickinson’s perspective, metaphor thus becomes an epistemic tool of a different sort, one that reminds us of the fundamental interconnections between things. This extends across nearly all of the dualities we take for granted: fact-value, science-society, literal-figurative. In the current context, environmental metaphors might highlight the unavoidable entanglement of nature and culture, especially the way that they describe nature through cultural lenses. With metaphor we see one thing in terms of another, and the key question I attend to herein is whether we are choosing the right thing—a question usually asked solely along epistemic lines, but one that can also be asked more broadly. And in seeking metaphors of sustainability, one way to assess these other things is whether they enhance our sense of interconnection. Perhaps some metaphors will help to sustain forests and water, and with them us. Certainly breaking down of the dualities that Larson points out above is necessary. But to figure out how the new “good” metaphors for environmental sustainability can go viral, is, in many ways, the same task as finding that elusively broad readership for poetry. Larson makes the fine claim that environmental scientists and poets need to talk to each other. Hear, hear. Poets know good metaphors

from bad ones. On this path, we may very well find the answer to John Felstiner's earlier question. Maybe poetry *can* save the earth.

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### ***The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* by BERNIE KRAUSE**

Little, Brown & Co, 2012 \$26.99

Reviewed by **ANDREW MARK**

**B**ernie Krause could be described as an acoustic naturalist. His book, *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places*, takes the listener-reader around the world to sample the nature of things and their sounding through time and place on earth. In this work, he accomplishes three things: 1) he describes the arc of his unusual life path, depicting the kinds of skills, interests, and chances that will land a person in the field of acoustic ecology; 2) he brings attention to acoustics and listening which are lacking in the wider environmental movement; and 3) he lays out the generation of his theory of acoustic niches, biophony, geophony, and anthrophony and how species have evolved to inhabit specialized or segmented acoustic space (or rather, are disappearing from it and/or are being edged out).

Krause began his career as a musician, and, by luck, had the opportunity to take over for Pete Seeger when he left the Weavers. He then worked as an in-demand studio musician in the 1960s while also generating sound tracks for Hollywood. He eventually became an expert at capturing and mixing "natural" sounds and acoustic spaces for film, and nature films in particular. He was also involved in designing some of the first electronic synthesizers at the time. In the book, he uses this portion of his life

narrative to introduce vocabulary for describing the properties of acoustic environments and sound. This vocabulary includes, for example, key concepts like “envelopes” which are the parts of sound waves that allow our ears to differentiate the sound of a violin from say, a flute, even when they are playing the same note.

As the book is not a strictly academic or scientific text, Krause does quite an excellent job avoiding assumptions about the kinds of technical language that tends to scare readers away from both acoustic ecology and from music generally (frequency spectrum, compression, signal to noise ratio, notation, etc.). While his book is not nearly so foundational or ambitious as R. Murray Schaffer’s *The Tuning of the World*, he covers many of the same topics and renders them more palatable for a general audience. A reader new to the language and philosophy of acoustic ecology might consider starting first with this digestible volume, and for this reason I recommend the book.

Krause relates an analogy between the aural aims of music studio mastering experts and music ensembles—the mixing of voices and musical instruments to achieve hi-fidelity on any music playback system or within an ensemble in a given composition—and the phenomenon of acoustic speciation. Krause demonstrates that species have evolved to achieve mature localized biophonies that, like a well mastered CD or well diversified group of instruments in an ensemble, inhabit available acoustic space both completely and strategically. He does not, however, take enough time to explain at the start of the book how music producers and musical ensembles mix instruments to inhabit certain specific

frequency ranges on recordings and in performance so that each instrument can be clearly heard, how each occupies a specific niche that relates to an acoustic frequency range. Rather, a reader new to the subject of this book must piece together Krause’s arguments over the entire book. For example, in the studio, from the entire range of our hearing, bass guitars are relegated to a specific frequency range when mixing them into a record, and that range must be carefully negotiated with, for example, a bass drum, because if they overlap too much then the listener may have difficulty differentiating the two instruments and the recording will be “muddy.” This problem is analogous to the natural environment where fidelity is important for, among other things, reproductive success, avoiding prey, predicting the weather, etc. What Krause demonstrates using spectrographs—visual representations of acoustic environments and the frequencies being sounded within them—is that through evolution, animals have come to occupy very specific bands of acoustic frequency. Their sounding is differentiated just as if a music producer or composer had come along and arranged and assigned them positions not only in the measurable and experiential acoustic spectrum, but also through time as well. In other words, animals, through evolution, make differentiated acoustic sounds to inhabit suitable available frequencies and moments in time. Like a producer mixing bass drums and bass guitars to be audible and not overlapping or muddled, animals find their soundings situated, or situate themselves to be heard and to hear each other. This mix of sounding, this argument for measurable and visually demonstrable biophony is the crux of Krause’s acoustic evidence for our loss of speciation

through time. Anthrophony is edging and eroding the quality of this delicate mix: humans are making both material and acoustic poison and Krause's work explains this comprehensibly.

Another criticism I have of the book is the same criticism I would level upon movie series like *Planet Earth*. Krause's extraordinary travels to fragile acoustic environments are those very same human behaviors that endanger these spaces. While many of us are complicit or culpable in the ploys of "ecopornography," there is something exploitative in travelling the globe to document and preserve technologically mediated versions of reality so that others from afar might see and hear our dilemmas or witness diminishment (which Krause demonstrates conclusively in the acoustic world). He does not miss the irony of mediated environmental representation in the least, nor his own tech-geek persona. Yet at heart, I sense a Muirian search for the purity of nature when he reminds us again and again that fifty percent of all of the recordings he has made of unique and heterogeneous biophonies are now documents that represent extinct soundscapes. In this way, Krause's book can be a difficult read, because he so comprehensively confirms that not only are all other measurable vital signs of Gaia in trouble, but unsurprisingly, the vitality of our sounded environments are at risk or are already damaged. Dead coral reefs not only look dead, and are dead by many other measures, but apparently, they sound dead too. This said, his good news might be that acoustic analysis can allow us some unique methods of documenting and interpreting what we intuit about the declining health of nature.

Note: the enhanced ebook version of this

work includes recordings and videos, and there is also an audiobook version of the work that Krause narrates himself. This aural version of the work includes recordings at key moments in the text, an audiophile's dream.

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***Imperial Canada Inc.: Legal Haven of Choice for the World's Mining Industry*** by **ALAIN DENEAULT** and **WILLIAM SACHER** (with Catherine Browne, Mathieu Denis and Patrick Ducharme), translated by **FRED A. REED** and **ROBIN PHILPOT**  
Talonbooks, 2012 \$29.95

Reviewed by **NATHAN ANDREWS**

There is a lot to show that the Canadian government is interested in the extractive industry, both at home and abroad. A recent indication of such interest is the establishment of a Canadian International Institute for Extractive Industries and Development, to be co-hosted by the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. This institute is part of the government's efforts at establishing partnerships with private extractive



companies to facilitate the achievement of the developmental goals of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). While this interest is apparent, there is evidence of mechanisms that permit extractive companies to list in Canada and enable several of them involved in controversies abroad to continue to thrive in the financial market. Alain Deneault and William Sacher's *Imperial Canada Inc.* does a good job of revealing such contrivances. Their overall premise is that Canada is now "home to oil, gas, and mining companies that choose to register here in order to benefit from our permissive mining regulations and preferential tax structure." While stock markets in London, Paris, and New York all have speculative characteristics, Canadian stock exchanges have historically "been singularly shaped by dubious practices of speculation, primarily on natural resources." This quote explains why seventy-five percent of the world's mining exploration and operating firms are based in Canada with about sixty percent of them registered on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX). And the companies involved, mostly operating outside Canada, have caused a great deal of devastation in places like South Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In Africa, for instance, the authors cite Canadian companies such as Iamgold (in Mali), Prestea Resources Ltd. and Birim Goldfields (in Ghana), First Quantum Minerals (in Congo-Kinshasa), DiamondWorks (in Sierra Leone), and Heritage Oil (in Angola), whose work incites severe social and environmental repercussions which are left unattended. Canadian government grants and other forms of support perpetuate this trend, and the media plays a key role by suppressing information about the

exploitative behaviour of companies abroad. The authors' argument that "the country's jurisdiction provides unofficial cover for corporations that may be involved in controversies abroad" resonates with recent efforts to establish partnerships between CIDA, private mining firms, and some non-governmental organizations. The partnerships, launched in 2011, are with World University Service of Canada and Rio Tinto Alcan in Ghana, Plan Canada and Iamgold in Burkina Faso, and World Vision Canada, and Barrick Gold in Peru—and CIDA is committing about \$6.7 million towards poverty alleviation in these three pilot countries. The point being made here is that if taxpayers' dollars are to support these "partnerships," it is appropriate to ensure that private companies involved embrace social and environmental responsibility in a manner that will shed good light on Canada.

Historically, New York and London did set the tone when it came to stock market trading. However, the establishment of Standard Stock and Mining Exchange in 1899 reinforced Toronto as both North America's mining capital and centre of stock market fraud. This fraud, according to Deneault and Sacher, involves selling and re-buying one's own shares leading to a build-up of artificial interest in a particular stock. As a result of these fraudulent practices and the fact that they are permitted, there is currently "a dizzying fifty to one" ratio of speculative transactions to those that are based on the real economy. This status of "ultra-permissiveness" was confirmed by the government in the official public statement entitled *Building the Canadian Advantage*, a document that failed to impose human rights obligations on Canada-based mining companies.

Additionally, the failure of Bill C-300 (which was intended to provide a stricter ethical requirement for extractive companies) in the House of Commons in October 2010 “confirms the shortcomings of the pseudo-regulatory mechanism known as good governance, adopted in recent years by those authorized to speak in the name of ‘civil society’ in formal exchanges with industry and public authorities.”

The chapter entitled “The Argument” in particular provides a compelling account of why Canada has remained a tax haven for mining companies, citing many examples and cases to buttress the argument. Also, the authors provide evidence from other countries where similar permissiveness in terms of relaxed tax regulation, unpaid royalties, and corporate tax evasion has resulted in less benefit accruing to national governments. In some cases, such as Columbia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Guinea, and Zambia, Canada has been actively involved in drafting favourable mining legislation, which makes it impossible to gain any developmental advantage from tax revenues. This dynamic also means that the power Canadian mining companies have in these countries has the prospect of reaching notorious proportions. What’s more, the potential for the general public, activists, and academics to speak about these issues is restrained by SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation).

Having said that, the 11-page conclusion is, perhaps, the only shortfall of the book. While the authors do remarkable work in revealing what needs to be addressed, they fail to emphasize exactly what can be done. To be sure, they do call for

“interdisciplinarity” and a coordination of efforts among all Canadians, as well as more openness in politics. Nonetheless, to bolster their persuasive and well-documented account, one would expect the authors to have gone beyond these general calls to make some clear and solid recommendations.

Overall, one can argue that the book is a critical easy-read for anyone interested in knowing how Toronto (and in fact, Ottawa) is allowing the image of Canada to further tarnish by permitting notorious mining companies to list on its stock exchange. Books such as Ives Engler’s *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* (2009) and Todd Gordon’s *Imperialist Canada* (2010) do speak to the notion of Canada as a quintessential imperialist in many forms—and, thus, not necessarily doing any good abroad through its foreign policy. Beyond what Canadian companies are doing abroad, Deneault and Sacher provide a case study to show Canada’s imperialist character by putting into context the ongoing exploitation of natural resources in the Northwest Territories and the subsequent dispossession of Aboriginal peoples in Quebec—a province that has won awards for offering a “best practice” for the extractive industry. This insight solidifies their overall argument that Canada is indeed a legal haven for mining companies. Besides their elevated style of writing, the authors do well to explain key mining and financial terms for an audience that may not be exposed to such language. It is therefore a book that will appeal both to intellectuals of different disciplines and to the general public. After reading this book, you will think twice before accepting notions of Canada being a “moral” country that genuinely cares about the lives of people

abroad. This remarkable piece is indeed a clarion call on the Canadian Harper government to stop partnering with these private companies without scrutinizing their practices both home and abroad.

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### The Alchemy of Creativity

*Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples*  
Edited by **DANIEL COLEMAN, ERIN GOHEEN GLANVILLE, WAFAA HASAN & AGNES KRAMER-HAMSTRA**

U of Alberta P, 2012 \$34.95

Reviewed by **AUBREY HANSON**

*Countering Displacements* is an inspired new book from the University of Alberta Press that spans a wide range of particular cultural and political intersections. The common thread tying together this collection of resonant essays is demonstrations of creativity and resilience in Indigenous and refugee-ed peoples' resistance to displacement. The book succeeds in opening up challenging dialogue about issues of colonization, migration, territory, agency, citizenship, domination, resistance, and art. Avoiding reductive attempts at oversimplification or homogenization, *Countering Displacements* brings

together disparate voices and incites readers to respond critically to these global protests against multiple forms of displacement. Further, this text testifies to the power of cultural expression and the enduring strength of Indigenous and refugee-ed peoples.

This collection emerges out of a conference entitled "Displacements: Borders, Mobility, Statelessness" held at McMaster University in March of 2008. The goals of the conference organizers were to "understand not only the legal and the political, but, more broadly, the *cultural* causes, effects, and possibilities of displacement, and, by this means, to encourage an interdisciplinary dialogue that might bridge the gap between Indigenous and refugee studies." These goals in turn helped to shape the three main intentions of the book, which are

- 1) to generate the dialogue between Indigenous and refugee displacements mentioned above;
- 2) to provide an arena where suppressed or contested narratives of displacements could be re-narrated and therefore "witnessed" in a public forum; and
- 3) to highlight the agency and creativity of displaced people who are often represented as objects rather than subjects of their experience.

These directions are well represented by the contributing authors, and all three are significant to *Countering Displacements'* contribution to existing discourses.

The bringing together of refugee and Indigenous perspectives in this collection makes it somewhat unique. The editors state that this "dialogue," together with the text's "cultural studies focus on creativity and agency," provides a distinctive

contribution to “the conversation on displacement.” One significant related volume is *Narratives of Citizenship: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples Unsettle the Nation-State* (Aloys, Van Styvendale, and McCarroll). This latter text also addresses perspectives on culture and resistance by Indigenous and diasporic peoples, and on re-imagining constructs of citizenship and the nation-state through cultural expression, but does not focus specifically on displacement or on refugee experiences. Broadly speaking, *Countering Displacements* participates in discourses on refugees, Indigenous peoples, de/colonization, displacement, globalization, protest, activism, arts, culture, gender, and identity.

In addition to its unique assemblage of refugee and Indigenous voices, the most exciting aspect of this book is its envisioning of resistance through creativity. Authors include forms of resistance and affirmation ranging from creative works to policy-making to outright protest. The diversity of these forms of resistance does not seem unfocused; on the contrary, by bringing together this varied set of case studies and analyses, the authors collectively open up a sense of possibility for displaced peoples to collaborate, envision, and resist together. The authors are at times critical of governments or regimes imposing displacement and violence upon peoples across the globe, but the book maintains a hopeful tone. The text’s editors state that “the chapters in this volume are not just about displacement but about *countering* displacement, insofar as they emphasize the ways in which those who have been displaced remain active, potently political, and remarkably resilient, even when they have very little access to official power.” That is, these

portrayals of creativity and resilience have the intention and effect of highlighting agency and empowerment, even in distressing circumstances.

The circumstances and peoples discussed in this volume are as diverse as their forms of resistance. Jon Gordon’s chapter examines multiple displacements brought about by the oil sands in Alberta, “of land, labour, and prior communities,” and articulates a need to listen for “counter narratives.” He conducts this examination with the concept of “lyric” thinking and through two texts by Rudy Wiebe, “The Angel of the Tar Sands” and *Far as the Eye Can See: A Play*. Jean McDonald’s chapter argues that understandings of “migrant illegality” are important to studies of citizenship, and looks at “the intertwined processes of exclusion and inclusion” in regimes of citizenship. She examines these issues in relation to Toronto’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and “Sanctuary City” campaigns, which advocate service provision for non-citizens, as well as the work of No One Is Illegal-Toronto. She importantly contends that such movements may “develop new modes of belonging” that challenge “the sovereign power of the nation-state.” Mazen Masri’s chapter focuses on the barrier that divides Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank, on the “modes of displacement” caused by this wall, and on the various forms of resistance it has provoked. He contends that the wall “represents the ugly face of occupation, colonialism, and apartheid” and foregrounds the ongoing resistance of Palestinian populations. Catherine Graham’s chapter also focuses on Palestinian perspectives, but through a close analysis of a theatrical piece created collaboratively by Belgian and Palestinian artists for a European audience. She explores how the play,

entitled *Les Murs Tombent, Les Mots Restent*, can open up “new ways of thinking about the problem of creating public spaces where the stories of displaced and marginalized groups can be heard.” She points out possibilities for disrupting “our patterns of information gathering and our habits of focus” that enable these new ways of thinking.

The chapter by Pavithra Narayanan looks at the State of Manipur in the North-East of India, and on local populations’ resistance against repressive, militarized Indian nationalism, which has led to conflict and violence for Manipuris. The resistance efforts of women, namely the Meira Paibis, are her primary focus; she highlights actions such as nightly neighbourhood patrols, a protest in which “twelve Meira Paibis stripped naked in front of the gates of the Assam Rifles Battalion” to protest sexual violence, and the memorializing of a young woman who died while in military custody. Subhasri Ghosh’s chapter concentrates on resistance deployed by “forced migrants from East Bengal” in West Bengal faced with “inadequate state provisions for rebuilding their lives,” including “forcible seizure” of land through the establishment of “squatter settlements.” Resistance here, she argues, enables people to “contest and define” government-set “ethnic, religious, material, and class borders” and to insist upon human and land rights. Agnes Kramer-Hamstra’s chapter engages with the work of Mohawk filmmaker Shelley Niro and the ways in which “Niro’s eye counters displacement’s reductive gaze.” Kramer-Hamstra argues that Niro’s films, namely *It Starts With a Whisper* and *Suite: Indian*, oppose the “fixed images” in media that “obscure First Nations’ histories, and cultural traditions and values.” The

collection’s final chapter by Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed foregrounds “women refugees’ creativity as expressions of resilience.” She uses three research projects studying women recovering from experiences of forced migration and violence to show how “refugee creativity” contributes to “efforts towards eradicating trauma and forced displacement.” These eight divergent essays together comprise a collection that is genuinely evocative and courageous.

In concluding, I will leave you with an inspirational statement, alluded to in my title, from Hajdukowski-Ahmed’s writing. She says, “creativity is an alchemy that can transform pain into art, testimony, and hope.” One after another, the chapters in *Countering Displacements* work to describe this alchemy, and to attest to the strength of those who practice it within their political and cultural struggles.

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***The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude* by  
ANDREW NIKIFORUK**

Greystone Books, 2012 \$29.95

Reviewed by **PAMELA BANTING**

In a 2011 issue of the *PMLA*, Patricia Yaeger asks whether “instead of divvying up literary works into hundred-year intervals (or elastic variants like the long eighteenth or twentieth century) or categories harnessing the history of ideas (Romanticism, Enlightenment), what happens if we sort texts according to the energy sources that made them possible?” A series of short essays by various period specialists follow hers, each of which gestures toward what such a dramatic reorganization of the discipline of English literary studies might look like.

Andrew Nikiforuk’s important new social and cultural history of oil, *The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude*, stands to serve as an indispensable guide to such a re-imagining of the discipline of literary studies. In it he teases out a skein of historical and contemporary connections between energy production and human and other-than-human physical labour. Award-winning environmental journalist Nikiforuk—whom many ALECC members will know from his powerful plenary address about pine beetles at the 2012 ALECC Conference in Kelowna—has published several books and countless journalistic articles about oil and gas issues, as well as others on education, economics and the inevitable return of pandemics. *The Energy of Slaves* follows *Saboteurs: Wiebo Ludwig’s War Against Oil* and *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil*

and *the Future of a Continent* in his trilogy of books on oil and gas.

*Saboteurs* won the Governor-General’s Award for Nonfiction and *Tar Sands* won the City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Book Prize and the Rachel Carson Environment Book Award. While *Saboteurs* examines the controversial resistance of Wiebo Ludwig against the incursions of oil and gas companies into his region, and *Tar Sands* is a detailed investigation of Alberta-based bitumen extraction, this third volume of the trilogy examines energy, particularly oil, within the context of European and North American history and ideologies.

As Nikiforuk demonstrates, energy is the great blindspot in Western civilization, the taken-for-granted, the genie in the bottle, the invisible “tiger in the tank.” It is the invisible agent that has retained the mystery of its powers. The book opens with a lyrical prologue about the beginnings of Western civilization in ancient Greece, reminding the reader of the energy profligacy of the old gods, flinging thunderbolts out of the blue, directing sunlight and raising the seas: “the Greek gods could fly through the air, change the course of rivers, place constellations in the sky, and even cloak themselves with invisibility,” Nikiforuk writes. It is this cloak of often harmful invisibility that Nikiforuk sets out to render visible. While the Greek gods were not the only ones capable of altering the weather, geography, and the fates of mortals, this evocation of the gods accords with Yaeger’s suggestion that we examine the powers and investments of energy throughout our cultural history.

From the Greeks, Nikiforuk fans out through



Roman civilization, powered by the human muscle of slaves obtained through incessant warring, and up to the present. Throughout the book, the reader is haunted by the vacillation within the phrase as to what extent “the energy of slaves” refers to the forces exerted through human and other animals’ muscle, steam, whale oil, coal, and rock oil and to what extent oil enslaves even those of us who believe ourselves to be its masters, controllers, and privileged users. Although many North Americans and Europeans live in a style not unlike that of ancient pharaohs (the average North American employs the equivalent of about 89 invisible slaves), we are only recently beginning to wonder whether we might be sacrificing our basic security, democracy, and hard-won liberties to it. Am I consumer or the consumed? Sheik or slave? Do I dare to eat a well-travelled peach? Should I buy that jet-propelled pineapple? Or that new laptop computer, impregnated as it is with about 240 kilograms of the oil it takes to make it? Oil has become the transcendental signifier, and increasingly we have to answer to its dictates and those of its high priests and minions.

Oil is routinely metaphorized as the “lifeblood” of our economy and as a substance to which collectively we are “addicted.” In Alberta, where I live, it has infiltrated our everyday speech: it constrains and even curtails some conversations. Colloquial criticism of even its worst effects is typically prefaced by a declaration that goes something like this: “Now I’m not opposed to the oil industry, but...”. Vernacular speech acts have acquired a preface. A river of oil runs through our currency, more and more of our institutions, and our eroding structures of democratic governance. Even

though some of its effects can be, at times, ridiculous and even absurd, energy, like the antique gods, demands obeisance. As Nikiforuk details, petro-states and petro-kingdoms demand strict fealty, and yet these oft-heard mumbles of allegiance and loyalty seem not to result in feelings of belonging, collectivity, or community but in increasing social atomization.

The influence of oil is not only discursive, however. Oil also undoes metaphoricity. Just as we used to extract fat and oil from animal bodies (whales, fish, bears, ducks, and many others) oil now runs through our own veins, metaphorically but literally, too. In some areas where the land has been subjected to horizontal hydraulic fracturing, so much methane pours out of some people’s faucets that their drinking water is literally flammable. We now all have a body-burden of chemicals associated with plastics and other petroleum by-products. For the aboriginal people who live downstream and downwind of the tar sands, bitumen and the substances used in its production flow through the water they drink, cook with, and bathe in, and the air they breathe. We think oil and gas give us power and agency, but as philosopher Jane Bennett has elaborated, things also have their own agency and effects.

*The Energy of Slaves*—a fascinating, impeccably documented, highly readable history of oil in thirteen chapters and a prologue—ranges across history, economics, politics, colonialism, and science and is a *tour de force* analysis of Western civilization’s energy investments. In a few places in the book, I felt an initial twinge of skepticism as to claims about the overwhelming magnitude of the

problems in which we are implicated. Invariably, however, a few pages later I would realize that those twinges were not caused by hyperbole in the writing so much as by my North American energy-slave owning consciousness rebelling and then expanding. This is a book to read, re-read, annotate, absorb, quote, and share. Nikiforuk's evocation, if not invocation, of the gods in the prologue sets the stage for the epic deconstruction of Western myths, ideologies, history, and practices that follows. He picks up what Ezra Pound called "the tale of the tribe" at the point where, after fighting inane wars, wasting resources, and abandoning his family for a period of ten years, Odysseus comes home and is faced with the responsibilities of living in place. *The Energy of Slaves* lays the ground for the enormous and pressing project of ethical reconciliation with the chthonic powers of the earth and with one another.

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***The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and The Cultures of Longing* by RACHEL POLIQUIN**

Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012 US\$29.95

Reviewed by **DAVID BROWNSTEIN**

What does it mean for an animal to be "dead but not gone?" Interdisciplinary curator Rachel Poliquin contemplates this and other related questions in her creative, thoughtful, and accessible

book *The Breathless Zoo*. She examines the art and science of taxidermy in its many forms, as practised in Western Europe and North America from the sixteenth century to the present. All genres of taxidermy, Poliquin argues, share a similar goal. "Taxidermy wants to stop time. To keep life. To cherish what is no longer as if it were immortally whole." As dead and mounted fauna, taxidermy are thoroughly cultural objects, yet simultaneously pieces of nature.

Poliquin roots her understanding of divergent taxidermic practices in American poet and literary critic Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Longing, Poliquin interprets, works as a kind of ache connecting the stories that we tell ourselves and the objects that we use as storytellers. Taking her cue from Stewart, Poliquin argues that all taxidermy is deeply marked by human longing. "Far more than just death and destruction, taxidermy always exposes the desires and day-dreams surrounding human relationships with and within the natural world." Taxidermied mounts are never just cultural objects, Poliquin asserts, "but are rather provocative animal-things imbued with both the longing to capture animal life immortally, and the longing to see the living animal again."

While the unifying theme of longing underlies the entire book, it is not a rigorously applied thematic device. Rather, the idea is presented as a frame at the beginning, then loosely interwoven throughout. Poliquin identifies seven longings that structure the book into rough thematic and chronological chapters of varying strength. Each imperative is presented as a motivation to preserve

deceased animals, and despite these practices sharing the same broad universal quality of longing, each manifests in different ways with cultural and temporal specificities. The longings explored are: wonder, beauty, spectacle, order, narrative, allegory, and remembrance. While the seven chapters are presented in an egalitarian manner, the book can be described as having two parts. The first four chapters examine taxidermy in the aid of science. The last three chapters examine more popular genres of taxidermy. All chapters are placed in a general historical context, before individual mounts/artworks, collections or collector biographies, and are used as case studies for critical analysis.

In the first chapter, “Wonder,” Poliquin examines the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European practice of collecting rarities for *Wunderkammer*, such as artworks, religious relics, antiquities and natural history specimens. The materiality of such collections, she asserts, provoked creative thought, and with wonder came the desire to possess and revisit. Early preservation techniques were not capable of arresting decay in specimens, the result being that early modern natural history collections were composed of small bits and pieces that resisted decomposition. Early taxidermists expanded on the techniques of tanners, upholsterers and others, bolstered by astringent barks, salts, and spices used in mummification. Their attempts at preservation allowed for intimacies between the curious, and radically unknown creatures, to expose the startling diversity of the natural world.

In contrast to the previous century’s delight in strangeness, the early decades of the eighteenth century exhibited the refinement of taste in an era

when scientific inquiry was not distinct from aesthetic appreciation. In chapter two, “Beauty,” Poliquin argues that birds picturesquely arranged on branches became central showpieces. Basic taxidermy challenges became how to prevent insects and rot from destroying collections, and better techniques for capturing the lively beauty and charisma of animals. Chapter three, “Spectacle,” describes how in the last decades of the nineteenth century, internal sculpture was a new method of preparing large animal mounts. No longer seeking mere preservation, this bolder form of taxidermy blurred the boundary between reality and representation. The more skill a taxidermist possessed, the more able they were to impose an artistic vision on the animal. Exemplars of this category included exciting and violent scenes of charismatic animal combat between predator and prey. In educational contexts, these same techniques gave rise to the placid habitat diorama, employed to tell stories linking species and ecological loss. In chapter four, “Order,” the last of her “science” chapters, Poliquin introduces us to nineteenth- and twentieth-century techniques and chemicals for preserving animals, which enabled the creation and stabilization of large research collections. She contends that earlier displays of beauty, rarity, and violence gave way to systematic order and species representativeness, which highlighted the workings of the expert mind.

The more popular genres of taxidermy fulfilled their own set of functions. These include chapter five, “Narrative,” on the hunting trophy, which Poliquin proposes is valued by the hunter because it tells a story about himself and his place in

nature. Once parted from their hunter-creators, trophies have been more recently reclaimed by a range of contemporary artists and urban hipsters disenchanted with sameness and reproduction. Poliquin understands their desires for taxidermy as expressions of the ultimate antimodern object. In chapter six, "Allegory," Poliquin introduces us to the grotesques, a form that arose in the nineteenth century that were anthropomorphic taxidermied fables. In textual or oral form, she asserts, animal stories told much about the human experience, however when realized in material form, taxidermied bunnies, squirrels and kittens lost their allegorical power. The meta-narrative becomes one of human domination of nature. In the last longing explored in the book, chapter seven's "Remembrance," Poliquin contemplates emotional catastrophe, sadness and the perpetual pet. Here, death relics become whatever we need them to be, the ultimate proof of ownership.

The book brings together material from a very wide range of sources, meaning that *The Breathless Zoo* will appeal to those across the visual arts, or scholars of eco-criticism, art history, cultural theory, animal studies, and historians of science. Poliquin's prose is lyrical, though occasionally bordering on the self-indulgent. For instance, the author has a militant preference for the word "beast" over "animal," but if this is for a particular reason it is never explained. Readers with affection for the words *besotted*, *ravishing*, *promiscuous*, *voluptuous*, and *delicious*, will enjoy Poliquin's style. Her prose is supported by many colour figures, both photographs and artworks, and a very attractive book design.

*The Breathless Zoo* is part of the Animalibus

series, which claims to "eschew disciplinary-specific jargon to serve a wide range of audiences." In adopting this approach, Penn State Press has attempted to tap into the popular as well as academic markets. The book's mention in the 2012 *New York Times*' roundup of holiday coffee table books suggests it has met its goal on the first count. As for the academic audience, the lack of discipline specific terms, and at times the associated concepts, may be a source of frustration. Similarly, the interdisciplinary nature of the book may leave the specialized reader dissatisfied with the modest number of citations that pertain to his/her respective field, amongst a pot-pourri of sources that tread lightly in all directions. Indeed, due to the books' generality, Poliquin has not situated herself firmly within several highly relevant academic conversations. Her literary backdrop is fine to inspire her seven categories of longing, but her subject is object-bodies, not words, which means that art history, curatorial studies, and discourse in intersubjectivity could have been more profitably invoked. Further, Poliquin has comparatively few accounts of period perceptions. Instead, her own reactions to taxidermied mounts have a tendency to subsume any period specificity under a universalizing perspective of longing. This highly subjective approach may alienate historians looking for a classical method of contextualization. These observations aside, aiming for the middle, I can certainly see individual chapters of this book assigned as undergraduate course readings, if not the whole.

*The Breathless Zoo* comes as part of a recent surge of interest in taxidermy, by both journalists and scholars, including Milgrom's 2011 *Still Life: Adventures in Taxidermy*, and Madden's 2011 *The*

*Authentic Animal: Inside the Odd and Obsessive World of Taxidermy.* Poliquin's contribution is an historically situated reading of taxidermied animals, within the discourse of longing, surfacing the human relation to the taxidermied object. As with any project, strengths are simultaneously weaknesses, so readers open to interdisciplinary inquiry will find much here to admire.

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***Catalysts: Confrontations With the Muse*** by

**CATHERINE OWEN**

Wolsak & Wynn, 2012 \$15.95

Reviewed by **CHRISTINE LOWTHER**

Catherine Owen's preoccupations are "the connection between music and poetry, the dearth of in-depth criticism in most Canadian journals, the shifting face of regional and environmental writings in this country and the richness of multimedia collaboration." In her 2008 piece "Deep Time & Children's Literature" she eloquently strikes a familiar chord:

A yearning still grips me for those days of plunging into books at a psychic depth I can scarcely imagine now, as I strain to develop a reading schedule that isn't striated with thoughts of chores that I should be

doing, voices that guilt me about things I haven't yet accomplished, or even cold and interpretive stances that rear up over the book and dismantle its joys.

The exploration ends with a poignant tribute to her parents, "who did not annihilate my reading practices by cramming my hours with lessons, goals, duties or resentment", who, along with the many books *she* chose to read for hours on end as a child, gave her "courage" and assured "that I would be received, as I was, in the world."

In Owen's 1999 "Motes on Poetry" she offers answers to the question I'm always asking: why more people — including poets — don't read poetry. This last section is one of my favourites to quote. "Serious poets are scoffed at. ... Reduced to irrelevant jesters ... the poet who wishes to keep a song going today must be brutally self-reliant, tough and yet tender, both permeable and steel."

Owen's 2008 piece, "A Childhood Map," describes in detail the many unique characters, human and canine, who shared the poet's childhood neighbourhood. In 2011's "The Muse: A Teasing Out," those with writers' block can only hope for such a creative source:

the anxiety of subject matter dissolves in this incessant surge of material. A wave of producing that can feel like possession, both exhilarating and disruptive; can feel, at the time, as if it will be endless, a constantly renewable trove; can feel freeing and suffocating in equal measures, a delirium that restrains self-criticism, necessarily, dangerously; can feel like joy. Her own muses have been many and varied,

including metal music; she writes and plays in several hair-whip-inspired, neck-straining bands.

“Trobairitzes in the Pit: Reinscribing Conventions in Medieval and Metal Culture” illustrates how, in both troubadour culture and heavy metal, women as active participants have been undervalued. This comparison is followed by a travelogue: a lonely and sometimes danger-filled pilgrimage hunting for troubadour clues through Europe. Anything for the muse.

Muses are not always human, and when they are, they can be unheroic, such as the memory of a junkie boyfriend — “wholly unfathomable how over a hundred poems emerged from a man who spat in my face the last time I saw him.”

Having a muse seemed to me ...  
overwhelmingly possessing and  
being possessed. It was wholly  
undomesticated, unpredictable, wily.  
It threw me into torments and left  
me hating, seething. It threw me  
into passions and sent me into a  
state where I could barely breathe I  
was so overcome with arousal and  
ineffability. ... I had to receive or be  
struck dumb, be annulled as an  
artist.

“Circuitry: Poetry as an Energy Field” (2010) is a welcome interpretation of a poem as a way of containing energy on the page, like “clutching a squirming animal”. Owen dives fearlessly into the rift between page poets and spoken word poets, critiquing both, and honouring the muse in both. She next examines poetry and healing, Joe Rosenblatt, and collaboration with visual artist Sydney Lancaster. I loved it all. A lambasting of a recent BC poetry

anthology is followed by a meditation on ice and “ice-poesis”. The book ends with 2009’s “Dark Ecologies”, first published in *Eco Poetry: Women Poets on the Environment*. It is difficult not to extensively quote her wisdom on the muse.

Moreover, does anyone else have the gall to question some of this country’s highest-haired nature poets, at the same time offering hard-hitting alternatives?

Catherine Owen joins the latter in keeping us “awake, on edge, unsettled and spurred on to a reassessment of our planetary acts.”

**CHRISTINE LOWTHER** is the author of *Half-Blood Poems*, *My Nature*, *New Power*, co-editor and co-author of *Writing the West Coast: In Love with Place* and *Living Artfully: Reflections from the Far West Coast*.

***Digging the City: An Urban Agriculture Manifesto***  
by **RHONA MCADAMS**

Rocky Mountain Books, 2012, \$16.95

Reviewed by **RANDY LEE CUTLER**

**A**s with most good writing on food issues and food security, Rhona McAdams's has an embodied approach to her subject. *Digging the City: An Urban Agriculture Manifesto* begins with a short personal history that locates the author in relationship to her writing practice, the food system that she had taken for granted, and a transformational journey to northern Italy. There she embarked on a master’s degree in food culture and



communication at the University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNISIG). This institution is the education arm of Slow Food, an international movement founded by Carlo Petrini in 1986. One of the most significant things she learned was the consistency of viewpoints across a range of disciplines. Whether examined through the lens of historians, geographers, economists, and farmers, among others, regulation and corporate interests have eroded food traditions. The effect of shifts in industrialization and the increasing dominance of genetically modified crops combined with a world fuelled by cheap oil and diminishing resources has affected the health of humans and animals large and small. As she notes near the end of her first chapter, “the problems were systematic, interlocking and terminal.”

What follows is not just a compelling diagnosis of the problem but an extended exploration of alternative models for growing and distributing food within a local and communitarian context. McAdams shares with her reader firsthand experiences of a city dweller coming to terms with urban agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The majority of us have little idea of the ecological consequences of our food choices, “either for the people who grow food now or the future generations who must live on the land we leave them.” The fact that the actual cost of food is hidden from consumers who shop by price point is a challenging hurdle but can be overcome through innovative and practical strategies.

The manifesto in the title is taken up not only in the sense of urgency around food security but also the importance of challenging the status quo from activist, multipronged, and community-oriented approaches to greater agency around growing,

sharing, and consuming good quality food. McAdams draws from her own experience living in Victoria and how she came to attend neighborhood meetings with a community of food lovers. Together they eventually formed the Gorge Tillicum Urban Farmers (GTUF), an inspiring model for personal (and communal) urban agriculture. Through numerous examples, readers are encouraged to secure their own access to an adequate food supply. This securing can be experienced in a variety of ways, from community meetings and sharing food related concerns to community gardens, lawn or backyard farming, community-supported agriculture schemes (CSA), farmer’s markets, school gardens, community education in planting, growing and preserving foods, and happily the list goes on. An important point here is that we need to consider shifting our reliance on large-scale food production and government policies that lag behind immediate needs.

As a manifesto, *Digging the City* celebrates alternate models that connect us to each other and the knowledge that abounds locally. It offers inspiring examples such as Cuba’s organopónicos or organic urban gardens, which has benefited from small-scale organic methods of growing using land within and outside cities. In addition to food security (the resilience to future disruption or the unavailability of critical food supply due to various risk factors including droughts, shipping disruptions, fuel shortages, economic instability, wars, etc.), attention is paid to food safety, which has been manifest with cases of the Norwalk virus, salmonella, E. coli, and Listeria. Canada is at risk with its centralized food systems where food is produced in large quantities. A meaningful response to corporate

food production is the increasing popularity of classes in topics like bread-making, cheese-making, fermented foods, and home canning. These small-scale events bring people together as a means of sharing knowledge and engaging community networks. I appreciate McAdams's strong stance on the out-of-control corporatization of food when she states: "I think that we, as global citizens, need to question whether we really have the right to purchase whatever we want just because we are in the privileged position of being able to pay for it."

For a slim book, *Digging the City* packs a punch, taking up fascinating discussions of the economic and environmental implications of urban agriculture, which makes the book a solid introduction to the subject. McAdams argues cogently not simply about the problems but more optimistically for practical solutions that reside in growing communities through diversification and localization. Whether it will reach a broad readership is unclear, but if the uninitiated do discover this manifesto, they will learn that personal choice and agency offer some hope for the future. "Vote with your fork, your pen, your shovel and your consumer dollar..."

**RANDY LEE CUTLER** is an associate professor at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Her practice weaves through creative and critical writing, performance art, experimental media, and pedagogy exploring the aesthetics of affect, sustenance, and embodiment.

***Edge Effects* by JAN CONN**

Brick Books, 2012 \$19.00

Reviewed by **EDIE STEINER**

In *Edge Effects*, her eighth collection of poetry, Jan Conn is a time-travelling, peripatetic sojourner excavating multiple hybrid landscapes swathed in the noxious social and political debris that hovers over all tourist sites. We follow her from Our Lady of Guadalupe's gaze, Mexican idol, to the migrants who perish in leaving her maternal spell as they struggle to enter into the promised land north of a perilous border crossing. On another continent, a homeless man in Capetown's District Six, the epicentre of apartheid, struggles to grasp at the shreds of his residual memories.

In these sites are images refulgent with a toxic glare, "like Bergman on acid". What would this look like, the oneiric vision of a filmmaker renowned for bleak narratives, tinted in psychedelic hues? Visitations by an array of artists and authors punctuate and penetrate the verses. Many of them are no longer among the living and their spirits or their works saturate these poems, as do others still among us, who continue to produce the abiding and transforming cultural artifacts influencing Conn's vision. Among the dead are Diego (Rivera?), the Spanish painter Valázquez, the Russian filmmaker Eisenstein, the poets Rilke and Ted Hughes, the Bröntes, singer Josephine Baker, Tolstoy, modernist artist Paul Klee, Van Gogh, Andy Warhol, and Marilyn Monroe.

This is not Monroe's first appearance in

Conn's poetry. In her 2000 collection, *Beauties on Mad River*, Monroe appears as an iconic representation of the idealized female body caught midstream in full bloom, all plush flesh, hurtling towards morbidity. By the time she meets Andy Warhol in *Edge Effects* she is all artifice, from her teeth to her aura to her platinum hair – like Andy's wig – “woven entirely of dead people's hair” – to her “phony mole-near-the-lip-thing”.

“She” is a recurring character, at times an autobiographical actor among other female archetypes. Some are spectral women like Monroe, victims of a false culture. In “Close to Ghosts”: “With a tape measure, the supermodel loiters in a graveyard / A toxic terrain where / Pumpkins glow in the field like planets.” In another poem, “Tomorrow's Bright White Light,” “the stripper goes on an outing.” We meet this character in a forested place where her flesh is “now a queer, cold tone / of green, as though reflecting conifers / and spirits commingled.”

In this grim image, she is a character like so many other ‘disappeared’ women, just another media statistic, an easily forgotten mystery, abandoned to a place where “She'll die alone, / the residue of a photograph.”

The self is omnipresent in the text, dipping between layers of consciousness, as thin and translucent as “parchment”, threaded in stratum of occult phenomena and ecological danger, where personal history collides with political anxiety. In “Disturbance in the Key of B” Conn asks “Where are the sources of the self? I need to find mine / and give them a good shaking.”

In the poem “Extreme Condition”, the everyday is a place that contracts and expands from

the microscopic, “where lead and zinc jingle percussively”, to the macrosphere where the “astrobiologist” leaps from her “glossy, refurbished brochure kitchen” into far-flung worlds corralled by language: “This planet a mere lexicon of the one left behind.”

Even the infinity of space is enclosed as a finite, encapsulated frontier, a lead-soaked underworld where “simian” escorts plunge to a dodgy descent. But it is human dominance in charge here: “*survival of the* –”

Many of the poems refer to or are inspired by specific paintings, films, encounters with artworks in museums and art galleries, and in dreams. Foreboding colours permeate descriptions: “enigmatic orange”, a river that is “errant blue”, “the hazards of nightblack”, and: “The velveteen texture of the golf greens / depends on enough herbicides and fertilizer / to poison our drinking water forever.”

We know Conn as a scientist, a biologist, an ecosopher who weaves the minutiae of scientific observation and the expertise of a rational, objective eye, the fictional assignments of our mediated daily lives with ineffable encounters in human and non-human places, and with an infusion of feminist logic and linguistic persuasion.

In “The Present is Elusive” Conn writes “I prefer to live in the cracks of events.” And so she does, inhabiting the elastic, rhizomic spaces between science, art, social scrutiny, and personal history, soaked in a longing for “the ravine of childhood”. Family members arise here and there: a deceased father who appears in several poems, sometimes missed, sometimes admonished, and a brother who “sings off-key, startling birds”.

This is thick, complex work, alive with art and magic, spiked with intricate structures of ecological and epistemic context, in mesh with vibrant lived experience. With each return reading, I discover another shade of meaning, an alternative value to uncover, a new detail to research. The emotional topography of the text is infused with grief, with self-effacing irony, and humour.

**EDIE STEINER** is a PhD. Candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Her research and creative practice as an independent filmmaker and visual artist explores themes of place, memory, and landscape.

***The Wealth of Nature: Economics as if Survival Mattered* by JOHN MICHAEL GREER**

New Society Publishers, 2011 \$18.95

Reviewed by **GABRIELLE ZEZULKA-MAILLOUX**

In a time of market uncertainties and constant economic crises, John Michael Greer's *The Wealth of Nature* provides calm assurance that all that is needed to remedy our global situation is a revolution in our worldview, on par with that proposed by Copernicus. Yes, it seems just a little dramatic, but also completely logical, once the facts are evaluated. Greer's central analogy is that just as Ptolemy's view of the world was based on flawed assumptions, so too are the economic systems and theories based on Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Greer casts Ernst Friedrich Schumacher in

the role of Copernicus, and uses his book *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered*, to deconstruct and analyze our contemporary economic systems. Greer's self-proclaimed goal in this book is to offer potential solutions to the crises driven by the failure of modern economics, and he picks some large bones with economists, the oil industry, energy analysts, and environmentalists along the way.

Greer is unapologetic about his lack of professional economic training—he argues convincingly that those who have such an education have no more certainty on the subject than he does—and it is perhaps this position that allows him to analyze economic theory so creatively. Abounding with metaphors and similes, this book is at once easy to follow and quite thorough and complex in its critiques. At times, the analogies are heavy-handed, and a cynical reader may find herself poking holes in them, but their value in simplifying complex economic dynamics cannot be overstated. As Greer notes in his introduction, the goal of his book is not to explain economic theory to those who are familiar with its catch-phrases, but, rather to give rise to discussions amongst “the audience that has the final say in matters of public policy: the public itself.”

Fundamental to the economic revolution Greer calls for is an understanding of “The Three Economies.” Following Schumacher's theory that natural resources are the “primary goods in any economy, and those produced by human labor are secondary goods,” Greer suggests that the services and goods provided by nature are our “primary economy,” and human processes used to transform those services and goods into useful resources are the “secondary economy.” “Tertiary economy,” has no

direct relationship with the latter economies, but instead is “the circulation of monetary goods and financial services that, in theory, fosters the distribution of the products of the primary and secondary economies.” Greer makes a strong case that modern monetary systems obscure the realities in the primary and secondary economies, and that therefore they need a reality check, or a total overhaul.

Greer takes the imminent oil-energy-crisis as inevitable and as the likely future catalyst for a massive failure of economic systems. The sale and purchase of fossil fuels has driven the economy, and created an artificial bubble that is about to burst. As he argues, there is no logical reason to spend government resources supporting an economic system that is doomed because it does not recognize the limited quantities of natural resources. Further to this point, he deconstructs the concept of productivity, noting that culturally we conflate “productivity” with “*labour* productivity,” meaning “output per worker hour.” Commonly, human labour has been seen “as the main limitation to economic growth,” and “anything that decreases the amount of labor [is seen] as an economic gain.” In an age where several countries are defaulting on their debts, and unemployment is reaching extraordinarily high levels, Greer’s point that *labour* productivity is economically counter-productive (from the holistic perspective rather than the individual employer’s perspective), is well-taken.

So what should replace these untenable economic systems? As energy is that which enables our current, flawed economic system to operate, energy reform is key to our future survival. We

should be using oil and gas, concentrated energy forms, only where absolutely necessary, and should not expect or demand that renewable, diffuse energy be able to run the kind of technology that was built with concentrated energy—coal or other fossil fuels—in mind. Sunlight is not likely to be the most efficient energy source to power a car, but Greer cites examples of how it can quite handily cook a pot roast or heat a household if directed with appropriate technology.

Greer softens the imminent threat of systems collapse that will accompany global peak oil by suggesting that “we face a shortage of energy concentration rather than energy quantity.” We will never run out of sunlight. Greer points a few barbs at environmentalist boosters who see green technology as a simple problem of conversion, though, for “easy talk about swapping one for the other evades the immense challenge and nearly unimaginable cost of scrapping multiple-continent-wide infrastructures geared to oil and building new ones suited to solar energy.”

Offering some practical advice to individuals wishing to be part of the change, Greer notes that some technologies do not need external infrastructure; solar hot water heaters can be installed on individual homes to directly benefit their tenants. Indeed, echoing Garrett Hardin’s lifeboat metaphor in his analysis of the *Tragedy of the Commons*, “off-grid sources of space heating, hot water, and other basic necessities are as important in a modern city, suburb, or rural area as life jackets are in a boat.” What is needed, Greer argues, is a system that maximizes the value to energy ratio, and one that manages all commons—including markets

themselves—for the benefit of society rather than in the interests of individual profiteers, so we can all safely sail into a greener future. This change will not come easily but, in Greer’s view, is inevitable as the current system collapses.

On the one hand, the book is hopeful and optimistic about the possibilities of economic reform and energy alternatives, and on the other, it seems to predict an unavoidably dire future in which the global (or at least American) population will have missed their opportunity to install the necessary infrastructure for a greener future while our flawed-and-limping-but-still-sort-of-functioning economic system still has a chance of building it.

Readers who enjoy the sense of righteousness that comes from identifying the fallacies of “the powers that be” will love this book. Those who look for creative solutions to these fallacies will be pleased. But those who are annoyed by polemic arguments and sometimes over-simplified analogies may wish to look elsewhere. Overall, this book is definitely worth the read, and couldn’t be more timely or more relevant to our global situation today.

**GABY ZEZULKA-MAILLOUX** is an environmental consultant based in Vancouver. She is involved in professional and independent research in the areas of environmental policy, socio-economic impacts of resource extraction, and sustainable cities. She has a PhD from the University of Alberta.

***Sharawadji*** by **BRIAN HENDERSON**

Brick Books, 2011 \$19.00

***Girlwood*** by **JENNIFER STILL**

Brick Books, 2011 \$19.00

Review by **GILLIAN WIGMORE**

**B**rian Henderson’s *Sharawadji* is an immersion (actually, several immersions) into worlds super-saturated with sensation and emotion. Broken into four parts, the book is a quartet of journeys, each section allowing the reader to breathe a moment before plunging into an entirely new place or way of thinking.

*Sharawadji* opens like an excursion on another planet. I read the poems in “Twelve Imaginary Landscapes” with wonder—surrounded by “figures...haloed and blown” (“The After”), creeping through ruins and a room “crammed to its ceiling of cloud with darkness in the lost city of found things, where sinks are rife with bullhead and pickerelweed” (“The Gleaner”). Each of these compact prose poems is chock-full of images both terrifying and enthralling. Read as science fiction or as ekphrastic poems translating art (as Henderson explains in the notes at the end of the book), the post-apocalyptic “smudged orange rubble fires on the horizon” (“Test”) haunted me and drew me back in for more.

The shift in the second section of the book does not jar, though its subject is far different—this journey is through death and grief, and the method of immersing the reader in detail and image (though this time in free verse) is no less sensational and equally effective. There is a sure-footedness to



Henderson's poetry that engenders trust in the reader; for him, I not only accept the following, but I love its questions and its turns:

What has become  
of then and now, now,  
if ash is an isotope of bone  
and faith of ash,  
the thorium of breath  
each atom of which  
has an unpredictable moment  
of decay?  
There is  
in the yard  
a birch  
with one remaining wing  
of yellow leaves ("Half-Lives")

Listen to the pauses, the measured words, the sounds of "ash," "is," "isotope"; then he mixes in "faith" and "thorium" and "breath" and finishes off with the repeated "ch" in "each" and "which." I love to be drawn through a poem this way, down a ladder of echoed vowels and the rhythm of consonance. The simplicity of the birch against the complexity of the question is stunning, particularly when the birch is transformed by one word: "wing"—in "wing" is hope, freedom, and life, all concepts at odds with death but so true to grief and our experience of loss. Henderson has a way of matching form and content that is utterly natural, and where the grief expressed in this section would overwhelm if not contained, he manages to parse it out so carefully we are left with grief's most beautiful, human expression.

In the third and fourth sections of *Sharawadji*, explorations of nature and time, Henderson offers ideas and images and subverts

expectations, all in a measured step. "Let the rock be rock and the lichens lichen / orange and green and grey" ("Himalaya") he says, but in another poem, "Arrowhon Anniversary," he has hummingbirds whizzing past, "turning / out the cluttered pockets of our hearts, scattering / their contents like sudden rain". That he can do both the concrete and the whimsical delights me—that he does it without apology and with such skill inspires me to read it over again.

Jennifer Still's *Girlwood* is another expedition into uncharted lands. So different from Henderson's *Sharawadji* in style, it is equally good at immersing the reader and requiring that we look again. *Girlwood* is an exploration of girlhood pared down to its barest components; in stunning, blunt description Still manages to conjure up the claustrophobia and minutiae of coming of age incredibly effectively. I was stopped short a number of times by images that might have been my own half-memories.

"Suckneck hickey," "winebottle swervy," teenage "love arrives" in "Ruby-Throated." Still has no qualms forcing us back in time to admit "we slutted a decade / or worse, we didn't" ("Whirlpool") and there are just enough holes in the narrative to make that statement work—the details that litter poems like "Flaming Sambuca" ("the lip-synched licorice / drink... pour us clear / and numb / and burning") bring it to boozy, bleary life, but the gaps for imagination in this collection are what make it vivid and living. The sinuous, short-lined free-verse poems are broken up, in *Girlwood*, by "tracks"—prose poems that serve to separate sections and that act as dense dams of expression. These poems are small thickets of sexuality and domesticity where the

tangles of girlhood are exploded and shown for the mess they are.

Still's layering of details serves to immerse the reader in girly detritus, ("baby-dolled, daisychained, herringboned, terry-clothed, mini- / skirted, halter-topped, high-waisted, seersuckered..." the list goes on in "Mother") setting the stage for her narrator's journey. But where *Girlwood* shines most is at the conjunction of human wilderness and animal wilderness. This conjunction happens most expressly in the section "Moth," where adolescence and nature collide, where the narrative mimics the chrysalis-to-wing cycle, the text balances, fragile and gorgeous, almost ready to topple or splinter, but it holds, offering us a most intimate view of life. Sensuous and immediate, poems such as "Lightning" illuminate a coming of age that makes no distinction between body and nature; the poems exist "where the storm ripens cloud / in night, where the forked tongues dowse us."

It is typical of the poems in *Girlwood* that the domestic is upended and revealed, that the motherly is desired and rejected, and that the sexual is exposed and explored, but the book itself is atypical of most Canadian poetry in that it is unflinching in its gaze. We are hauled in, image by image, item by item, to the sensation and emotion of girlhood, then hauled out, dripping and naked, the better for having skinny-dipped in the *Girlwood*.

**GILLIAN WIGMORE** has published her poetry in *Geist*, *CV2*, *filling station*, and the *Inner Harbour Review*, among others. Wigmore won the 2008 ReLit Award for her work *Soft Geography* and was also shortlisted for the Dorothy Livesay BC Book Prize. She

published in 2012 her collection *Dirt of Ages* (Harbour Publishing).

### Poems vs. Pipelines

*Poems for an Oil Free Coast* by YVONNE BLOOMER, KIM GOLDBERG, J. IRIBARNE, CHRISTINE LOWTHER, GARRY THOMAS MORSE, PATRICK M. PILARSKI, STEVE NOYES, EDEN ROBINSON, ALISON WATT

Red Tower Bookworks, 2012 \$75/\$35

Reviewed by JONATHAN GORDON

This slim chapbook, offered in a special edition of fifty numbered copies and a regular edition of fifty numbered copies, with proceeds going to the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, contains "poetry and prose from one Albertan, and eight British Columbian poets." These writers "illustrate the ecological diversity of the north and central coast of British Columbia, now under threat from plans to ship tar sands bitumen from Kitimat." The book arises as a companion to the collection *Canada's Raincoast at Risk: Art for an Oil Free Coast*, where these texts also appear. While only sixteen of the fifty pages are printed in the review copy I received (twenty-four of fifty pages in the special edition are printed), the effect of the book is striking. Each poem is separated by a translucent interleaf sheet of blank Kozo paper, through which it is just possible to read the text, letterpress printed on the subsequent sheet of Zerkall Ingres 90 lb. mould-made paper. Placing this barrier between the reader and the poems, especially given the subject matter of the book—the

ecological specificity threatened by Enbridge's proposed pipeline—reminds the reader both of the book's status as go-between, carrying the poet's perceptions of the natural world to the reader and, thus, mediating between the reader and nature, but also of the threat posed to nature by turning it into a conduit for carrying bitumen to the coast—the threat of further separation from and loss of otherness. This threat is mentioned explicitly only in the title of the collection and a brief note preceding the texts. This threat is embodied even more materially in the special edition of the book, which uses, for its cover, yellow cedar boards from the Great Bear Rainforest—one of the ecological areas threatened by the planned movement of supertankers off the B.C. coast. The prose and poems themselves were not written in response to Enbridge's proposal, but have been taken from their original contexts, re-printed, and made to speak again in this politicized context.

One can always question the efficacy of engaging large political questions through poetry—and aside from the excerpt from Eden Robinson's *The Sasquatch at Home* that opens the collection, all of the pieces are poems—but perhaps especially poetry published in a limited edition. In the "Foreword" to another collection of poetry that works in opposition to Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline, *The Enpipe Line*, Rex Weyler addresses this question and concludes that "historically, poetry always wins. Basho lives long after the war lords are vanquished. Rumi and Hafiz survive the Persian empires. Harriet Beecher Stowe outlives American slavery." This observation, it seems to me, is quite different than suggesting that poems can create or maintain an oil free coast. This reviewer certainly

hopes that reading

The banks are littered with salmon  
dragged from spawning beds,  
eye sockets hollowed by ravens,  
heads opened, brains licked out  
by the bears' hot tongues.

in Alison Watt's "Creekwalker," or

Flukes tapping, feeling the water,  
sensitive fingertips of the blind,  
he lusts after no one, sings  
love songs for light  
lyrics for deepest soundings  
pastorals for tropical calms.

in J. Iribarne's "Cetology" might create a ripple that energizes the movement to stop bitumen extraction and pipeline building, but the likelihood of that seems slim. Perhaps in some post-oil future these poems will remind humans of what was lost and persuade them to avoid making a similar mistake in the pursuit of another form of progress.

**JON GORDON** teaches Writing Studies in the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Alberta. He has published on hog production, mountaineering, and bitumen extraction. His most recent article, "'Rethinking Bitumen: From 'Bullshit' to a 'Matter of Concern'," includes a discussion of Joe Oliver's infamous denunciation of environmentalists' opposition to Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline.

*Assiniboia* by TIM LILBURN

McClelland & Stewart, 2012 \$18.99

Reviewed by HARRY VANDERVLIST

“Colonial wars,” writes Tim Lilburn in *Assiniboia*, “are long mythopoeic wars.” Lilburn’s audacious, visionary volume is at once a salvo in a mythopoeic insurrection, and a salve, a “recital . . . applied to the wound” inflicted when huge tracts of what is now designated Canada were sold by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1869. What got sold out, in this “theft that founds our nation” was a place, a people, and a way of being which Lilburn calls *Assiniboia*. The name does designate a historical entity: two of them in fact. Between 1812 and 1869 the Red River Colony was named the District of *Assiniboia*. Later, in 1882, a portion of what is now the Northwest Territories received the same designation. Lilburn’s *Assiniboia* looks to both of these historical moments as it builds its vision of a stolen possibility for northwestern North America: “an imaginal state, polyglot (Cree, French *Assiniboine*, Blackfoot, English, Michif), local, mixed race, Catholic–mystical.”

One of the volume’s many audacities is its choice of form. *Assiniboia* consists of two choral performances and a masque. Yes, a masque, like Milton’s *Comus*, that courtly hybrid of music, song, dance and acting still practiced in the late seventeenth century when the Hudson’s Bay Company was founded. In this masque, the singers include Louis Riel, his sister Sara, the Cabri Man stone effigy which lies northwest of Swift Current, and even portions of the land itself. The poem really

is a work for performance, and Lilburn told Rob MacLennan in January 2012 that a staged version was in the works.

Readers find their way into the volume through the first series of choral performances, an exegesis sung by a variety of voices. In this section the perspective moves freely through topography, from Dawson Creek to southern Saskatchewan, from Hudson’s Bay to the Olympic Peninsula. Equally extensive sections of time become simultaneously available to these voices: Suncor plays a role in a shamanic legend played out in “traders’ sunk cabins,” while marine fossils settle into place. Here Calypso sings of how the twelfth-century Persian mystic Suhrawardi might “unsilo” like a missile emerging from Sentinel Pass in the Rockies. This exegesis instructs readers in weaving far-flung traditions together with precise Canadian locales, complete with their identifying flora:

There are two ways into Jordan River,  
Via late antiquity, snaking the twist of the  
aorta  
Of scatted Neoplatonism  
Or a portage, naked, next to, black bears,  
One, two, ravening through salal.

The least you can say about this weaving is that it defamiliarizes readers accustomed to a given, imperial and colonial set of concepts customarily mapped onto the territory Lilburn evokes, while at the same time it revels in particular odours, seasons and landforms.

The masque itself, which forms the central portion of the volume, contains eight “watches,” songs voiced by the poplars, the hills, Louis and Sara Riel, and a kid in Winnipeg among others. The Cabri Man effigy speaks a portion of the 1885

Revolutionary Bill of Rights while Louis Riel's secretary Honoré Jaxon joins in. Like the volume's initial section, these songs need to be read and re-read, listened to again after (in my case at least) research into the central figures and events. It strikes me that, in order for these songs to resonate fully, more needs to have been forgotten about Assiniboia than many readers will yet have learned. Yet the writing does evoke the promise of such a forgetting and a re-imagining, of going out the door and re-entering a place that has been imagined into a new existence. "Here" already looks and sounds differently, for me, than it did before reading *Assiniboia*.

The final poem, "Tahsis, Northwest Vancouver Island, edge of the uttered land" moves out to the edge of Assiniboia. An epigraph from Plato's *Timaeus* signals that we're in the realm of poetic creation narratives. The poem's uttered land, no longer Rupert's Land, is an Assiniboia that the volume both laments and asserts. The strangeness and the fascination of Lilburn's *Assiniboia* lie in this blending of observation and meditation with militancy.

Note:

"12 or 20 questions (second series) with Tim Lilburn." rob mclennan's blog.

[http://robmcclennan.blogspot.ca/2012/01/12-or-20-questions-second-series-with\\_25.html](http://robmcclennan.blogspot.ca/2012/01/12-or-20-questions-second-series-with_25.html)

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## Two darknesses

*Undark: An Oratorio* by SANDY POOL

Nightwood Editions, 2012 \$18.95

*between dusk and night* by EMILY MCGIFFIN

Brick Books, 2012 \$19.00

Reviewed by JASMINE JOHNSTON

"You have taken from me friend and neighbour—darkness is my closest friend" (Psalm 88.18). In life, as in art, this question always waits: does love recede into obscurity, or does obscurity itself draw close? Is darkness, and all that darkness can signify, the manifestation of that which is within, or the internalisation of that which is without? In Sandy Pool's *Undark: An Oratorio*—a poetry collection concerning radium women, dial painters who worked with radioactive paint in the early 1900s—and in Emily McGiffin's *between dusk and night*—a poetry collection concerning intersections of the global and local in the life of the poet-speaker—the line between inner and outer darkness is obscured.

Pool construes darkness as "undarkness," which can be read as either a doubling that is undoing and unknowing or as the negation of negation such that, in the end, balance is achieved, a zero sum, nought, naught. As Pool exhorts, "Light only / the edge of what's swallowed, consumed," so *Undark* is also a character in her "oratorio," a musical art form comparable to an opera but performed undramatised, so that the characters seldom address one another. *Undark* is a "propaganda radio personality," one oratorical voice amongst human and allegorical others, including

Sappho, Nox, the Radium Women, the Chorus (“a sea of light”), Sabin (the inventor of Undark radium paint), and Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh of ancient Egypt who died from cancer that may have been caused by carcinogens in her body oil.

The poems in *Undark* are best read as a whole, start to finish. The glow-in-the-dark cover of the book leads to two black pages, the first at the beginning, announcing part one, “Undark,” the second halfway through the book, announcing part two, “Half-Light.” Most of the poems are arranged in blank couplets. Interspersed throughout the book there are also “transcriptions,” poems in the style of translations from ancient texts with many open brackets to indicate physical damage to the written medium or untranslatable portions of the script. Pool mingles these utterances from a dead—but possibly reanimating—Hatshepsut with fragments from Ann Carson’s *Fragments of Sappho* with untitled poems set in the 1900s so that one becomes uncertain who is “translating” whom.

There are also “footnotes” in blank verse at the bottom of several pages—“Salt of the earth, lie still. Wind, not enough...Light takes so long to get to us. Here is the ash and ice, the frame, and the ice”; “To do and undo this mandible world would be to speak. Osseous tissue; we’re sorry....Line after line, our sickness. Forgive us.” These surreal and punning lines are both bitter and beautiful—the “mandible world” haunts triply the jaw and line of the poet and her chorus, the radium women who licked their paint brushes so frequently their cancers often ate away the bones in their faces, and the body of a disposable female labour pool that seems to have been, not to put too fine a point on it, man-edible.

At the bottom of every page is a countdown to destruction. The last poem in the book, “Nox, Epilogue,” occurs at 00:00:13:452. The final line, “I never turn off the lights,” is a fine reversal of ontology, where Nox, the speaker, negates its own nature, much as grief can affect survivors. It takes three blank pages more to arrive at 00:00:00:000—so three beats later we arrive at a blank end in a white light.

Beyond the end of the poems proper, Pool acknowledges debts to Carson, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jan Zwicky, amongst others. The abstract yet deeply emotional quality of her verse and the clever construction of her text will interest readers familiar with these antecedents; readers will also likely find Pool’s reflections on science and the history of science most illuminating. I personally found many resonances between Pond’s poems and Marie Clements’s play *Burning Vision*, where Dene, Japanese, and abstract entities likewise manifest a flash of toxic dreamlight, mingling cherry blossoms, uranium dust, and nuclear fallout.

Jan Zwicky seems to me to be one of the constants of Canadian poetry’s cosmos. In Emily McGiffin’s *between dusk and night*, Zwicky’s body of work, along with Robert Bringhurst’s, Tim Lilburn’s, and Don McKay’s, informs McGiffin’s westwards-facing yet globally-embracing poetics. The poet’s lovers and friends are absent-yet-present in poems reflecting upon life after love, the intellectual life of ancient thinkers such as Dioskorides (a Greek physician and voyaging botanist), and even the lives of cuttlefish bones and wild sage.

McGiffin’s title, *between dusk and night*, evokes the gloaming of her region, northwestern



British Columbia. During the summer, the gloaming is a time of intense yet transitional activity; the day is extended into a golden half-light that feels endless—as John Muir puts it, there is “eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming.” McGiffin’s collection begins with a poem in the valley of Wokkpash, where “in this gloaming, this coyote / light thick with the unnamed...you know nothing the dusk doesn’t.” The poet-speaker suspends in this eternal moment the “folding summer” and the compromised beauty of the Peace River region with “dying...asters, the fireweed / blazing seed, the grey and fossil-scarred scree.” In the poem’s deictic coordinates, “Tomorrow does not exist,” lending a “measure of forgetfulness / more vast than this quiet mountain.” When dusk turns to “wolfish light,” the speaker becomes “awake with everything thoughtless, / everything without cause...without reason,” a “crepuscular...animal, / alive.”

McGiffin’s opening poem, so animal and so alive, is divided from the next section of the book by a compass rose; the second section of poems concerns travel in space and in time—a protestor’s march in the rain, missing a friend on a foggy autumn day, and connections between the stars in Orion the Hunter’s constellation and dandelions: “in this same gesture / of pure desire, dandelions burst through pavement.” If this section of poems concerns a going out, the next section of poems seem to concern a coming home. McGiffin writes of encounters with individual plants, animals, weather, people—nettles, cranes, fog, her grandfather and his diminishing memories: “I’ve learned that the heart / in torment is at its most fecund.”

Perhaps the most compelling poem in the collection, for me, comes at the end of this section: “Seven Songs for Spatsizi” concerns a plateau in northern BC. The Spatsizi Plateau, west and a little south of the Wokkpash Valley where the poetry collection began, is located on the upper Stikine River, a river rich with animal life and under threat from oil and gas development. McGiffin does not address the threat of environmental disaster directly in her poem, but these seven short “songs” speak powerfully of an “alpine water...ablution,” of waking from a “dream of two moose” to moose that pause in their “walking, in the moonlit scrub willows, / and turn their unhurried gaze” towards the poet-speaker, of “sharing, for a small time, the same journey” as moose, black bears, caribou, and goats, and of “always / death” that is “All the way, walking alongside.” The songs end with a warning concerning the river itself: “Take care / lest it take you, for, like the mountains, / it is stronger than it knows and cannot stop flowing.”

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**JASMINE JOHNSTON** is a student of literature at the University of British Columbia.

***Foodshed: An Edible Alberta Alphabet* by DEE  
HOBSBAWN-SMITH**

TouchWood Editions, 2012 \$19.95

**Reviewed by JENNA BUTLER**

Dee Hobsbawn-Smith, longtime chef, food advocate, and writer, brings all three areas of expertise to bear in this important collection that asks: if we know by name all the other professionals who impact our lives, why don't we know the names of our farmers?

*Foodshed* is an immediately engaging read, due in part to its unexpected structure that makes for some quirky headings, as in the chapter on m, "milk's immortal leap: cheese." Although initially structured on a strict A-Z format (think *A Prairie Alphabet*), the necessity of fitting the existing topics to every letter of the alphabet results in a little rule-bending. This doesn't grate, however; instead, it's an amusing focal point for a book that makes the most of everything and leaves nothing to waste, with an economy of words that covers amazing ground in a scant 278 pages. In the fashion of the best prairie cuisine, *Foodshed* proves itself to be filling and inspiring, and leaves you wanting more.

Hobsbawn-Smith writes what she knows: the book is the culmination of years of eating and sourcing locally for her family and her Calgary-based restaurant, Foodsmith. The products are laid out alongside the lives and experiences of those who raise them, and it is a highly effective strategy. By the end of the collection, readers have gained a sense of the variety of foods available in our province and also a

feeling for the lives of those who cultivate the crops. That's what *Foodshed* is all about: giving a face to our growers and putting food back into a social context. Thus, paired with the author's other major area of expertise, cooking, each alphabetized chapter also offers recipes for the focal ingredient. This is another excellent strategy: by encouraging us not only to seek but also to prepare our own farm-fresh food, Hobsbawn-Smith drives us to take part in the easy delight of crafting meals grown by people we know, prepared with our own hands. We can read the human involvement in our meal from seed to table.

Over the course of the book, we become much more aware, too, of the challenges facing the farmers and ranchers in our province. Farmers are forced to relocate in the face of encroaching developments. Family farms sometimes fight the generational tide as the younger members turn to the city and more prosperous careers. But we're equally as intrigued to learn about those who choose to leave the city for life on a farm, whether as a safer place to raise the children or because of deeply held beliefs about the importance of a close connection to food sources. These are not the original back-to-the-landers of the 60s and 70s; they are savvy families and young couples who move onto the land already conversant, in many cases, with the technology they will need and the market base to which they hope to cater. Yes, the situation for many small farms and ranches in Alberta is dire, and Hobsbawn-Smith is intimately aware of that, but this book also celebrates the families who have found creative ways of keeping the farm going, in addition to the people who are making a conscious decision to leave their urban lives

and get actively involved in the production of food in this province.

The second part of the book, the less-creatively titled “Facts and Figures,” moves us outward from our own province to connect to the global Slow Food movement and draw environmental and political issues into the agricultural arena. This is the “business” section of the book, detailing the impacts of particular governments on producers and consumers. Hobsbawn-Smith keeps it succinct, but she knows what she’s doing: now that we have the faces of the farming families in mind, the discussion of the particular regulations and political groups is cast in the light of how they will affect the farmers and ranchers we’ve met in the previous 250 pages. It’s a humanizing tactic that makes the “Facts and Figures,” in addition to the numerous appendices, the works cited, and the websites to consider, pages we’re willing to actively engage with.

*Foodshed: An Edible Alberta Alphabet* is a perfect blend of personal narrative and fact, offering the stories of those who grow our food within the larger sociopolitical context that impacts both grower and consumer. It’s a quirky, honest, and deeply satisfying read.

**JENNA BUTLER** is the author of three collections of poetry, *Aphelion*, *Wells*, and the forthcoming *Seldom Seen Road*. She teaches English and Creative Writing at Grant MacEwan University, where she researches and writes about ecopoetics. Butler divides her time between Edmonton and the small farm she runs with her husband in Alberta’s north country.

*The Essential Robert Gibbs* selected by **BRIAN BARTLETT**

The Porcupines Quill, 2012 \$14.95

Reviewed by **JESSICA KUEPFER**

I knew I would love Robert Gibbs’ poetry the moment I read that he is often compared to Gerard Manley Hopkins and Margaret Avison. Gibbs proved to be every bit the poet I was anticipating; a master of soaring to great heights of literary exploration “with wings beating up to heaven” and then, swiftly narrowing in on a small detail such as “seabird-feathered sea-ribbed sand.” It is no wonder then, that Gibbs has been lauded as a “gourmet of the minimal” who “devotes himself to asserting the value of the ordinary.”

*The Essential Robert Gibbs*, selected by Brian Bartlett, is a carefully curated collection of Gibbs’ finest and most thought provoking works. Bartlett adds that Gibbs’ strongest poems are among the most distinctive of the past century in Canadian poetry. As this was the first time that I read Gibbs, I found it was a wonderful introduction and survey of his career and it allowed me to observe the craft and development of his writing.

The poems at the beginning of Gibbs’ career, in volumes such as *Five New New Brunswick Poets*, tend to be more conventional in their versification and ‘literary’ in their language, but later in his career his poetry becomes more relaxed, playful and humorous in lines and description. His first selected works are much like delightful snapshots of nature while the poetry near the end of his career, such as

*Driving to Our Edge*, becomes unruly and open. The wildness of the lyrics, the profound stanzas and the lines lacking in punctuation give more work to the reader as it becomes necessary to imagine the unsaid. It begins to feel as if Gibbs recognizes that he has not said all there is to say, recognizing this fact with the lines “my voyagings not done.”

The natural landscape of Gibbs' beloved New Brunswick lies at the heart of his poetry. Rather than lavishing literary conventions upon his landscapes and making grandiose declarations, he fills his poetry with humour and playful rhythms and narratives, which cause his poetry to feel more like a child's song or a beautiful dream than a mere snapshot of a landscape. His lyrics dance with words such as ‘puddingstone’, ‘shadowgraphs’, and ‘spring songs’, puns and homonyms (‘unread herring’, ‘prince of whales’, ‘damned river dammers’) and a host of other playful doublings and echos such as ‘unhollowed/hallowed’, ‘my dotage my/anecdote’, and ‘amphoric euphoria.” Adapting the literary word play of Hopkin's poetry, he explores “the angles of cliffs” and “the blueberries bluest fat and thick”, immersing the reader in the living and majestic environment that he called home.

Gibbs was a master of dreamscapes as well. In his collection, *A Dog in a Dream*, the reader is taken on a shrieking vision in the night “to get out as you got in ... is past understanding” and begins “dreaming what the earth dreams.” Using fantastical language and common imagery, Gibbs ties the ordinary with the deeply profound. It is within this world that Gibbs finds the means to explain his journey with poetry. He laments that he “saw a poet flounder on a river / sticky and black as mimeograph

ink” where “leeches jerked like typewriter works.” This entanglement of the civilized world with the natural world is a satisfying display of Gibbs' relationship to nature as a poet; it flows through his poetry, his relationships and his history.

Gibbs is a poet that Canada must be proud of, as he expresses truths that lay at the heart of his reader. He celebrates family, history and nature with clear, familiar imagery, crisp imagination and a vivacious word play that is both delightful and profound to readers. Leading the reader on a journey, he sums up the whole of his collection with the words “The roads and we that take the roads / (with us as we must) / become ourselves in going out.” Expressed in a warm familiar voice, Gibbs expresses a clear understanding of the natural world and the human heart. *The Essential Robert Gibbs* is a delightful, worthwhile read that satisfies a reader's desire for quality, sentiment, and humor.

**JESSICA KUEPFER** is an English and French graduate from the University of Waterloo, currently working at Alternatives Journal, Canada's Environmental Magazine. When she is not reading books, she is outside training for her next ultra-marathon.

## Songs of Sparrows, Earth & Spirits

***Everything, Now*** by JESSICA MOORE

Brick Books, 2012 \$19.00

***Birds, Metals, Stones & Rain*** by RUSSELL

THORNTON

Harbour Publishing, 2013 \$16.95

Reviewed by KELLY DEAN SHEPHERD

From the front cover's graceful and evocative linocut, to the Afterword, which is both artist statement and heartfelt confession, Jessica Moore's *Everything, Now* is a beautiful book. When Moore's lover Galen was killed in a bicycle accident, she was unable to write about it; she was resistant to the idea that something could be created from the loss. She was initially afraid that poetry might reduce the terrible and sacred wholeness of the experience, but ultimately concluded that "nothing could diminish it" and in fact the writing had to be done.

This hesitation, this cautious tension, is evident in the poems. Moore combines dense prose with brief, terse lines and compelling black & white photography to weave a haunting tapestry sometimes rich and colorful, sometimes bleak and elusive. Thematically, we are moved from the depiction of cold, clear detachment in "Glass like me": "For a year I was like glass – poised to shatter" to the acceptance and forgiveness of "North Beach":

Love, tonight, at the edge of this

sea of stars, I don't need words. All there is

is here – a light from the beginning of the world

and this warm knowing, in us and all around us,

stars tingling through our blood – it is us, our edges erased, love,

tonight, I am,

we are, full.

...and back again.

Some poems, like "San Cristobal," are spacious and sun-drenched, full of prayer flags and vines growing outside windows; others, like the title piece "Everything, now," fill the page to overflowing with long lines, descriptions of dreams entangled with personal myths and unfulfilled desires. Some of these poems seem to be almost haunted by the personifications of memories and unanswerable questions.

Indeed, among other things, *Everything, Now* is a book about spirits. They flutter in the background of almost every line: on birds' wings, in and out of bright rooms, in the held breath. There are dark spirits, too, including the mysterious "Something" that crouches in shadows and hollow places, and the skeletal red devil (who is death), who follows and torments the poet. Ghosts, and beings of pure light, and questions about the human soul move throughout the book. "Tonight as I write," Moore says in the opening poem, "I become conjurer – / when I open my hands: / a thousand sparrows." This is her magic: summoning the words, the pain, the spirits—the thousand sparrows—and then releasing them.

Perhaps a quick, summary glance at Russell Thornton's new collection will give us some hints, some clues as to what we can expect from the poems. With a book entitled *Birds, Metals, Stones & Rain*, we might be forgiven for expecting simple nature poetry. The table of contents contains a number of elemental-sounding titles like "Squall," "Rain Wolf, West Coast Trail," and "Book of Sparrows," which seem to confirm this suspicion. We also see references to flowers, snow, cormorants, and swans' bones.

Looking a little closer at the titles, however, there appears to be a second grouping of poems. These seem to deal with the poet's family. Considering one called "My Grandmother's Eyes"—and two titles starting with the words "My Daughter"—this is beginning to look almost predictable. Fortunately, poetry invites more than a quick, summary glance.

Certainly, there are poems about family here. Some describe Thornton's daughter, for example the poem "Triangle" compares his vision of the world with hers. The cry of a gull comprises one point of the little girl's perceptual "triangle," her father the second, and she herself the third. He, on the other hand, defines his own triangle as "her, the world, and my dead / among the dead."

And *Birds, Metals, Stones & Rain* has elemental themes, too: poems dealing with wildlife, bodies of water, and geology. There are boulders "dating back to a mere three hundred / million years after the globe formed / out of a cloud of cosmic debris and dust." Branches in the rain resemble

molten metal, transforming a tree into the burning bush from the biblical book of Exodus; a giant purple-black crow "utters" an abusive father. Not merely nature poems, these are mythical readings of the natural world. In the poem "Greenness" there are lawns of grass that, Thornton says,

touch my bare  
feet with cold dew and make me swift, shoot  
me  
full of starlight the grass stores in its maze  
of roots and make me shine bright.

This is reminiscent of the *duende* that, according to Federico Garcia Lorca, surges up from the earth and into the soles of one's feet: a chthonic energy. It is significant that this poem takes us underground, to the labyrinthine roots of the grass, because that is where much of this book dwells: in rocks, under water, in the sand and soil. Some (arguably, most) of these poems are mythical, but Thornton is not creating a grand personal cosmology by looking at the heavens. Addressing "The Man Who Sleeps in Cemeteries" he says: "Whistle all day the songs / that came to you in the night through the cold clean dirt." The man in the poem learns his music by resting his head upon the earth, which is inhabited by the deceased. After reading *Birds, Metals, Stones & Rain*, this is exactly how I would describe Russell Thornton.

**KELLY DEAN SHEPHERD** has an MA in Religious Studies from the University of Alberta, and is currently working on an MFA degree at UBC Okanagan. Kelly has written three poetry chapbooks, and his poetry and nonfiction have been published in *Geist Magazine*, *Lake*,



and numerous other Canadian and international journals.

***A Geography of Blood* by CANDACE SAVAGE**

Greystone Books, 2012 \$26.95

Reviewed by **LORELEI L. HANSON**

What started out for Candace Savage as two weeks of cheap accommodation at the Stegner House in Eastend, Saskatchewan blossomed into an exploration of the prairie's natural and cultural history, as well as an examination of her own familial roots across this expansive landscape. Diverted from their travel plans due to repeated breakdowns of an old van, Savage and her human and canine companions settled down in the quiet prairie town and began to uncover the layered stories of this place. The book chronicles her discoveries and the threads that weave together her family story with the mythic saga of prairie settlement, Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*, the life and times of the tyrannosaurus, stone circles and grassland ecology.

After their first sojourn to Eastend, Savage and her life companion buy a house there. They learn about their home away from home through conversations with locals, and forays along the nearby riverbanks, hillsides, and open plains with their dogs and guests. With a discerning eye, they explore the treasures held by the land, taking note of the plants and animals, rocks and soil, and anything wonderfully odd and unexpected. Savage recounts their adventures and discoveries, but also contemplates the relationships between these

seemingly discrete objects. Often she begins with the description of a natural history feature at a site but is soon led to investigate its adjacent and related dimensions as revealed through the geology, palentology, ecological transformations, or human history of these places.

The stories Savage recounts about the particularities of southwestern Saskatchewan extend far beyond the specific sites and region she explores. The investigative path she follows leads her to critically question the dominant narrative about the settling of Canada and what constitutes progress. She opens up for debate the grand scheme associated with western development and the value of European civilization. At a more personal level she reflects on how the stories of her family's history of immigration to western Canada highlight triumph and prosperity, but that hidden beneath this highlighted narrative are shame and defeat. In this sense, the stories she recounts resonate across the lives of many who have lived on the Canadian prairies. The personal accounts she shares are heartfelt and touch upon the many layered histories and lives shared by all. The stories speak to a history on the west characterized by paradox, and of a present course of development that in many respects points to a future of diminished richness.

The book is beautifully written, critical, and hopeful. While Savage is pointed about the devastation wrought by the hands of Europeans to a landscape once teeming with life and diversity, this book is not only about the dark side of civilization but also about the connective threads that provide promise for a different society, and a different way of interacting with the land. Moreover, Savage's

descriptions of the natural features of the grassland prairies linger and tantalize, beckoning one to explore the world around them with more care and curiosity. It is not always an easy read, but is certainly a book that provokes critical reflection.

**LORELEI L. HANSON** is the academic coordinator of Environmental Studies at Athabasca University. She co-edits the online journal *Aurora: Interviews with Leading Thinkers and Writers*. She currently is working with an international contingent of scholars on a five year SSHRC funded Community Research Alliance project *Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD): Deliberative Democracy and Climate Change in Alberta and Beyond*.

***Bad Latitudes* by AL POPE**

Turnstone Press, 2004 \$19.95

Reviewed by **LORI ROSMUS**

The Canadian North in the late 1970's, represents a vast wilderness in which Connie, the heroine of *Bad Latitudes*, the debut novel by Al Pope, mines a sense of place and self-mastery. She longs to be more than "a barely relevant satellite in a world that revolved around other people." From the well-meaning pressures of her prosperous suburban family, to the selfish sexual pressures of her first love at university, Connie escapes to a location perfectly suited to her quest and flies to Whitehorse between semesters for the summer in 1978. She flees a life in which she does not belong to a new world in which she has no idea what it means to belong. She recoils from the "Yukon worship" of the "new-wave

hillbillies" that live in shacks or retired school buses and who treat her condescendingly as a "virgin-tourist" from Markham, Ontario. Her journey from city-slicker naif to trained dog-musher includes physical privations and sexual exploration within a plot seemingly tacked on for dramatic purposes.

More a collection of vignettes than a cohesive narrative, *Bad Latitudes* reads rather like a plot written by committee than a unified story. Corny title and cover photo aside, the manufactured tension of and over-explained conclusion to the life-and-death sled-ride through a blizzard would serve as a passable youth novel were it not for all the cursing and sex throughout. As Connie searches for a place to belong, Pope seemingly hammers shorter vignettes into a narrative in which they do not quite fit. The underdeveloped and clichéd plot building to a sled-ride in a blizzard to safety yokes with violence present in several smaller, independent narratives. The result is an overall feeling of uneasy assimilation as opposed to a celebration of Northern independence.

The first chapter, "Drum," starts the novel out promisingly with a rhythm and cadence not sustained throughout the rest of the narrative. Originally released as a separate work, one wonders if Pope's approach might have been more effective as a series of short stories. Much like Connie in Ontario, the stories seem to need more independence than the structure of the novel provides. There is much of interest in *Bad Latitudes*, unfortunately the plot detracts from the overall experience of reading the novel.

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of Science from the University of Alberta that is one course away from her Bachelor of English Honours at the University of Calgary.

***The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems* by NANCY HOLMES**

Ronsdale Press, 2012 \$15.95

Reviewed by **CHRISTINE LOWTHER**

*The Flicker Tree* is a beautiful book that includes nine bird poems, five flower poems, five flowering plant poems, a mushroom poem, a squirrel poem, a short butterfly poem, and a long butterfly poem. Nancy Holmes's descriptions of nature can feel and taste like fine truffles that burst on the tongue: "in wild spots / in nests of pine needles // bitterroot opens its pink mouth." Wild flowers on hillsides are buttons opening a winter coat or being pushed to start spring.

The collection opens with some folks out mushrooming, more like prose than poetry, just people searching the woods for fungi to study—only to discover a cornucopia of colours, shapes, and textures. It's a party ("cafés of tiny pink cocktail/ umbrellas, miniature reefs of creamy coral"), among the equally textured "broken trees, cow patties, muddy/ ruts filled with yellow leaves." She captures perfectly how a forest sounds as it "preens and patters" after rain.

In the second piece, the poet watches a red-tailed hawk soar as her father lies dying: "all that

air, / and you struggled for breath." Her father is all appreciated: hunter's bloody axe and decapitated mallard heads are remembered as gifts side by side with his homegrown raspberries and words of love.

Holmes's poems can illustrate the pleasing technique of changing nouns into verbs and adjectives, describing a hawk's tail as "lustred open / and tendoned like a pale hand."

The book's title poem conjures an image of a tree alive—somehow in its very bark—with dozens of calling flickers, one of our most beautiful birds. She hears their cries and is "candled / by freshened embers of grief."

This poet is deeply affected by, and never takes for granted, fragile wild animals and seasonal occurrences, when so many people are far more absorbed by their various electronic devices:

a butterfly rests a moment  
on my finger

its legs are threads of flesh  
against my flesh

She is not afraid to declare that "the lake is lit up/ so spiritually." At the same time, she is aware that humans' well-meant bird feeders are akin to drug-pushing, and that obsessive bird watching requires extensive, expensive spying equipment.

The second section moves into activism, empathy/solidarity, protest, and the telling of what it feels like to be born and live our lives on stolen land. Readers learn a little Okanagan history and about some of its characters; it is the poet's tribute to what is clearly a rich place. Later in the book we feel how Holmes can be turned inside-out by experiences in this place's wild areas. A plant is described as

“orchid-weird and bloody-clawed.” Off the path, in the dark woods, everything “is antler, not border.” How many poets write series of poems to an author of a guidebook? This one does.

Hard questions are asked: “is the water lower/ in the creek this year? Are bees/ and blossoms fewer?” In a long poem on the futility of parks, “Braiding,” a parking lot meditation breaks off into a thread of twelve lines describing wild flowering plants; then

Lost, I’m wading,  
sinking into the height and depth  
of the sensuous world, the bone-

sewn,

name-spattered, leaf-smothered,  
pollen-rubbed, bark-trenched,  
birdsong-battered, fur-mottled  
branch-cracking, petal-lit,  
vertical park.

Further into the poem is a prose-paragraph of statistics around lingering DDT: “what we think we’re doing with parks and preserves. / Some conscience set aside, some excuse.”

Holmes speaks perhaps most eloquently for trees.

the trees are all  
all gesture, all power  
all secret nest holes  
and wind-cracked

limbs

...

for staying,  
staying and thinking,  
is their

business

...

The charcoal trunks, their grave-baked limbs.

...

[ending as nurse logs]  
all these giant bodies call as I pass by  
“what’s happening up there?”  
creating earth, after centuries  
of making air

**CHRISTINE LOWTHER** is the author of *Half-Blood Poems*, *My Nature*, *New Power*, co-editor and co-author of *Writing the West Coast: In Love with Place* and *Living Artfully: Reflections from the Far West Coast*.

### **Animals, Wonder, and Humans**

*A Page from The Wonders of Life on Earth* by  
**STEPHANIE BOLSTER**

Brick Books, 2011 \$19.00

Reviewed by **MATTHEW ZANTINGH**

**D**on McKay, in *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry and Wilderness*, writes that metaphors are “entry points where wilderness re-invades language,” pointing beyond themselves to that which is Other.

In Quebec poet Stephanie Bolster's latest offering of poems, *A Page from the Wonders of Life on Earth*, wilderness most often appears in the form of animals. In the strongest poems of the book, such as "A Visit to the Children's Zoo," "A Brief History of the Bear Pit at the Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes," or "When We Stop Visiting," the animal, often caged or contained by humans, looks out at readers and asks difficult questions which I, for one, struggled to answer. The central conceit of the latter poem asks the question of what happens to animals when zoos fall out of favour, wondering whether "a few / donations to return them / to where they come from, / though they no longer / come from there" is enough. The following poem, "Housing the Great Auk," ironically describes the commodification of the now-extinct North Atlantic alcid before ending with the deadpan declaration that "we were a marvel." Such instances introduce a note of deep longing or mourning on Bolster's part concerning our fraught relationship with animals. They are something Other than us, and our attempts to capture them appear, in Bolster's poems, hopelessly inadequate. Zoos and museums which can be places of wonder, especially for children, are also places of cruelty and ecological atrocity, as the earlier poem suggests. This rich poetic wondering and Bolster's ambivalent feelings culminate in "Rainbow," a poem alluding to Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish," which ends with "Can art / cancel ruin? Who am I / to gulp the world and live?" Bolster's ability to move between different affects and ambivalence while writing in a spare yet evocative style makes these animal/human moments poignant and memorable.

She is also interested in human architecture

and the way that it is both an attempt to control the natural world and augment it. "Foundations" returns to Paris' pre-history as a marsh and explores the connection between names, place, and animals, while "The Gardens of Capability Brown" explores gardening and our urge to make the land into an aesthetic image. In these poems and others, the human ability to control the natural world is not simply dismissed as inappropriate and necessarily damaging, even if it can be both of these things. In "Topiary," the speaker wonders at the horticultural practice of training plants into shapes, describing it as "one wild thing / pruned to another's shape."

However, she also connects this act to "the shaving of a face. / The shapes extravagant." This triangle of human, (wild) animal, and plant is both wonderful and unsettling in the hinting at violence in "the taming of both." Just as the volume seems haunted by the loss of certain animals, caged or otherwise, it is also haunted by the loss of a form of grand architecture in earlier periods where London's Crystal Palace and the Palace of Versailles were pinnacles of human achievement.

Overall, Bolster's volume is worth looking at for readers interested in human-animal relations, the Victorian period, and architecture more broadly. It is a far-ranging collection, much like the encyclopedic *The Wonders of Life on Earth* (which the collection borrows from), that is accessible yet retains enough depth to reward multiple re-readings of many of the poems. I felt like the first half of the collection flagged in comparison to the latter half. I am not sure whether this is because it took thirty pages to become accustomed to Bolster's poetic style or whether it emerges from the poems themselves. The decision to

arrange the poems into roughly thematic groups works for the most part, although I felt that the “Life of the Mind” poems, with the exception of “(Dear),” “(Wonders),” and “(Night),” which frame these groupings, tended to become somewhat scattered catalogues of items. While *A Page* is not strictly a volume of nature writing, Bolster’s willingness to blur the boundaries of the human and natural worlds would certainly place it in this genre. Canadian ecocritics, writers, and artists alike may find welcome sustenance in the nuggets that Bolster offers up.

**MATTHEW ZANTINGH** is a PhD Candidate in English at McMaster University. His dissertation looks at literary depictions of urban nature in several Canadian cities.

***Evolution: The View From the Cottage*** by **JEAN-PIERRE ROGEL**, translated by **NIGEL SPENCER**  
Ronsdale Press, 2010 \$21.95

Reviewed by **MATTHEW ZANTINGH**

**A**ttempting to explain evolution to a broad audience with recourse to his local Canadian landscape whenever possible, Jean-Pierre Rogel’s pithy *Evolution: The View From the Cottage* sets out to defend evolution in the wake of renewed attacks on the scientific theory by Creationist and Intelligent Design proponents. His fundamental premise, quoting Richard Dawkins, that evolution “did the most explanatory work that actually changed the way people think” is buttressed by his desire to explore

the new developments that have taken place in evolutionary theory since Darwin’s publication of *On the Origin of Species* over 150 years ago. He follows through with some 140 pages of case studies and explanations of the tree of life, DNA bar codes, whale evolution, genetic development, and other pertinent topics. All of this, with the intent of “invit[ing] readers] to take a fresh look at nature as it surrounds us” and “to lead readers toward science itself and show the strength of what it does at an essential level that concerns us all.”

This desire to introduce a complex science to a wide reading public is admirable, and helps to disseminate the often deeply complex science of contemporary evolution and development theory, or evo-devo as it is often called. He uses a journalistic style as a result, utilising his cottage on Lake Memphremagog west of Montreal as a base and primary example for his writing. The journalistic style makes *Evolution* very readable, as I found myself quickly passing through his short chapters while being engaged by his examples and explanations. However, one persistent question that arose for me was whether this choice of writing style means that the science gets short shrift. Darwin’s ideas, particularly survival of the fittest, are some of the most misinterpreted and misused concepts in contemporary culture, as Rogel points out, so some level of depth and complexity is necessary in understanding what an idea like natural selection means. On the whole, I feel that Rogel does manage to convey the complexity of evo-devo in an accessible manner, particularly his discussion of the tree of life metaphor and the evolutionary path of whales. At the same time, I found some sections, like the one that



addresses architect genes, somewhat lacking in clarity. Whether this is because I lack the requisite knowledge in genetics, or because the subject matter itself is too complex to be efficiently broken down to an easily digestible level, I do not know. One failing of the book is, despite his complaint against social Darwinism, Rogel does not address this misreading head-on so that I felt somewhat frustrated by the book's end. He may have chosen not to do so because it would not involve science directly, but, by not addressing it he leaves some of its explanatory power intact.

One of the things that I found distracting in the book was Rogel's persistent attempts to show how evolution is directly opposed to any Creationist or Intelligent Design position. While I think Rogel holds a stronger position in regards to the explanation of the universe's origins, I am not convinced that these positions are always necessarily opposed. This does not excuse movements to discredit all science and stop teaching it at the elementary or secondary level, but I do want to question whether science itself is so fundamentally opposed to religious explanation. In a discussion of Dwight Davis's hypothesis that the panda's opposable thumbs can be explained due to a simple genetic alteration that changed bone structure, Rogel writes "Davis' hypothesis is very attractive and admits of later additions, as I have just shown, but it has yet to be proved. Likely, some researcher will provide a convincing solution to this enigma." While he tempers his belief to a certain degree, throughout the book he evinces an implicit faith in evolution's ability to explain all life. In a way, Rogel's insistence on science as an explanatory force becomes similar to

the fundamentalist recourse to God or the bible for rhetorical force.

Part of why this small quibble is troubling for me is that Rogel relies on the notion that knowledge, particularly individual knowledge of how the world works at its most basic level, will lead necessarily to environmental protection and conservation. In one section, discussing the genetic proximity of humans to all life, he argues that "understanding how we relate to other life forms speaks to our sense of responsibility as humans ... becoming aware of the connections and interdependence among all living things seems a perfect way to begin acting responsibly: first individually, then collectively." I am not convinced by this somewhat naive chain of logic. Oftentimes, we do know the facts of environmental destruction, but it has not led to concrete change. For example, we know the incredibly harmful impact the tar sands has on Alberta's landscape, yet this has not led to a widespread resistance to the further development of this resource. Similarly, we know the devastating impact of asbestos on the human body, yet Canada continues to export the substance to under-developed countries. In both cases, there has been strong popular resistance to these actions, yet the knowledge itself does not seem to be enough.

In the end, *Evolution* is a valuable primer on evolutionary theory and recent developments. Its ability to explain complex science in an accessible manner means that this book may be valuable for ecocritics teaching courses on science and literature. However, ecocritics will have to do some legwork to show how this science can lead to an ecologically responsible method of being in the world.

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***Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land* by A. A. DEN OTTER**

University of Alberta Press, 2012 \$49.95

Reviewed by **MATTHEW ZANTINGH**

Too often in Canadian literary discourse, the wilderness is seen as a terrifying vacuum, something to be feared and avoided at all costs. In Margaret Atwood's terms, the wilderness is not something we can conquer but only hope to survive. A.A. den Otter's *Civilizing the Wilderness* aims to provide a more nuanced historical account of wilderness by exploring the intertwined discourses of civilization and wilderness in pre-Confederation Canada. He presents his thesis when he writes that European settlers "intended to convert the wilderness into an idealized landscape – a Garden of Eden – and at the same time to elevate its Indigenous inhabitants to cultured tillers of the soil." While this idea seems self-explanatory, den Otter goes to great lengths exploring the nuance, evolution, and variations of this idea in several different locations and time periods.

Over the course of the book, den Otter examines letters, reports, biographies, memos, and other textual accounts to trace the genealogy of the "civilizing the wilderness" discourse. He also

examines several different subject positions as he looks at the Anglican Bishop David Anderson, Governor George Simpson, the 1857 British Parliamentary Select Committee, and two missionaries in the region, William Mason and Robert Rundle. One of the more fascinating aspects of the book is den Otter's work on indigenous men who were educated in Christian missions and became missionaries themselves, including Henry Steinhauer, Henry Budd, and Peter Jones. den Otter's work on these figures provides more examples of indigenous peoples speaking and contributing to Canadian culture in the pre-Confederation period, work that places these figures alongside better-known writers like George Copway and George Henry. Another productive element of the book is the way that it takes up the Red River colony. Although den Otter does not address Riel specifically (as Riel falls outside of the book's time scope) he does provide a detailed account of life in the colony before the Red River Rebellion made it (in)famous. Such work presents a complex portrait of the lived conditions in Canada during the process of settlement and aptly illustrates how colonization was always a process, a negotiation, and not a once-and-for-all act.

Throughout the book, den Otter explores the complicated role that Christianity plays in this period. Used to justify settlement and agricultural transformation of the land, den Otter also argues that Christianity became the basis for indigenous rights in a qualified manner. In his chapter on the 1857 Parliamentary Select Committee, den Otter explores how the Hudson Bay Company's treatment of the indigenous peoples was a key factor in renewing the company's monopoly. While most of the people

involved with this group advocated cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, genuinely believing them to be unsaved and uneducated, they did believe that the Hudson Bay Company and the European settlers in North America had a moral obligation to treat indigenous peoples with respect and love. While it would be easy to dismiss the Christian missionaries as religious/cultural imperialists, den Otter is at pains to stress that the situation is more complex than that. The missionaries and religious leaders genuinely cared for the indigenous peoples, even if the results of such care fell short of those feelings. den Otter manages to walk the fine line between condoning and condemning the settlers for their fervent belief in civilizing the wilderness and its inhabitants. Of interest to post-colonial scholars is den Otter's chapter on how historians have treated the Red River Métis. He critiques most historians for simply dismissing the Métis as backwards or savage and offers up a reading that posits them as intelligent actors adapting to the changing circumstances of the Red River region.

While this book is firmly set in the discipline of history, it offers many things for ecocritics, particularly in the first and second chapters where den Otter works through the cultural ramifications of wilderness and civilization in early Canadian literature. Moreover, the detail and specificity of his work moves conceptions of wilderness beyond a simple characterization of it as hostile or savage. Instead, his work allows ecocritics to begin to ask deeper questions about why we mobilize the trope of wilderness, what work is performed in such mobilizations, and who is served by discourses of

wilderness. Moreover, den Otter's work is productive in how he systematically takes apart the human/nature binary that is often assumed when discussing early Canadian literature. The situation is not as simple as settlers against the wilderness, or settlers against the noble savages; it is more complex, more ambivalent. There will be some translation work necessary to use den Otter's ideas in different disciplines, but for scholars working in pre-Confederation Canada and who are interested in issues of settlement, relation to environment, Christian missions, and/or settler-indigenous relations, this book can be a valuable resource.

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***The Rapids*** by **SUSAN GILLIS**

Brick Books, 2012 \$19.00

***Slow Curve Out*** by **MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS**

Pedlar Press, 2012 \$20.00

Reviewed by **PHOEBE WANG**

**I**n *The Rapids*, Susan Gillis delicately circumscribes the shape of things before they take shape. Gillis' third collection of poetry does not attempt to pin down indefinable feelings or places, only to outline their constant shifts. They explore how our private lives are negotiated in spaces beyond the borders of our attention. The spirit of Ariel moves through these poems, but so does the voice of

a mature self who now questions her prior understandings of the world.

Gillis' work expresses a sense of the ungraspable and the ambiguous, which may leave some readers scrambling for something solid to rest upon. The poems convey that feeling of certainties sliding out from beneath you. Fear and panic often instigate insight. For instance, the speaker tells us, "Stepping outside the house at dusk I'm afraid / I'm stepping into another form, / my edges losing their edge, arms shading into the trees," but the "chill air" beyond the open door "is not what I thought. / It is the lit and humming *in here* / rushing out of the frame." It is not only the boundaries between the public and private and between domesticity and wildness that Gillis calls into question, but also between the spiritual and material world.

These boundaries do not merely dissolve; the world's different spheres overlap in Gillis' images. Doors are willed open by "our hundred exhalations," a black bear moving towards us precipitates "the sudden brightness of knowledge, / the room inside us for it," and an open window "admits more than I can bear... Closed it's stifling. / Either way I can't rest." That restlessness drives much of the book's movement and revelations. Yet moments of self-knowledge are quickly undermined by the world's propulsive evolutions. As a result, the speaker must backtrack and reposition herself again and again: "Every morning / I walked through a world slightly altered, / taking a new inventory." By taking stock of incremental changes, in how her "tracks begin to fill in, / smudge into the shade that settles on things. . . ." the speaker realizes, "My apprenticeship has begun."

Is it any wonder that she reveals a kind of helplessness, when air and dust are "wanting form" and her body seems about to dissolve? In the subjective experiences she holds up to the light, the reader is acutely aware of absences. A recurring figure is that of the young man at the edge of forest, whose perspective we can never have, and Saint Jerome, "searching the port and the neighborhoods / for entrances into the wild." The shining pebble of the book is the long poem sequence, 'The Rapids', published in an earlier version in a chapbook with Gaspereau Press. This series of views and glimpses of the Lachine rapids gives the sensation of seasons passing in a blur, while a certain part of the consciousness remains sharp, yet wistful. The more that the reader attempts to derive some gist of the matter, the more the rush of images, like the quick water itself, can overcome you.

Concerned with how we are carried from place to place, how we are drawn into places and by unnamed forces "that propel us / *into* the storm," Gillis' poems swerve and pivot. Fragments, half-finished thoughts, exclamations and questions move the lines forward and keep them from stagnating. At times, it can be difficult to infer the speaker's emotional trajectory or rationale, because these are not poems that jump to conclusions. They leave space for the reader to look up, like a house with high ceilings.

We move from the St. Lawrence and Montreal Island to the grasslands of Maureen Scott Harris' upbringing in Saskatchewan, and the streetcars of Toronto where she currently resides. *Slow Curve Out* is the third book of poems from this Trillium-award winning poet, and the League of

Canadian Poets named *Slow Curve Out* a finalist in the Pat Lowther Memorial Award.

Harris' candid, forthcoming poems propose that "to enter a field or room might be a form of conversation." The reader listens in on this conversation Harris generously shares with us, which she is having with other writers, with memory, and with her surroundings. Epistolary, anecdotal, and chatty, the poems often step into a call-and-response mode. The book opens, for instance, with 'Walking in Saskatchewan with Rilke,' in which walking is a form of meditation for the poet, even though she expects no certainties: "I guess I'm not waiting for any particular / answer, no marks given for poetic sensibility." Rather, these conversations and these walks are a means of the poet to look to nature for insights about the cycle of life, and what she refers to as "griefwork."

The book's first section, "Back Up, Begin Again," is where Harris maps out a kind of ethos, a way of listening to the world. In "Epistemology: The World Speaks," the speaker identifies her touchstones and attempts to orient herself: "I dream of a language yearning for landscape." Her words may "yearn to be embodied," but at the same time, she also desires a wider arena of possibility, which walking and contemplation may open up:

Walking may empty  
the mind's geometry, unhook its angles  
from their linked confusion, that oxymoronic  
insistence on contained space.

"The Ten Thousand Things," the book's middle section, is less a catalogue than it is an assemblage of desires and birdsongs. Here, Harris pulls up the lynchpins of syntax to mimic the

magpies, crows, sparrows and "animal lives" moving through the poems. The looser forms and onomatopoetic fragments convey the speaker's immersion in the present: "my mind darts too, frantic to keep up— laundry, letters, dishes, what first, what next? / *O-O virtuous virtuous virtuous* / calls the white throated sparrow. . . ." these erratic, spare lines evoke the kinetic and instinctual movements of birds and animals themselves. In 'Walking Ghazals,' Harris recalls Adrienne Rich's famous Ghalib and Blue Ghazals, with a similar probing, plaintive tone: "Where *do* I belong?" But "Questions again—they're a manner of speaking / rising like poppies in the yellowing fields."

Harris continues to dream and wonder about the uncanny animal lives in the book's last section, asking, "Whose dream is this anyway and / what ears pricked to which wind?" The poems are cognizant of the startling inadequacy of our representations of animals. The speaker confesses: "I inhabit my body so badly... I want three minutes in the skin of another animal." While this longing remains impossible, the poems cast light on the wild spirit in daughters and families. The reader is alerted to how the wild does not only apply to the animal world, but to those who transgress social customs and occupy the fringe of the forbidden. Harris is sensitive to the way that the body's sensuality has been framed as bestial and uncivilized. She claims these experiences as having a deep place in our culture. One of Harris' greatest strengths as a poet is her versatility. At her disposal are many different rhythms and timbres tuned to the "echoes within the bone."

Works Cited

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**PHOEBE WANG**'s poems have appeared in *Arc*, *Canadian Literature*, *CV2*, *Descant*, *Grain* and are forthcoming in *Ricepaper Magazine*. Her chapbook will be appearing with Odourless Press in Fall 2013. Born in Ottawa, she is a graduate of the University of Toronto's MA in Creative Writing program. She is also reviewer and contributor to *The Puritan* and *The Toronto Review of Books*. More of her work can be found at [www.alittleprint.com](http://www.alittleprint.com).

### Every Step Along the Way

***Border Crossings: Walking the Haiku Path on the International Appalachian Trail*** by **IAN MARSHALL**  
Hiraeth Press, 2012 \$17.95

Reviewed by **MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS**

**T**he International Appalachian Trail (IAT) stretches seven hundred miles, northeast from Thoreau's Mount Katahdin in Maine through New Brunswick to the tip of the Gaspé Peninsula. With Basho's *Narrow Road to the Far North* in mind, Ian Marshall set out to walk its length. He had two aims: to hike the trail, and to learn to write a decent haiku. Given the exigencies of professional life and family responsibilities, his walking took place in two-week increments over six summers. He didn't hike alone but with a companion whom we know only by her

trail name: The Hiker Formerly Known as Mooseless. *Border Crossings* is a journal of their walking.

Ian Marshall's haiku path is a combination of travel memoir and nature writing that also explores the haiku form. Why haiku? In Marshall's words, "In haiku we find a literary model for ecocentric thought, moving beyond a solely human perspective in order to see clearly the 'more-than-human-world' (as David Abram calls it) on its own terms—but without erasing the human perceiver that is part of that world."

*Border Crossings* is an engaging book, and Marshall an engaging writer, able to express ideas clearly and deftly. Though I had my doubts initially. He's prone to puns and silly humour, and I have a—perhaps lamentably—low tolerance for both. But as the hike stretched out I became engrossed in life on the trail, and his consideration of haiku, and got over my crankiness.

Marshall is both an experienced backpacker and an ecocritic (and a former president of ASLE), who began writing haiku when his academic career was well-established. But his haiku weren't, he says, particularly good. For this hike, carrying a copy of Basho in his backpack and with notes from the critical works he has read, he sets himself the task of meditating each day on a haiku principle. Over the six journeys he corrects and expands his own notions of the form through further reading and thinking, and in doing so models learning.

Marshall characterizes his academic work as "narrative scholarship," a practice that incorporates personal musing and experience into the critical enterprise. He writes of being startled to find in Japanese haibun (Basho's *Narrow Road*) a precursor



It's the journey itself that is the point, and the trail and haiku are means to that end. The journey is arrived at in every step along the way. The raspberries, the ripe ones we finally found along the river trail the last few kilometers into Mont St. Pierre—the lines of weathered rock in the high cliffs above the St. Pierre valley—the spruce grouse standing on the trail and calmly strolling off into the woods right before I can get it in camera range—the glimpse of the gulf between mountains—the gulp of water while sitting on packs during a rest break on a ridge trail—the eagle we saw careening over the valley

yesterday enroute to Les  
Cabourons... these are the means and  
end of the journey.

In his reflections on haiku Marshall moves himself, and his readers, from a simplistic sense of it as a vehicle for an aha! moment of clear perception, to an awareness of its ability to express a large range of complexities through paradox, juxtaposition, and open-endedness. In fact, the form itself becomes (appropriately) enigmatic the more he thinks about it. I'm grateful to him for sharpening my own sense of its possibilities, and giving me varied strategies for both reading and writing haiku. Marshall's own haiku form only a small part of the book. More than decent, some of them shine:

between the shout and  
the echo

the canyon  
the canyon

catching a breath  
till the summit view  
takes it away again

restless wind the pond wants out of itself  
*Border Crossings* is a book about hiking and haiku,  
yes, but also about finding one's way in life through  
connecting to nature and attending to the ongoing  
conversation between internal and external worlds,  
thought and experience. At the end of the final hike  
Marshall settles briefly into the satisfactions of  
completion, only to note that the Appalachians  
continue through Newfoundland, and then Scotland  
—and that chapters of the IAT association are busy  
with trail extensions throughout Europe. The

journey, it seems, is as open-ended as haiku itself.

**MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS** was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award for her 2012 poetry collection *Slow Curve Out* (Pedlar Press). In 2011 Harris started *Fieldnotes Chapbooks*, an occasional publication, by producing *YesNo*, a talk by Beth Follett (publisher of Pedlar Press). In 2012 *Drowning Lessons* was voted one of the four favourite Trillium winners in Open Book's "Favourite Titles from the Past 24 Years" contest. In 2005 she won the Trillium Book Award for poetry for *Drowning Lessons*. In April 2009, Maureen Scott Harris was the first non-Australian to be awarded the 2009 WildCare Tasmania Nature Writing Prize which included a two-week long residency in a Tasmanian National Park. She won for her essay, "Broken Mouth: Offerings for the Don River, Toronto."

*geographies of a lover* by **SARAH DE LEEUW**  
NeWest Press, 2012 \$14.95

Reviewed by **CAMILLA NELSON**

*Distance is what defines a lover ("Distance".)*

The lyric structure of Sarah de Leeuw's most recent poetry collection, *geographies of a lover*, makes lovers of us all. De Leeuw's new book applies a geographer's methodology to the overlap and interweave of lovers' bodies: real, imagined, and remembered in words. As in the poem that prefaces this collection, Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, de Leeuw's lovers, a

woman, the narrator, and a married man, are engaged in an extra-marital affair. As readers, we are similarly invited to engage, imaginatively and explicitly, in the love that passes between these two individuals as an act of poetry. In doing so, the reader must recruit from his/her own previously experienced and/or imagined acts of love. As a result, we are both present and absent in our involvement with this text, as we are with every text; our situation is defined, as the lover defines herself, by distance. Distance, or absence, from the text is necessary in order for it to make sense; there can be no union without separation. These remembered elsewhere, from which we recruit an understanding of these words, are necessary in order for us to inhabit the text. In a similar way, the wife and children of the man with whom the narrator is in love, allied as they are to the domestic sirens of "leaking windows," "weeds in the driveway," and "a kitchen sink with dishes calling," present the most obvious occasion for the separation and distance of these lovers, ghosting the collection with their domestic traces even as they are exiled "beyond" the text ("Distance"). This, for me, is perhaps the most interesting aspect of de Leeuw's collection: the variety of ways in which she presences that which is absent, not in order to overcome this absence, which is terminally unresolved ("you will leave me, without a doubt," the collection finally laments), a necessary prerequisite of desire, but in order to explore the complex interface between intimacy and abstraction.

Distance and proximity, or absence and presence, for the lover are allied to the issues of presence and representation for the reader and the writer. How can the protagonist of this collection

make her lover, and their physical acts of love, present in words? How can the writer make the details of concrete experience present for the reader in words? As an attempt to answer both of these questions, this collection is as much an exploration of what presence means, of what constitutes the immediacy of experience, and its relationship with the (written) word, as it is an investigation of geography and/or love. Or, rather, this collection rephrases questions of presence and representation in literature in a melding of the languages of love and geography.

And so we come to the burning question: in what words are the primary landmarks of this text articulated? This question took me back to a fragment of “Kama,” one of the short stories in Vikram Chandra’s collection *Love and Longing in Bombay*:

They had argued and talked and laughed about what to call their parts, she hated *lund* and *chut*, how vernac and crude and vulgar she said, cock and pussy felt foreign in his mouth, he said that to her and she laughed fondly and said all I want in your mouth is me and thrust her breast against his lips, me by any other name.

This, for me, is the stumbling block of de Leeuw’s collection: the appropriate (with its multiples senses of propriety, property, ownership, belonging, boundedness etc.) naming of parts. Her collection at once expands the terrain of these human bodies and their field of experience in “48026’18.10 “N 68031’50.42 “W”; the lovers’ bodies interweave not just with the bodies of the birds but with their flight paths and patterns in a convergence of substance and

experience that deconstructs any boundaries between things themselves and the things they do—“bodies balanced fragile as the weight of a bird, hollow bones and avian frame barely bending the top branch of an aspen tree upon landing but still in that spilt second of tucking in wings the horizon shifts, is rearranged above new snow, fitted closely over grey hound and I am reaching, bending too, tucking in”—and contracts these bodies and their actions to clipped phrases in “the tip of your cock,” “fuck my ass,” “42021’40.67 “N 71002’37.93 “W.” These single syllable words slap hard and sharp amid the open weave of the more geographical phrasing, but perhaps this is the point: expansive transfiguration slams up against frank four-letter words, expressing the emotional peaks and troughs of the collection’s narrator through the lurch of phrasal rhythm and sudden shifts in diction. Having said this, I was, nonetheless, disappointed with de Leeuw’s lack of variation when it came to her naming of parts. The repetition of the same single syllable words (cunt, cock, clit, cum, ass) displays a lack of innovation that is at odds with the ambition and inventiveness of her collection as a whole.

de Leeuw’s use of co-ordinates as titles are perhaps the most obvious of her innovations, that explores the interface between distance and proximity; making the near far and the far near. They are also the most surprising. Upon entering one of these titles into an online search engine, I was surprised to find how swiftly the sensation of spying, of becoming even more of a peeping Tom than an identification with the lyric “I” has already made me, gave way to a striking sense of ostracization and loss of bearings. The pinpointed satellite view of a rooftop in Toronto in “43040’38.52 “N 79021’02.02 “W” or a

lorry, parked in an industrial area of Ottawa in “45024’49.26 “N 75037’35.47 “W,” no matter how far I zoomed in, told me less about the particularity of being there than my reading of the poem had done. In fact, it made me feel that I knew much less about the “reality” of these events than my reading experience had led me to believe. This shattering of any sense of geography as stable or uncomplicatedly real, or present, is typical of this text. We are repeatedly reminded of the absence that infuses presence, but the many variations of this infusion make the ride endlessly exciting. What bearings do these co-ordinates “really” have on these poems? Are they the “actual” sites of the poem or, as may be true of “45038’09.35 “N 75055’35.85 “W” where the satellite view lands you in the middle of “the ottawa river,” are these precise locations as much imagined, symbolic or suggestive, as the rest of the text? This series of sparsely punctuated single sentences, reminiscent of the final affirmations of James Joyce’s Molly Bloom, offers no easy answers. Only one thing is certain: Sarah de Leeuw’s new collection is brave.

**CAMILLA NELSON** has recently completed a practice-based PhD entitled “Reading and Writing with a Tree: Practising Nature Writing as Enquiry” at University College Falmouth. Her poetry has most recently been published in Nathan Hamilton’s anthology *Hello World and Everyone In it: New UK Poetry* (Bloodaxe Books).

*To the Edge of the Sea* by **ANNE MCDONALD**

Thistledown Press, 2011 \$19.95

Reviewed by **OLIVIA FERGUSON**

*To the Edge of the Sea* is a quick read, though the story Anne McDonald tells extends far beyond the novel’s 162 pages. McDonald draws on a wide array of Canadian historical material to tell a coming-of-age narrative against the backdrop of the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences in 1864. As the author’s note acknowledges, the novel’s primary sources include the diary of George Coles’ daughter, Mercy Ann Coles, as well as articles from Canadian and British newspapers of the 1800s. (Coles’ unpublished diary is held at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, and a typescript of the diary is available for consultation in the University of Victoria Archives.) McDonald also draws on secondary sources, such as Christopher Moore’s book *1867: How the Fathers Made a Deal* (1998).

McDonald’s fascination with her primary sources is perhaps the novel’s greatest strength. The two quotations that preface Part One, for example, introduce the old imagery that imagines Britain’s colonies as young, immature children. The first quotation, from the *London Daily News*, reads: “What child, if the future could be revealed to it in infancy, would not shrink from the dangers and burdens even of the most prosperous and heroic life?” The second quotation, from the *London Times*, reads: “Our colonies are rather too fond of us, and embrace us, if anything, too closely.” By juxtaposing these two quotations, McDonald creates a tense

family portrait in which the parent is sympathetic, yet desires to be free of the clinging child. All three of the novel's young protagonists — Mercy Coles, Alex, and Reggie — make decisions and have new experiences that shape them as mature individuals; and McDonald's epigraph suggests that their personal stories have something to do with Canada's "coming of age."

As Glenn Willmott observes in *Unreal Country* (2002), "From Confederation onward, the land is perceived not as an old colony but as a young nation, and its role within the empire, or out of it, a matter of perennial uncertainty and debate." Willmott identifies Sara Jeannette Duncan's novel *The Imperialist* (1904) as the first novel to use the metaphor of youth to represent the beginning of Canada's nationhood, and suggests that the metaphor "exhausts itself in the Nietzschean indeterminacy of MacLennan's Neil in *Barometer Rising*." By this account, new Canadian fiction has no use for the young nation-protagonist — but if McDonald's metaphor of youth is old-fashioned, it is self-consciously so; and McDonald, I think, puts a new twist on an old trope. In *To the Edge of the Sea*, the epigraph marks the youth metaphor as a product of British attitudes and British newspapers. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Confederation has something to do with the personal lives of Mercy, Alex, and Reggie, not the other way around. McDonald reverses the terms of the old trope, firmly placing the lives of individual Canadians in the foreground.

Unfortunately, too often McDonald allows her entertaining account of the political manoeuvres involved in the long railroad to Confederation to

upstage Mercy, Alex, and Reggie. When the narrator is alone with her protagonists, descriptions of the way the light falls, or the way water feels, take the place of character. Not one of McDonald's three young protagonists has an individual way of thinking or speaking. By far the most detailed and intriguing character is the famous John A. MacDonald, until the reader suffers through the dopey flirtation between "John A" and Mercy, which has nothing on Duncan's Hugh and Advena. Even John A. often becomes a surrogate for the narrator:

He lifted a raspberry with his fork and ate it. Even a tinge of tart, not over ripe yet, still in the bloom of youth. Like the Canadas, he thought, the potential, the beauty of youth. What a country this could be. And the eastern colonies were joining, the swell of momentum taking them all. Fruit falling ripe, easy.

There is an opportunity here to particularize John A's way of thinking about Confederation, or to ironize his attraction to the young Mercy, who has "[l]ips red with raspberry," instead, John A. is merely a way for the narrator to deliver pretty similes. If McDonald intended John A's flights of imagination to be comic, his metaphors resemble the narrator's metaphors too closely for the irony to register.

McDonald's attention to the details of landscape is certainly the novel's most obvious strength as I found much to appreciate in the descriptions of Prince Edward Island and Niagara Falls. However, both the vivid setting and the historical framework seem empty without individualized protagonists. McDonald's first novel is full of good writing and good research, yet often fails

to create the illusion that the characters have minds of their own.

**OLIVIA FERGUSON** is an M.A. student in the Department of English at the University of Victoria. She studies Canadian and British Literature, and is currently researching political prints and illustrated satires of the Regency period. Her poetry appears in this year's *New Writing Scotland*, published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies.

*Dirt of Ages* by **GILLIAN WIGMORE**  
Nightwood Editions, 2012 \$18.95

Reviewed by **NAOMI SMEDBOL**

Poet Gillian Wigmore's *Dirt of Ages* is divided into two sections, "Water Girls" and "Construction." The anthology explores often quite complicated human/human/nonhuman relationships, profoundly aware of and concerned with the specificities of place. Written from North Central BC, Wigmore's collection travels, touching down in places like Saltspring Island and Prince George, Florence and Germany, and is not afraid to confront the gritty alongside the pretty:

Prince George leaves its burn victims out to air  
in the fetid fall inversion that traps  
the pulp-mill fumes in the river bottom where  
the bulk of the downtown falls to  
the  
arsonist, historic building by building, the free  
press out to catch it as it

tumbles....the

burned-out buildings are a calling of the heart. Salt Spring Island, by contrast, conjures the image of "the semi-sweetness / of autumn on the island—thick scent / of blackberry and new sex, naked in the open." These places, and the others explored in this collection (many of which are in Northern/Central BC), are examined with an eye adulterated by memory and time, as the speakers render their spaces sensitively and with complexity.

The title poem of the first section weaves the speaker's son laughing together with a youthful girlish abandon and reminiscences of Oddysean sirens, asking repeatedly, "what is it with us water girls?" She compares the water girls' draw toward the sea to "some kind of balm or baptismal bloody fountain," investigating the desire she posits as "always looking to be clean." But the water is complicated, uncomfortable, too; the water girls desire not only purification but also "comfort / in bad weather, rough water, sweet- / looking boys with sour countenances," and the speaker questions this desire and its relationship to "the secret in the water / that is the water." This poem is characteristic of the collection in that it sparks with energy and disallows "passive" reading: the reader is swept along by vivid images and words that seem themselves to move like swift currents and swirling eddies. Its resonances with Greek mythology and traditional cultural associations between the female and water are both familiar and yet *unfamiliar*: her speakers engage with and expand these familiar tropes to discover what exactly it *is* with these water girls.

Wigmore employs hyperbole in ways that are sometimes startling. In "Houseplants," the speaker



describes his or her green thumb as follows: “I love them silently and with a fervour I deny my kids and husband. I love them / hard and fierce.” The voices in these poems alternate between this conversational hyperbole and more elevated, lyrical drama, whether it’s the Christmas cactus’s “articulate, / water-hoarding nature” or the menagerie of different “roots writhing / in handmade stoneware pots.” But the drama and hyperbole are effective, particularly in rendering an active connection between the human speakers of the poems and their nonhuman counterparts. The poems resist a classification of plant life as passive through words like “writhing,” “articulate,” and “hoarding,” and though personification can be problematic, here I find it engages readers to think critically about how these images might challenge or reflect their own human/nonhuman relationships.

“Construction,” the second section, hosts poems that feel more like fragments and that seem more aware of themselves as poems. “k’san,” for example, calls the reader to “locate the poem with dirt composition and geology,” and finishes by declaring “there is no space between raindrops during condensation, not in this rainy valley | not in this poem.” Indeed, this call to location of poetry (and poetry of location) seems an apt place to finish my review: the collection is an essential addition to any bookshelf concerned with poetry of place, and particularly poetry of Northern and Central British Columbia. Though it travels the world, *Dirt of Ages* is clearly rooted in BC, and it provides a stirring series of voices for the body of literature of the Pacific Northwest.

**NAOMI SMEDBOL** holds a Masters in Environmental Studies from York University, where she studied place, trauma, and Japanese Canadian Internment. She is also a copy editor for *The Goose* and is the current Graduate Student Representative for ALECC.

### **Reason and Instinct: Balancing the Duality**

*Every Wolf's Howl* by **BARRY GRILLS**

Freehand Books, 2012 \$21.95

Reviewed by **TRAVIS VANDERVELDEN**

*Every Wolf's Howl* promises to be a book about a man’s relationship with his canine friend, who is actually more wolf than dog, a combination that inspires him to embrace his own wildness. While it delivers on that promise, showcasing the day to day struggles of pet ownership, as well as the unique difficulties of living with a (mostly) domesticated wolf, it also provides an intimate look into the life of a man struggling to live authentically and on his own terms. This memoir highlights the true nature of the relationship between pets and their owners, as well as tracing one man’s journey through separation, bankruptcy, and failure.

Barry is a struggling writer who is barely keeping his head above water when he adopts Lupus from a Kingston animal shelter. Shortly after their relationship begins Barry is hospitalized once again for a heart condition, brought on by the stress and demands of running his own weekly newspaper.

After unsuccessfully collecting the debts he is owed, Barry is forced to shut down his paper and his own personal, economic, and romantic lives are brought down along with it. He attempts to free himself from the society that just cast him out and find a new start for himself as he sets out across western Canada, camping his way across the country, only to be once again reigned in by a lack of funds and a failing romantic relationship back in Ontario.

After his return, Barry is faced with the constant pressures of finding work and finding ways to feed himself and Lupus. In one recounted instance, Barry is interviewed for a part-time office job on a provincial campaign and, having once been a fellow parliamentary candidate several years earlier, he feels optimistic about the possibility of getting the job. He is told that he is overqualified and was only granted the interview because they felt it was “owed” to him based on his past experience. Barry is stuck between being “qualified for positions that aren’t open and overqualified” for those that are. Barry’s struggle to find consistent work in his chosen profession is a challenge that all artists and writers must face. Lupus, it seems, is the only thing in his life that he can consistently rely on. Even as writing jobs come in, a constant source of income is something that always eludes Barry.

Lost and searching for a new path in life after failing at the conventional channels of success and happiness, Barry begins to notice the odd behavior of his best friend and, at times, travelling companion. Lupus responds and obeys Barry’s commands, but he also seems to have extra wolf senses that sometimes take over, especially during their long walks through the wilderness. During one walk in particular, Lupus

encounters a young deer in the woods and chases out onto the thin ice of a lake that has yet to thaw in the new spring. As Lupus is circling the deer trapped out on the ice, attempting to find the best point of attack, Barry tries to regain control over his unleashed pet. When it seems that the deer is all but lost, Barry’s cries finally reach home and Lupus obediently returns to Barry’s side and re-accepts his domesticated role. It is the duality of instinct and reason that Barry recognizes in Lupus, which inspires his own transformation. Barry must find his own balance between fitting in and living out his true nature.

Towards the end of the narrative, as Barry is finally putting himself back together and is in a new romantic relationship, he tragically loses his lupine companion and must find a way to survive on his own. Throughout the tumultuous three-year period that Barry and Lupus were together, Lupus was the only constant in Barry’s life. Lupus was his only true friend and was possibly the reason that Barry was able to pull himself out of his downward spiral. Barry learned from Lupus how to live both as a domesticated and a wild animal. It was Lupus’ dual nature that showed Barry how to survive and not compromise any part of his true identity.

The book is narrated in reverse-chronological order beginning with the final tragic moments of Barry and Lupus’ relationship and tracing backwards throughout the previous years until Barry meets Lupus in an animal shelter. The book reads in the early pages as one man dealing with the loss of his beloved friend, but as you move forward the depth of their relationship is revealed as the reader sees the pain and loss that Barry goes through. Lupus is an integral part of Barry’s life during this difficult time,

and as the book goes on the tragedy of Barry's loss is multiplied as the true value of Lupus' companionship is slowly revealed.

Mostly known for his short stories and for his co-authored biographies of female, Canadian pop-singers, Barry Grills' memoir provides a look not only into the intimate relationship between a dog and his master, but also displays an inside look into the life of a struggling artist. This memoir shows the depths that a man intent on following his passion and his craft will go to in order to survive. At its basest elements, this is a remarkable and tender story about a man and his best friend during a difficult period in his life. It is a story of love and friendship born out of unique circumstances and ending in unparalleled affection.

**TRAVIS VANDERVELDEN** is a graduate student in English at the University of Victoria.

***Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk: A Natural and Cultural History of Yukon's Arctic Island*** edited by

**CHRISTOPHER R. BURN**

Wildlife Management Advisory Council North Slope,  
2012 \$44.95

Reviewed by **SHIRLEY ROBURN**

**T**his beautiful coffee table and general interest book is well worth the price for its photography alone, combining stunning landscape photos, amazing close-up wildlife shots, and archival and present days images of the human history of

Herschel Island as fishing and hunting camp, whaling station, fur trade locale, mission and police outpost, and finally territorial park.

Nominated by Canada to be part of a future western arctic UNESCO World Heritage site, Herschel Island is a fascinating place. *Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk* offers a comprehensive look at this remote Arctic island and its significant natural and cultural history. Divided into six main, colour-coded sections, including "land and water," "flora and fauna," "people and culture," and "conservation and governance," as well as an introduction and conclusion, the book contains three to ten-page-long chapters covering just about every aspect of the natural and cultural history of the island, ranging from its formation through geological time; to the migration of plants, animals, and peoples dating back to the Beringia; to detailed explanations of regional bathymetry, ocean currents, and climate; to a full-scale itemization of all known flora and fauna on the island; to comprehensive coverage of the human history of the region, up to the settled Inuvialuit land claim and present-day arrangements for governance of Herschel Island as a territorial park that is part of the broader North Slope region addressed in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA).

The book is also notable as an exemplary collaboration between a breadth of community, government, and academic knowledge-holders who live and work in the far north. Its format draws on the previous experience of the editor, permafrost specialist Chris Burn, as co-author of a natural and cultural history of the area around Mayo, Yukon, produced for the town's centenary in 2003. Like this previous foray, *Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk* is

holistic in its presentation, and draws primarily on the knowledge of longtime resident northerners. The passion of the forty-two contributors — ranging from distinguished academics, such as Charles Krebs (author of numerous undergraduate ecology textbooks), to biologists, anthropologists, archivists, geologists and other regionally based working professionals, to Inuvialuit elders, and park wardens and rangers with personal histories and family ties to Herschel Island — is evident in their texts. I found the biologists' contributions especially delightful: every so often a simple adjective, anecdote, or little detail would turn a dry description into a poignant image, revealing an incredible depth of knowledge gained through years of study. How better to bring ornithology to life than through glimpsing a slowly growing flock of forlorn shorebirds, gathering below the meadow where their nests were pillaged by foxes and other predators, to quietly feed on the edges of a pond in the fleeting last days of the Arctic summer, the season too short for them to breed again?

Cameron Eckert's photographs of such birds, along with Fritz Mueller's panoramas of the island, and numerous other personal photographs provided by the contributors, are one of the design elements used by Whitehorse-based firm Aasman to enliven the texts and tie them together into a coherent whole. Colour coding, pictograph style graphic design comments, and the clever use of tables, charts, maps and graphs (which allow for greater complexity and detail, while leaving the main texts relatively simple and clean), also help to maintain clarity and continuity, making the book lively and compelling for the lay reader.

*Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk* is remarkable

not only for the breadth of its subject matter, but also for its integration of a variety of experiences and perspectives, and its accessibility to a wide readership. The book is dedicated to Inuvialuit elders who lived on or near Herschel Island. Throughout the text, efforts are made to value Inuvialuit knowledge in an equal or parallel way to Western and scientific knowledge. For example, one introductory chapter concerns place-names, which have greater importance in Inuit culture as repositories of knowledge (Collignon 2006). Inuvialuktun as well as scientific and English names are given in flora and fauna charts. In one instance a table highlights the multiple Inuvialuit names for distinguishing grizzly bears based on age, sex, and life-cycle stage, subtly suggesting differences in knowledge orientation; while scientists have named and classified dozens of insects that go unnamed or named only by broad category in Inuvialuktun dialects, local indigenous languages have a far richer and more nuanced vocabulary to describe natural conditions and species that are relevant to their survival.

As elder Danny Gordon describes in his preface, the book is of benefit to Inuvialuit and other northerners because it is able to both honour Inuvialuit people and their knowledge, and to collect and explain scientific research that has been conducted in and around the island in recent decades. In particular, as highlighted by Burn (Jickling 2012), the book became possible because research undertaken during the International Polar Year (2007-2009) filled in significant knowledge gaps, particularly with regards to the island's biota. The IPY research, like the book itself, reflects growing collaboration and mutual intelligibility between

Inuvialuit and Inuvialuit agencies, territorial and federal government agencies, NGOs, universities and northern colleges and research agencies, and local northerners of all stripes. This is evident not only in the book's authors, but in the broad swathe of government, northern research, and NGO agencies which financially supported the book's publication (the book is officially put out by the Wildlife Management Advisory Council North Slope, an agency whose mandate arises from the IFA), and in how the book was launched in Yukon, in tandem with an eponymous exhibit of fossils and cultural artifacts at Whitehorse's McBride Museum.

Such increasing cross-agency and cross-disciplinary research, conducted with growing community involvement, has yielded crucial new information, particularly about the urgent threat climate change is posing to the island. For example, weather records kept by clergy and whaling captains over a century ago have become important points of comparison that show a several week shift towards later ocean freeze-up around Herschel Island.

My one quibble with the book is that the threats of both oil and gas development and climate change are somewhat undersold within the text; chapters may mention how ancient archaeological sites are washing into the sea, how predator-prey dynamics are changing with a changing climate, or that heritage buildings in Pauline Cove have had to be moved back from the shoreline, sometimes more than once, but somehow the particular vulnerability of Herschel Island, and the rapid nature of changes to the island, doesn't come through strongly in the text. To be fair, however, the book does a splendid job of establishing Herschel Island's special place in

our natural and cultural heritage. Raising this awareness is perhaps the most crucial step to ensuring Herschel Island's future in a rapidly changing Arctic.

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**SHIRLEY ROBURN** is a PhD candidate in the Joint Program in Communication Studies at Concordia, UQAM and the University of Montreal. Her research, inspired by living in northern Canada, concerns the "public stories" that First Nations communities and environmental groups tell about climate change and food security in northwestern North America, and whether these stories are effective in garnering public support and influencing global, national, and regional policy. Roburn is a long-time community activist and has served as an employee, volunteer and organizer for many environmental justice and human rights organizations, ranging in scope from Amnesty International to the Yukon Conservation Society, from CoCo (a Montreal umbrella organization that builds capacity in the allophone and anglophone community sector) to SPEC, the community group that spawned Greenpeace. Roburn has also worked as a journalist, editor, creative writer and media producer in areas concerning environmental justice.

## Introducing Climate Change and Climate Science

### *Generation Us: The Challenge of Global Warming*

by **ANDREW WEAVER**

Orca Book Publishers, 2011 \$9.95

Reviewed by **SHANNON STUNDEN BOWER**

**A**ndrew Weaver's *Generation Us: The Challenge of Global Warming* is the effort of a renowned scientist to explain the issue of climate change to an interested public. Weaver is the Lansdowne Professor and Canada Research Chair in climate modeling and analysis in the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, University of Victoria. *Generation Us*, Weaver's second book on climate change, is part of Orca Book Publishers' Rapid Reads series, which offers short, accessible books on topics or themes of interest to adult readers.

This is a book that is as much about science as about global warming. At least some of the doubt publicly expressed about global warming is attributable to misunderstandings of science, scientists, or the scientific method. Weaver's aim in the early part of the book is to explain the state of scientific knowledge on climate change, making clear that the overwhelming majority of experts concur that climate change is not just real, but also already well underway. Weaver is keen to make clear that, in the realm of science, this is as close as it gets to certainty.

Perhaps the most affecting section of the book is that in which Weaver addresses what he calls 'tipping points,' milestones beyond which we can

expect profound change in our global environment. The loss of the West Antarctic ice sheet, the die-back of the Amazon rain forest, the submersion of entire island nations: these are not revelations for anyone who has followed media coverage of the climate story, but they remain environmental changes so dramatic as to defy comprehension.

Weaver makes clear that while global warming has been branded as an environmental problem, it is really a social, political and economic problem. The book includes discussion of potential ways to limit greenhouse gas emissions, such as through a carbon tax or a cap and trade system. According to the publisher's webpage, following Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Accord, a copy of *Generation Us* was sent to all 308 Members of Parliament. Weaver himself stood up for election as a Green Party candidate in the May 2013 British Columbia provincial election (And he won the seat) . Whether through policy recommendations, by informing politicians, or in joining the political process, Weaver is clearly focused on contributing to the development of solutions to the climate problem.

Weaver explains why he feels global warming has not been tackled in any real way, pointing to the incongruity between the time frame for climate change results and the electoral cycle, as well as the tragedy of the commons. These are factors, certainly, but they are dwarfed in significance by what remains in Weaver's book the elephant in the room: capitalism. An economic system premised on ever-increasing production and consumption seems ripe for analysis in a book about how we are bumping up against our planet's environmental limits. Tackling capitalism and its attendant injustices would have



served to broaden Weaver's discussion of inequality, which in the book is limited to intergenerational inequality and inequalities between the minority and majority worlds.

Perhaps Weaver feels that calling out capitalism is not the best way to achieve his goal of educating the public about climate change and climate science. And it is certainly possible that refraining from such critique leaves him better positioned to appeal to the general public as an aspiring politician. As a primer for those relatively unfamiliar with climate change, or as of yet unconvinced by the underlying science, Weaver's book is an excellent starting point. Those interested in a more in-depth analysis of the social, political, and economic issues related to climate change will want to broaden their understanding with reference to other texts.

**SHANNON STUNDEN BOWER** is the research director at the Parkland Institute, a public policy research network affiliated with the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. She holds a PhD in Geography from the University of British Columbia, and has published in the fields of history, geography, and social and environmental policy.

### **Anthologising Avant-Pastoral Poetics**

*The Arcadia Project: North American Postmodern Pastoral* edited by **JOSHUA COREY** and **GEORGE CALVIN**

Waldrup, 2012 \$28.00

Reviewed by **JASMINE JOHNSTON**

In an age when the literary anthology is sometimes overlooked in favour of digital alternatives, *The Arcadia Project* as a collection of contemporary eco-poetry remains irreplaceable. It is large and eclectic yet well laid-out; it includes the work of emerging and well-established poets; and the topics covered in the poems are as strange and vast as the world itself, as it is defined by forces many are describing as characteristic of the "anthropocene." In this age, hope and despair are debated at ever-diverging scales both microscopic and macroscopic, and the poets who contribute to this anthology engage in these debates in the sciences and the arts in ways that suffuse the terminology of nuclear physics with empathy and the deaths of small creatures with cosmic significance. I challenge readers to find a zoological or botanical word not contained in this volume.

The Introduction to the anthology is written by Joshua Corey and begins, "as I write this, a man in a green Volkswagen convertible drives by at a stately pace, a potted Japanese maple perched in the passenger seat next to him climbing nearly to the height of the stoplight"; the driver and his plant stop to await the green. With this echo of Timothy Morton's seminal critique of eco-mimesis in the opening chapter of *Ecology Without Nature*—"As I write this, I am sitting on the seashore"—Corey suggests that the green VW and the potted maple paused at the light compose a "little allegory of ecological desire, the desire to take nature with us, to integrate it into the roadways and networks of the modern." But whereas Morton models the pastiche-effect of eco-mimesis when he continues, "No—that

was pure fiction; just a tease...The more I try to evoke where I am—the 'I' who is writing this text—the more phrases and figures of speech I must employ," Corey salutes Bruno Latour's equally seminal *We Have Never Been Modern*, in which Latour argues that the "moderns' greatness stems from their proliferation of networks, their acceleration of the production of traces, their multiplication of delegates, their groping production of relative universals." The modern renders and is rendered a ruptured and profligate network of vital things, despite itself.

Morton continues his chapter on the thrownness of being as it is revealed by writing by suggesting that the "more I try to show you what lies beyond this page, the more of a page I have," while Latour suggests that this profligate process in the world is hidden for the sake of the production of modern knowledge while construing postmodern thought to be inversely yet equally defeatist in its absolute relativism. However, *The Arcadia Project*, in its collective of poetic voices, engages in this maze of nature and culture by modelling Corey's assertion that "we must discover new pathways and destinations." When, for example, "weather becomes historical," likewise "'nature' becomes what the pastoral always already was: a charged ideological fantasy that is not *only* ideological, but a structured reality nine-tenths buried in the unconscious of society, sending us messages in the form of symptoms we name tsunamis, snowstorms, extinctions, asthma." So the poets in this postmodern pastoral mode depart from ecomimesis into vital fantasies enlivened by linguistic and imagistic surrealisms. But for whom do these poems speak, and to whom?

In answer, Corey goes on to comment that "this book is a call to imagination—not the imagination of dire futures, but to the interruptions of poetry. These interruptions—breaks in the mediated dreamscape of images passively consumed... are also connections, recalling readers to life as it is lived in diverse human and animal bodies, in particular biomes and cityscapes, attuned to intimations of the mortality of everything." Profligacy itself is the central message, a message that is a fecundity of exchanges between the past and future, birth and death, to form not a dark ecology, precisely, but perhaps an ecology of the twilight, a dim, crepuscular eco-poetics that may be the day's end or its start, depending upon the poet, the poem, and the span of interventions circulating between the dialogical materialities of the "boundaries of historical and ecological knowledge."

As William Butler Yeats's "rough beast" slouches out of poetic vision into the desert of the real, so do these poetic "interruptions," but the zoology of texts born within this anthology are, as Corey asserts, more about hope than despair. The poems are divided into four sections—New Transcendentalisms, Textual Ecologies, Local Powers, and Necro/Pastoral—that reflect the poems therein accurately as well as make visible some of the imaginative inheritances from previous poets working in ecological pastoral modes. I think of Henry David Thoreau, of course, but also see, for example, Lisa Robertson's "Wednesday," an excerpt from her poem *The Weather*, which is an ecstatic bricolage alike to Walt Whitman's or Dionne Brand's poetry. Yet, it seems to me, Robertson's work is quite unique in its juxtaposition of surreal tensions between images and

syntax with a lush yet wry tone—so “lurid conditions enter as fact,” and as weather floats “Clear blue but yellowish in the northwest; we sit and explore. Clouded towards the south; we will not be made to mean by a space. We’ll do newness,” and “Crickets accumulate; our expression of atmosphere has carnal intentions. We also do decay. Dusk invades us; the description itself must offer shelter.” Peter O’Leary’s long poem “The Phosphorescence of Thought,” which begins with “The wren / the mind / allows / to sing / alights,” evokes Wallace Stevens’ recursive phenomenological project in poems such as “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” or, even earlier, the eco-linguistic desires of poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose luminous syllogism, “It was a hard thing to undo this knot. / The rainbow shines but only in the thought” attempts to work through phenomenologies of belief. O’Leary’s poem also evokes William Everson’s bio-theological “A Cantic to the Waterbirds.”

Jody Gladding’s “Bark Beetle,” a translation from the insects, includes insect rhetoric and punctuation, pushing concrete poetry to “find hollow / find spell” where there are “rumors of flight and fungi / (of light and lying)” and comes complete with a Translator’s note informing readers that “certain elements of the grammar make translating bark beetle problematic. Only two verb tenses exist in bark beetle, the cyclical and the radiant.” In pushing the limits of punctuation, syntax, and temporal grammar (and thus discursive space-time), as well as interspersing illustrations of bark beetle “script” (photos of their tunnels in wood) within the text of the poem, Gladding turns the post-human gaze upon the act of translation. Ed Roberson’s “*Sequoia*

*Sempervirens*” echoes the botanical-mineral eroticism of Kenneth Rexroth’s poem “Lyell’s Hypothesis Again” in lines like “fruits of a pleasure / lifting our scale into the scale / of a weight we feel we’re part of” that become a meditation on humanity as a “fire dependent / species like this tree / one that grows around fire / as if burn were...embedded iron / a piece of shot.”

But it is impossible, in this review, to single out effectively individual poems in such a large assemblage of excellent poets: interested readers can learn about the contributors to this anthology at <<http://arcadiaproject.net/>>, which includes a table of contents and a teacher’s guide, amongst other resources. I believe this anthology to be a rich contribution to the development and study of eco-poetics. The book is a fine example of thoughtfully-organised form and ever-innovative content, of Arcadian visions that diverge and converge in a postmodern network of avant-pastoral fantasies of North America, becoming a ruptured and profligate figure of vital renderings attuned, ultimately, to a human scale.

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**JASMINE JOHNSTON** is a student of literature at the University of British Columbia.

***Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North*** by **TIMOTHY B. LEDUC** University of Ottawa Press, 2010 \$29.95

Reviewed by **DIANNE CHISHOLM**

Climate change poses extreme challenges to Inuit knowledge and Western science both, and for

collective wisdom to meet these challenges an intercultural dialogue is needed. The aim of Timothy Leduc’s book is to create a cosmological context for facilitating such dialogue, and to review events of recent political history that explain why such dialogue has not yet commenced. The reticence of Western scientists to collaborate with Inuit Elders/shamans on climate research, and Western governments’ misleading science with economic directives are, for Leduc, the main obstacles to the exchange and gaining of wisdom. He thus makes it his dual task to clarify to climate scientists the systemic breadth and real value of Inuit knowledge, and to critique the corporate mentality compromising international policy and delaying action on climate change.

Leduc’s primary strategy is to instruct Western readers about *Inuit Qaujimatugangit (IQ)* which roughly translates as “knowledge about the weather.” *Qaujimatuganit* is not, he insists, to be regarded as “traditional knowledge” (TK), or what Western science mistakes for a prehistoric and static set of survival techniques and practices, more an object of study rather than a dynamic and evolving knowledge production. Leduc uses the infinitive of the term—*Qajmaningit*—to stress the meaning of *IQ* as “living technology,” a process of flexible adaptation that perceives systemic climatological change with prospective cultural change.

To clarify how *IQ* has been misinterpreted and undervalued by Westerners, Leduc calls on Inuit philosopher and policy-maker Jaypeetee Arnakak with whom he has cultivated an informative and longstanding correspondence. Accordingly, *Qajmaningit* entails an intimate cognizance of *Sila*,

“the weather.” To possess *IQ* is to be *weather*-wise. For the Inuit, there is no knowledge, no Intelligence Quotient, apart from knowing how the weather changes, and how and when to change with it. Unlike Western science, *IQ* makes no distinction between the weather and the climate; all environmental disturbance, however local and ephemeral, merits responsive attention. The Inuit regard *Sila* to be not an object of study but a force of nature that envelopes and inspires living beings as “the breath of the world.” *Sila* is not a thing but a vast and vital, animate and animating spirit; not the air but air *currents*, not the sea but sea *waves*, *swells* and *tides*, and not only the rhythmic cycle of seasons and migrations but also the erratic and volatile activity of storms, floods, earthquakes, and northern lights. The Inuit arise from and die into *Sila*, whose Being is both out there (*Silajuaq*) and within (*Silatunig*). The way to know *Sila* is through intense immersion, cultural inheritance and shamanic vision. If Western climate science measures change with statistical probabilities and computerized forecasts, *Silatunig* attunes the senses to emerging patterns of turbulence. Both approaches attempt to navigate eco/systemic chaos and complexity. But only the latter cultivates an immanent and adaptive ecology of mind, whereas the former loses ecological foresight to mandates of economic growth.

Western climate science confirms Inuit fear (*irlira*) of accelerated warming and ecological upheaval in the circumpolar north but, Leduc explains, it fails to translate into effective policy and action due to the distortion of its findings by neoconservative and neoliberal ideologies and governments. Stephen Harper’s Conservatives,

following George W. Bush’s Republicans, bully science into overrating its ratio of *uncertainty* to pass legal standards of risk and allow frontier-like, laissez-faire industrialization. The Harper Government views dramatic degradation of the polar icecap less in terms of the destruction of northern habitats by southern greenhouse gas emissions than as the opening of the Northwest Passage for transoceanic trade and intensified extraction of regional mineral wealth. Liberal governments acknowledge scientific evidence of climate change but only to propose schemes of “sustainable development” without altering the nation’s dependence on fossil fuels or substantially lowering its emissions.

Conversely, *IQ* comprehends economic needs within the scope of ecological health. *IQ* entails observing and fulfilling cultural obligations to *Sedna*, the collective spirit of Arctic animal life that personifies *Sila*’s power to affect and be affected by all species of bodies (including social and industrial bodies). From an *IQ* perspective, the southward migration and influx of polar bears into Inuit communities is not a welcome harbinger of a greater harvest for local hunters but a terrifying sign that the ecological covenant between *Sedna* and the people has been disrespectfully breached. The problem for *IQ* is to not only discern what breach has occurred but also see a way to confession and reparation.

Leduc believes that southern polluters, once initiated in the wisdom of *IQ*, will be induced to acknowledge the part they play in the accelerated erosion of Arctic habitat and make “carbon confessions to *Sedna*.” He believes reparation will follow in the form of an *IQ*-inspired natural contract that binds the economy to the ecology with a *nomos*

of mutual welfare. Such a change in Western environmentality could see real, social and cultural reparations in the wake of colonial abuses, and give substance to Harper's recent, historic apology to Canada's indigenous peoples made hollow by his government's inaction on northern warming.

Much of Leduc's book reviews the follies and failures of U.S. and Canadian climate change policies and initiatives with the frustration of having foreseen alternative outcomes. Its most compelling chapters are those which clearly advocate that Western climate science and the International Panel on Climate Change incorporate *IQ* into their research and policy-making, respectively, with much greater vigor than they have to date. Less convincing is its prophesying a syncretism between *Silatunig* and Gaia theory to overcome the domineering, pro-development and apocalypse-bound ("burn, baby burn"!) wasteland theology of America's evangelical right.

**DIANNE CHISHOLM** is a professor of English at the University of Alberta.

***The Water Man's Daughter* by EMMA RUBY-SACHS**

Emblem, 2011 \$17.99

Reviewed by **LEE FREW**

**T**here are competing theories as to why the African National Congress shifted its development policy away from its roots in socialism, after attaining

power in South Africa's first free elections of 1994. Whatever these reasons may be, the post-Apartheid era has thus far been largely guided by a neoliberal agenda that has realized fiscal austerity, an export-oriented economy, and systemic privatization. Such is the sociological context of Emma Ruby-Sachs's *The Water Man's Daughter*. This ambitious first novel deftly illustrates how so-called public-private partnerships have perpetuated economic Apartheid while mobilizing groups of poor South Africans who are beset by the withdrawal of basic government services. Part problem novel and part murder mystery, *The Water Man's Daughter* brings together three women who each have a stake in the privatization of the water supply of a black township of Johannesburg. After the mutilated body of a Canadian executive of a multi-national corporation turns up in the township, the story focuses on Nomsulwa, a local activist leading the fight against this corporation's expansion into her community; Zembe, the township's police chief charged with solving the murder; and Claire, the executive's daughter who arrives from Canada to uncover the circumstances surrounding both his death and his work. Despite such an appealing premise, *The Water Man's Daughter* falters for a number of reasons.

Although the novel received generally favourable reviews in the media upon its publication in 2011, a survey of online reader reviews indicates a more critical response. If some consensus emerges, it's that *The Water Man's Daughter* has weaknesses in characterization, particularly with Claire, and its ending as a murder mystery flops. I would add that it misses the mark as a problem novel. The problem with the problem novel is that the story needs to be



more interesting than the social problem that forms its nucleus. Here, the effects of neoliberal policies on post-apartheid reconstruction, and the disappointments of the New South Africa, are by far the more compelling aspects of the novel than its characters or the solving of the murder. In my view, this contextual over-determination is likely the result of Ruby-Sach's praiseworthy interests, detailed in her author bio at the back of the book, as a lawyer, journalist, and consultant for the progressive advocacy organization Avaaz. Just as likely, however, is that the novel's concern with social justice is the means by which the author attempts to compensate for writing South Africa from the outside. The citation in her author bio that she actually lived in South Africa for stretches in 2003 and 2004, a point also reiterated consistently in media interviews, suggests some anxiety over her possible lack of ethos. Without engaging too directly in the debate about authorial credibility and authenticity, the South Africa portrayed in *The Water Man's Daughter* seems to correspond rather narrowly to its image that arises from the discourses of both anti-globalization and international development. All that's missing here—so it does strike me as an astonishing lacuna—is any reference to the HIV/AIDS crisis that has been devastating South Africa for the past 30 years. I just can't help but wonder what South Africans would have to say about this novel.

I think *The Water Man's Daughter* nevertheless achieves its greatest success from all of its sociology. Even as it hinders individual character development, the overarching political setting Ruby-Sachs establishes does allow for some depiction of complex motivations and allegiances. Although both

Claire and her father are flat characters—she as a privileged dip, he as a condescending villain—the South Africans tend to fare much better. (Why is the novel titled for her?) For instance, Zembe chooses social justice over criminal justice in the end, a decision made difficult by her religious faith, and further rendered ambiguous because she knows it will advance her career. The corruption at the level of local politics is also convincingly portrayed as a disquieting calculus of male chauvinism and desperate poverty, among the other legacies of Apartheid. Laudably, the novel conveys that what the multi-national corporate types see as backwardness or incompetence from the people they seek to profit off of is, in fact, a set of rational actors working very hard and very smart with what they have.

**LEE FREW** recently defended his dissertation at York University, where he teaches Canadian and postcolonial literatures and animality studies. He is also preparing a forthcoming critical edition on the works of Ernest Thompson Seton.

*Of Moose and Men: A Wildlife Vet's Pursuit of the World's Largest Deer* by **DR. JERRY HAIGH**

ECW Press, 2012 \$22.95

Reviewed by **SITA-RANI MACMILLAN**

Immediately prior to immigrating to the plains of Saskatchewan, Dr. Jerry Haigh, as a trained Glasgow veterinarian, worked with wildlife in Africa. It is evident within the first few pages that he would soon

be thrust into action after his arrival, and the bitter realities of harsh Canadian winters fall to the wayside. He is able to balance and intertwine his research and stories to create a mesmerizing read about the moose. Even if the reader has very little background knowledge of such a creature, this book brings the moose and its history to life.

As a nature enthusiast and journal writer I devoured his unique storytelling, which explores both the humorous and serious aspects of moving to a new country and working with the Canadian wildlife. I recall one particular laugh out loud moment when he describes the eagerness of bears waiting for the moose calves to be born. Haigh personifies their excitement imagining the bears checking their calendars on their smartphones: “In Alaska grizzly bears may take 80 per cent of the calves born in the short space of a few weeks. One can almost imagine them slobbering with excitement and checking their smartphone calendars to see when June 1 will roll around and the new calf crop will hit the ground.”

Squeezed into these 249 pages are stories about his first animal crisis at the zoo (an emaciated white-tailed deer doe that did not survive an immobilizing dart) and how he would eventually problem solve immobilizing large animals; weighing moose for research; moose and captivity; the meaning of antlers; disease and what affects a moose; and the hunting and taming of moose.

Dr. Haigh’s research includes reading papers, consulting other professionals, moose enthusiasts, and local Aboriginal peoples, including elders to ascertain the history and importance of this great beast. He casts a large net when seeking information, utilizing technical terminology while connecting

readers to the information regardless of their background.

From a reader who had little previous knowledge of this topic, *Of Moose and Men* is an enjoyable read and makes you want to learn more about our Canadian moose. The book is a comprehensive read and has a wonderful, easy to follow narrative voice that encourages the reader to connect with the events. This is truly a remarkable book about a remarkable animal.

**SITA-RANI MACMILLAN** has a Masters in Education, is a journal writing workshop facilitator, and contributes a monthly article for the online magazine *Nourish Publication*. She completed her graduate studies in journal writing for personal growth and is an avid reader of memoirs and all things narrative. As a Canadian Cree–Scottish writer, Sita-Rani is forever interested in learning about the country and its inhabitants from people to animals.

*An Environmental History of Canada* by **LAUREL SEFTON MACDOWELL**

UBC P, 2012 \$49.95

Reviewed by **PHILIP VAN HUIZEN**

*An Environmental History of Canada* has been a long time coming, and not just because, as venerated University of Toronto historian Laurel Sefton MacDowell admits, the book took twenty years to write. Unlike in the United States, where environmental history has flourished since its

inception in the early 1970s, Canadian historians have taken much longer to explicitly pay attention to the reciprocal relationship between nature and humans. As recently as 2003 J. R. McNeill, in assessing the international spread of environmental history, argued that: “it is not easy to get useful information about Canadian environmental history because Canadianists have almost entirely ignored the genre” (18). The same could no longer be written today. Environmental history caught on in Canada in the late 1990s, and exploded during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. MacDowell’s book is indicative of this change of interest on the part of Canada’s historians, joining studies by Graeme Wynn, Alan MacEachern and William Turkel, and Neil Forkey in synthesizing the growth of the field over the past fifteen years.

As a synthesis of original works on Canada’s environmental history, MacDowell’s book is excellent and will no doubt be foundational to undergraduate courses in the field for years to come. The prose is fashioned with the uninitiated in mind; it’s jargon-free and includes concise definitions of important concepts and terms. Citations are few and far between; each chapter instead ends with a list of the books that informed it and another of recommended further reading. There are also illustrations on virtually every page and nearly as many vignettes about important topics and people that run parallel to the book’s narrative.

The first two chapters cover an immense amount of ground, setting the stage for the bulk of the book, which focuses on the period after Canada’s confederation in 1867. MacDowell starts with Canada’s geologic and geographic formation over

hundreds of millions of years, moves quickly through the period of migration and settlement by Canada’s first peoples, and ends with European contact and colonization, first by the Vikings and then by France, Spain, and Britain. Although MacDowell is careful to show that humans have been struggling against, adapting to, and changing non-human nature in what is now Canada since they first arrived thousands of years ago, she is also clear that Europe’s colonization fundamentally altered human-nature relationships that had evolved to a level of relative sustainability over thousands of years.

The next eleven chapters constitute the meat of MacDowell’s subject matter (and that of environmental historians of Canada more generally), focusing on the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapters progress chronologically and by theme, divided into three sections. The first, “Industrialism, Reform, and Infrastructure,” explores the first stages of the industrial revolution, the resulting conservation movement that reacted to the “waste” of natural resources, and the cultural and environmental impact of such things as larger cities, steam engines, and cars. The second section, “Harnessing Nature, Harming Nature,” tackles the second industrial revolution, when electricity made mechanization an everyday reality for most Canadians, and focuses on the impacts of this revolution on water resources and food and agricultural production and consumption. The final section, “The Environmental Era,” takes the story right up to the present, examining cultural shifts in values placed on nature as a result of the environmental movement after the 1960s, and juxtaposes these with the immense environmental

destruction that has continued apace anyway, including species extinction, toxic pollution, and climate change.

Although *Environmental History of Canada* is more textbook than monograph, MacDowell does not shy away from developing a charged argument over the course of the book. Similar to the stance Ted Steinberg takes in his environmental history of the United States, *Down to Earth*, MacDowell is highly critical of Canada's overall relationship with the nature that sustains it. The arc of MacDowell's narrative traces how Canada transitioned from a colony to a colonizing nation in its own right, one that is just as dependent on recklessly exploiting the natural resources that first attracted Europeans, but where its inhabitants are increasingly separated from these connections to nature through such processes as urbanization, consumerism, and technological innovation. "*Sustained economic growth*," she argues, "not sustainable development, has been the driving force in Canadian history." Even the "environmental era" did not slow this trend, since "Policy makers ... were motivated as much by commercial gain as ... by a concern for the environment" (5).

MacDowell thus does not sidestep the common criticism that environmental historians generally tell pessimistic stories. As she sees it, there is not much to celebrate in the history of Canada's relationship to its wild nature, although she is quick to point out that there have always been minority voices advising alternative policies and technologies.

Overall, though, as an introduction to Canadian environmental history, MacDowell's study is amongst the best so far attempted; it will be essential reading for anyone interested in learning

about Canada's historical relationship with its environment.

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## Recollected in Liquidity

*Distillō* by **BASMA KAVANAGH**

Gaspereau Press, 2012 \$19.95

Reviewed by **TRAVIS V. MASON**

*When you think of it, water is everything. Or rather, Water ventures into everything and becomes everything.*

—Gwendolyn MacEwen, “Water”

The opening lines of Gwendolyn MacEwen's “Water,” the first poem in her book-length *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* (1982), seem both the most and least obvious place to begin a review of *Distillō*, Basma Kavanagh's debut collection. Although water isn't the only phenomenon animating *Distillō*, it suffuses many of the poems, venturing into the poet's environment and onto her body, and in doing so, it satisfies MacEwen's frank claims. But water's ubiquity plays an ironic role in MacEwen's book, which traverses deserts and confronts thirst through the eponymous historical figure. Kavanagh's poems coalesce to document a year living in the anti-desert, the rainforest of coastal Vancouver Island. So, while MacEwen's poem announces water's ubiquity against a setting that largely exists in the absence of water, Kavanagh's poems address water's multivalent presence in a place defined by rain. As if to confront the stereotype head on, Kavanagh titles the opening section “Moisture,” leaving the remaining sections to explore other elements worthy of poetic attention.

If the book has a thesis, it's that humans are ecological beings ensconced in the endless chaos of

life. If we often forget this—thus necessitating such reminders as Kavanagh offers—we do so because of the observational, organizational, analytical roles we choose. These roles, embodied by historians, scientists, poets, are on the surface innocuous; at their extremes, however, they have been and continue to fulfil destructive anthropocentric, colonial desires. Kavanagh imagines these more malevolent manifestations of humans' engagement with the earth while writing connections that complicate presumptions regarding humans as separate from the earth system. This tension saturates the opening sequence, “Taxonomy,” in which the speaker takes on the job of classifying six species of rain. The impulse to classify admits the problematic tendency to name on the way to knowing and controlling—for scientific and geopolitical reasons—at the same time as it recognizes how much remains unknown: both how much of the world and how much of ourselves. The poems, like spring rain melting snow to reunite sun and plants, dissolve the line between world and self.

This is a fascinating opening sequence that works on multiple levels: as a kind of pseudo-scientific classification of rain (evoking that hoary myth about Inuit words for snow yet imbuing the project with a curiosity and intelligence that old myth doesn't have); and as a way of classifying humans—poets and scientists alike—as namers. It's a way of owning up to what has rightly been deemed at once an enduring problem and a crowning achievement of Western humanism and science, especially in a colonial context. Kavanagh largely avoids the problematic elements of naming as practice, however; instead, her classification of various rain species

—“*Distillo inlumino: an illuminating drizzle; uncommon,*” “*Imbris micans: a shower, not a true rain. . .*” and “*Pluvia densa: a true rain, heavy and penetrating. . .*”—invites readers to get to know a specific place through one of its defining physical characteristics. We all know it *rains* on the west coast; but few introductions to that rain—those rains—have the capacity to render the element distinctive in the act of gaining familiarity with its various manifestations.

Other poems similarly animate the organic flux in which humans, too, participate. In “Line” (26), the speaker and her companion paddle a kayak in Pacific waters; the wake they create attracts “A curl of dolphins, / glossy commas” that follow along as if the line in the water were “umbilical: / squiggle of breath, / connecting us to them.” By the end of the next poem, “Touch” (27), in which the two kayakers embrace each other—“*my chest on your chest,*” “*skin transformed by skin*”—they also embrace their affinity, marked more by energy than by theriomorphism, with the dolphins: “*endorphined, dolphined us: / we dive, we surface.*” In the brief, suggestive “Flux,” the speaker traces such connections back to the Earth system responsible for the comings and goings of all molecules:

Every pore a doorway;  
soil, bark, lungs. Earth  
birthing trees, bulbs, bugs,  
the rocks, the rivers, is. Push

and pull across this membrane;  
entrance, exit, *chorus*.

Death's inevitability, a finality that threatens in most Western mythologies to put paid to the wonders of

life, here occupies a space between “entrance” and “*chorus*,” between life and living. These are not dour eco-poems. Rather, they burble and gurgle with “suck of sand / at water's edge” (“Island”), with “salal's young shoots / springing from the moss, plump / and moist and round” (“Hunger”), with “Nymph-settled neighbourhoods” and “ocean's meaty, slow-formed plinth” (“Old Growth”).

“Bear” contributes to the collection's openness to humour as an antidote to the earnestness to which attentive, species-specific poetry can often succumb. Even its placement following “Perfume,” a four-part love poem about two brown northwestern salamanders (*Ambystoma gracile ssp. gracile*, the epigraph informs us) that respond to scent, announces a comic turn with its own references to scent: “Endure the nasty fug” and “*Is that a wet carpet?*” The pair in this poem, unlike the salamanders, inhabit the same space but are clearly not destined for love (*pace* Lou and the bear in Marian Engel's *Bear*, I can't help but think). The encounter, dismissed at first as unwelcome happenstance, you “[c]rossing the street when you smell it,” it “reeking, chum-drunk” dropping its lunch before wandering off. But once the smell returns, “[y]ou realize, this fucker / is following you, preceding you” and generally making it difficult to navigate both the town in which you and the bear walk and the stories that warn of the bear's potential to attack, crushing “accidentally, on purpose, what matters most.” Depending on your sense of humour, this is funny or terrifying. I think it's both, which is hilarious (in evolutionary terms).

Still other poems return to the precision and lyricism of the field guide: “In Leaf {Bigleaf Maple:



*Acer macrophyllum*},” “Mystic {Bog Myrtle: *Myrica gale*},” “Rice Root {*Fritillaria camschatcensis*},” “Poison {False Hellebore, Devil's Bite: *Veratrum viride*}.” And if the mesmerizing alliteration of Kavanagh's lines at times favours the proclivities of us, the linguistic species, I'm reminded throughout *Distillō* that language, as part of whatever bioregion you inhabit, doesn't have to stink. Salamander your way into this book and know that, as for *Ambystoma gracile ssp. gracile*, “[w]ater is our element. . .”

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***I see my love more clearly from a distance* by NORA GOULD**

Brick Books, 2012 \$19.00

Reviewed by **DILIA NARDUZZI**

**A**s a reader, I tend to avoid poetry. I do this not because I don't enjoy reading it, and not because I don't think it is important; instead, I tend to give poetry a wide berth because I find that the best poetry excavates emotions I didn't even know needed evoking. When I finished reading Nora Gould's

award-winning debut poetry collection, *I see my love more clearly from a distance*, I experienced my hallmark of an excellent book of poetry: I was crying, and I hardly minded. This anecdote probably says more about me than it does about poetry more generally, I know. Still, I think that poetry, more than fiction or any other form of writing, chisels away at something that shifts readers into inscrutable and visceral territory. At times, I think my tendency to hide from poetry acts as a kind of protective mechanism: my psyche needs to be ready for poetry to do its deep-seated work.

Prologue aside, I think it was Gould's title that compelled me to want to read her work; something about the employment of “distance” appealed to me as a way in which to see more distinctly “love.” This is because the juxtaposition of distance with the thing that most of us see as being very close, love, taunts our conceptions of both notions. Gould's themes throughout the collection move between the natural world in and around her family's Prairie ranch: birds and animals, life and death, illness, pain and the body, marriage, children, and grief. In “Cause of death obvious: rib cage crushed,” Gould writes, “The pathologist will turn me in his hands, / scrutinize, wonder what he might have observed / from a distance, / how I moved my body / how my body moved” (29). Earlier in this poem, Gould writes a kind of history of scars on the body, and in these closing lines, there are elements of observing bodies, medicalization, the history of a moving body, and, again, the notion of seeing something more clearly when one steps back (“from a distance”). In this stepping back, Gould seems to make the body an object among other objects she

talks about throughout the poem.

I also read a kind of searching for one's own identity amidst the noise of life / the quiet of Charl to be prevalent in these poems. In the poem, "I had known the finesse of his tongue," Gould fashions an accomplished poem about, at least in part, making sounds and mass from one's throat and mouth. She writes an anatomy of spitting, or "horking," that impressively underscores the action of expelling phlegm. At the same time, the poem discusses thoughts about using one's throat for speaking: "With the tip of his tongue pressed / to bridge his teeth, he builds a pressurized / trap, propels his spit in a synchronized / elegance of lips, tongue and breath. / Why doesn't he hork sounds from his larynx, / shape them into words with that same / exuberance" (31). These lines speak to communication and relationship, and how the noises of our throats can create different kinds of manifestations. There is desire here, at the same time, bulk and quiet.

Gould also writes about her experiences with endometriosis, the pain she feels; again the poems that reference this illness bespeak a commentary on medicalization, and the positioning of the body as an object. In "As if that absolved him, made him not complicit," Gould links her experiences with surgery for endometriosis with the death of her father: "I never saw his body, / my body parts in stainless steel, my / tissue thin-sectioned under the microscope, /... The doctor exhibited me to residents / before the second surgery *here, proof that / a woman with endometriosis / can have children...*" (41). There are other places in other poems where Gould shifts the subject of the poem around so that our

understanding of who/what the poem is about is adjusted; often animals and people are connected within a few lines, concurrent experiences made to be linked in some way. Another example of this can be found in "Some nights he breathed up all the air," where a red-tailed hawk is spoken about in the same lines as Charl, and even, perhaps, the poet herself.

While this poetry collection is about a lot of things, as I mentioned above, the emotion that seems most resonant is that of sadness, but not an indulgent sadness, but a sadness that is appropriate when one considers the largeness and complexity of life. In "Grief submerged with her brilliant feet, tucked up in flight," Gould talks about a bird—the Northern Shoveler—who "lost her eggs to crows," and looks around and around in the water for the eggs, "tending to orange along the cutting edges," which is as mundane as can be in the animal world, and, for me, unspeakably sad to think about that duck looking for her eggs. In "The kids took the sifter to the sandbox years ago," Gould expresses her desire to tell Charl everything about her day, and wonders about the funeral in Charl's family, and the poem ends, "I'm wondering how I would mourn for him, / if he would mourn for me" (97). The last two poems of the collection, "Let me rub your hands with pumice" and "I see my love more clearly from a distance," were the ones that finally drew my tears. While these last two poems evoke all of the big 'things' in life: love, death, living on the land, loss, illness, desire, getting older, and more, the emotions of the whole of the collection come through here. While these final poems are undeniably full of emotion, this collection truly reads as a narrative in pieces, with these poems acting as the final vignettes

of the story. I recommend Gould's debut collection without hesitation. Remember, though, if you're like me, carve out the time you truly need to sit with these poems. You'll find something you need here, perhaps something you didn't yet realize. *I see my love more clearly from a distance* has reawakened my desire to read poetry. I won't be avoiding it again anytime soon.

**DILIA NARDUZZI** finished a PhD in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University in 2011. She recently taught a course called Nature, Literature, Culture and one of her dissertation chapters was published in the March 2013 issue of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*. She currently works as a freelance writer for higher education textbook publishers and as an academic editor.

# Parting Glance

## Gus Curtis



Photography has been Gus' passion for as long as he can remember. He has been involved in photography for the past 30 years, but four years ago left a successful career in construction to pursue photography full time. A citizen of both the US and Canada, Gus has photographed wild animals and landscapes on both sides of the border. He is particularly drawn to places where wild animals thrive in their natural habitats and care is taken to ensure the survival of indigenous species. Gus is particularly interested in bears and other large North American mammals. He also has a keen eye for stunning landscapes and beautiful light. All the wildlife photos on Gus' website are of animals in their natural environments. His photographs often tell a story about the animals in their daily lives. On a wildlife photo shoot, Gus spends a lot of time with his subjects. Over time, Gus' presence in the field does not inhibit them, so his images capture the animals' natural behaviour and emotions. The animals in his photographs seem to be making a personal connection with the lens. Gus is a freelance contributor to Canadian Press and is an active member of the North American Nature Photographers' Association (NANPA). Go to **GUS CURTIS** to see more.