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

The Goose

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Contents

Editor's Notebook

New element, Lisa Szabo-Jones

These are the marks of rain, these are wave ripples, mudcracks, the scrapes of leaves—yet, despite the heft in hand, the pocks and fissures my fingers trace, I cannot hold long to the deep time—the varied climate—preserved in these fossils. I try again, and follow the contours of three-, seven-, eight-toed clawed , deep-sunk prints, a trail made by a sagging belly. 350 million years old. These marks letter this red-mud beach, remnant and storied accretions of place. School children, university students, holiday-makers, locals stroll the beach, squat and overturn rocks in the hopes of finding something more, something grander: a bone, a fossilized shark fin, perhaps. Human footprints don't last long on this beach; high tides twice a day ensure their transience.

Walking back up from the beach, glancing down into the ravine, though, I notice that we leave another mark: car tires, oil barrel, trash. Will any of these things fossilize? I often play a game where I try to imagine moments of the past that carry spectres of familiarity in the present: for instance, what would the Cooking Lakes area outside of Edmonton be like if it were inhabited by giant beavers today? Would we tread differently among the kettles and knobs? Here, on this beach, I try to think deep time into the future, and imagine what marks we will leave. Will there be 350 million year impressions of a Michelin tire tread, the scrapings in mud from a plastic shopping bag hooked on a tree branch, the pockmarks left by scattered cigarette butts?

Of course, there's a bit of perverse humour in these exercises, but there's also grief. Grief, because there's an element of possibility in these imaginings, both past and future, which make the present so filled with urgency. Are these the marks we want to leave behind? I had a brief debate with a prominent Canadian poet at October's Under Western Skies Conference at Mount Royal University on the issue of nostalgia and grief. I troubled over the political inefficacy of nostalgia, how it tends to lock us into passivity if overindulged. I don't advocate stifling grief and soldiering onward without a backward glance, as perhaps was assumed. After some disagreement (some at cross-purposes), we came to a consensus that nostalgia has a place, as a necessary process of grief.

Grief can mobilize. There is a time when grief gapes open, and the wounds want, need the fresh bite of air, salt, tears, anger; there's then a time when remembrances (soft and hard) quietly slip in to heal, to soothe, to mask the scars. As someone who visits too often ghosts of grief, I constantly struggle with the next stage: how do these memories unfold into something with possibility for change? What are the words, the actions, that return us to the processes of (the) living? For me, the process began with a class, began with a prairie long poem. A poem of a place far-removed from my own, but one that unlocked new possibilities for seeing my wet, west coast home.

This poem taught me, more importantly, that there are ways of writing grief without writing about grief. I can trace the contours of the scars left over time, still feel their stoney weight, but now I long not so much for restoration of all things past (there are too many impossibilities to contemplate in that desire). Rather, with the past held loosely yet not lightly, I look to people, places, things near at hand, here, now, in the present, conscientious of the marks I create and will leave behind. That poem was Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue*, that class, Laurie Ricou's The Canadian Long Poem.

This year marked Kroetsch's passing, and with him we have lost one of Canada's eminent poets. And, as Pamela Banting's remembrance shows at the end of this issue in Parting Glance, he was much more than a poet: he was friend and mentor to many—and a promoter of achieving impossibilities.

In this issue, we feature poetry from Vivian Demuth, Brian Bartlett, Jonathan Meakin, and Derrick Stacey Denholm. A photo-research

essay from Maria Whiteman's ongoing project *Taxonomia* appears in "Edge Effects." Lisa Szabo-Jones interviews Canadian poet, writer, and environmental journalist, Harry Thurston, who read at ALECC's inaugural conference in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia last August. Of course, as always, we have an ever-expanding selection of book reviews, and an extensive listing of new and upcoming publications.

Finally, as you have probably noticed, this issue of *The Goose* has flown past spring into summer. As Paul and I move into our fifth year of our PhDs, we are finding time more of a juggle, and so as a trial we're switching to summer and winter issues. Enjoy!

~ Lisa Szabo-Jones

Lisa Szabo-Jones

Brian Bartlett / From *Ringing Here & There: A Nature Calendar*

Damselfly, Lisa Szabo-Jones

M*y ongoing "nature calendar" project, begun in April 2010, will eventually be composed of 365 paragraphs, one for each day of the year, each drafted by hand and later revised to fit within the 420-character parameter of Facebook updates. Other excerpts have been published in* The Malahat Review *and are to appear in a special Robert Bly tribute issue of* Germination.

April 2: Two black dogs off their leashes lunged along the beach, as if in attack mode – but ignored me & sped into further freedom & space. Over the ocean an hour later, sundogs glowed on either side of the horizon-touching sun – light caught in crystals of ice fog, fractured, comet-like, the true sun's surrogates or pets. This evening might've been called Concentration, there at a beach named Crystal Crescent.

April 3: The year's first Grackles are back, their rusty-metal voices scraping as they flap between spruces. A Blue Jay rips air with attention-seizing shrieks. Even a Starling's mimicry today favours the harsh over the whistled or warbled. It's as if all the gentle-voiced are absent, or resting, reserving their strength, the day made by a blacksmith from whose anvil varied hardnesses ring. A Raven sounds like it agrees.

April 16: On a bank where a lake & a brook meet, wood chips are strewn around poplar stumps ringed with teeth marks. Since the lake is so close, the beavers need build no dam, but their lodge was recently patched & freshened. They share the neighborhood with a species suggested by signs caught among the branches & mud: a bicycle tire, a white plastic bucket, chip bags, & a torn t-shirt with a cartoon hawk across its front.

April 18: Awake again, Little Brown Bats emerge during the day, since the nights are still too cold for flies to flick about. The bats tolerate more light now than in June & July. Later they will feast in the darkest hours, when flies seek blood & feces until dawn. But for now, leaning toward summer, spring still presses a reluctant shoulder back against winter, & bats circle a pond under a white sky hinting of sunlight.

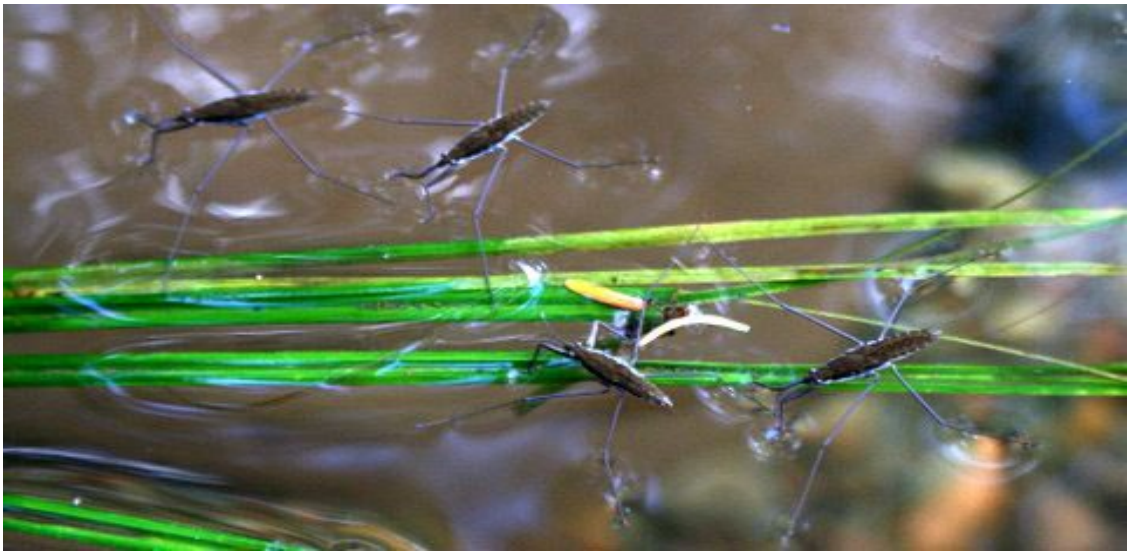
April 20: I like to think, singularly, "Old Friend Crow, Old Friend Jay, Old Friend Nuthatch" – though that makes the many one, as if each species were an individual. As a child I never said that, but now in my sixth decade I do, since I've seen so many in so many seasons, years & places. *Old Friend*, but this evening the birds on the trail may only be a year or two young, & it's *I* who am – and was – the oldest one.

May 10: Owl Survey night: in the Pockwock Watershed woods, we drive for hours of timed stops, play a cd of owl calls from a boom-box on the jeep's hood. Our motionless, silent spells of listening are pools of patience & expectation. Just as I bite into a piece of whiskey-filled toffee to ward off the chill, a Barred Owl lands nearby. Its mix of hoot, bark & babble is even more resonant than the whiskey's gentler shock.

May 18: Wood Violets, tiny islands of white, make up in numbers what they lack in size, as if spring's first favours went to smallness. In tree tops by the pond three Black-crowned Night Herons perch at noon – "Night" herons? Shark or tuna line, washed ashore, is wound & wound around a driftwood

hulk. A Winter Wren sings its high, superlatively speedy song – the days too short & too few for singing everything that could be sung.

BRIAN BARTLETT teaches creative writing and literature at St. Mary's University in Halifax. He is the author of *The Watchmaker's Table* (Goose Lane), *Travels of the Watch* (Gaspereau), *Being Charlie* (Alfred Gustav Press), *Wanting the Day: Selected Poems* (Goose Lane), *The After Life of Trees* (McGill-Queen's University Press), *Granite Erratics* (Ekstasis), *Underwater Carpentry* (Goose Lane), *Planet Harbour* (Goose Lane), *Cattail Week* (Villeneuve), *Brother's Insomnia* (New Brunswick Chapbooks), and *Finches for the Wake* (Fiddlehead Poetry Books), and he is editor of *Earthly Pages: The Poetry of Don Domanski* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press) and *Don McKay: Essays on His Works* (Guernica).



Water gliders, Brian Bartlett

Edge Effects

Maria Whiteman / Taxonomia

My work engages in an exploration of the complex ways in which we have come to understand animals and our relationship to them. As a visual artist, I am especially compelled by the ways in which animals are visualized and put on display, and how these techniques of representation afford them cultural significance. I am currently examining displays that transform flesh, feathers, and bone into knowledge about Nature. *Taxonomia* investigates the archive of animal bodies stuffed in jars, held in place by pins, wrapped up in string, and stuffed, mounted and displayed in an effort to render the anarchy of the natural world into the strict categories of science.

Knowledge of the animal world through biological taxonomy—domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and finally species—is an ancient practice, with origins in the work of Aristotle (in the ancient world) and Linnaeus (the forefather of modern practices). It is also a practice fast coming to an end, as science shifts from learning about animals through visual display to the invisibility of the double-helix of DNA. *Taxonomia* consists primarily of

photographs taken in the University of Alberta's Museum of Zoology, which has significant holdings of animal specimens (the Ichthyological Collection alone consists of more than 200,000 specimens representing 40 Orders and over 200 Families). My photographs focus especially (though not exclusively) on animals held in formaldehyde-filled jars. These specimens of floating flesh, rendered mute and colourless, gesture back to the origins of zoological collections and the dreams and fantasies associated with them—everything from the scientific desire to organize nature to collections of curiosities.

MARIA WHITEMAN completed her MFA at Pennsylvania State University in 1999. Maria is Assistant Professor of Drawing and Intermedia in Fine Arts at the University of Alberta. Her current art practice explores two main themes: relationships between industry, community and nature; and the place of animals in our cultural and social imaginary. In addition to her studio work, she conducts research in art theory (especially with respect to photography), animal studies and cultural studies. Her most recent exhibition was De Anima at FAB Gallery (2010) and one of her pieces was selected for the Canadian Landscape Juried Exhibition. She taught previously in Multimedia, Studio Art and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca

Vivian Demuth

3 Poems

Lisa Szabo-Jones

Caribou

1.
A crevassed grey antler
with orange trim of lichens
fragment of caribou.
two-pronged, not heavy for thick-
necked female of
Rocky foothills.
This disgorged body part of pregnant
caribou, flies at birth
offering of bony art
waiting to fall.

2.
Woodland caribou in small groups, families
easily spooked
endangered since 1985
80-150 years for forests to grow
lichen for caribou.
Risk factors: logging, coal mining
& oil &
gas exploration
and risks unknown
a chance of loss.

3.
Splayed hooves click through death's graveyard
running panting clicking
humans scratch together word fragments
car(e)-i? bou? who? try caribou rights.
Globally, people are pawing with ardent green pens
fervent foundations of community rights
& shattering ground swells of nature rights
birthing offering hoping.

Woman in Green #1

"Green, it's your green I love." — Lorca

On her first day on the job, male park rangers
turned greener than their uniforms, frothed at the

mouth and chanted 10-codes, 10-4. They thought she
seemed to be deer-like.
With ungulate eyes, bionic ears, a hushed
strut in a spruce green uniform, her nose
began twitching as the spring hunt sounded. Oh,
on that first, moonless

night, the green men blinded her with rabid flashlights
stroked her ribs and tits with pitons. But her breasts
slipped away, the heart climbed upslope. Her body,
shocked and pawed, thrown

at a grizzly, dead in a bear trap. But that's not
who she was. The wind whistled: *Teach your toes to*
become claws. Recollect. The bear undressed, gave
her his coat for the

cold then succumbed in her humming arms. She re-
membered something old as she stroked his broken
carcass. She ripped off her tattered uniform
then took his bony

penis inside her until she felt her breasts
re-grow with antennae as nipples. She crept home,
adorned in the bear coat. At dawn, she dressed in
a fresh uniform.

In a sharp new tie, she arrived at work late.
The rangers tried to hide their blue shivering
skin. But she saw. These sheepish stewards cracked jokes
as she offered them

a lovely toothpick to soothe the blood between
their teeth. They picked, barely sucking, not knowing,
it was the bear's prick. She took notes and began
to like them again.

Woman in Green #3

Woman in green vacuums the lime sprayed on dirt
roads so fir trees can cross safely. She sings to
porcupines who respond with raucous love. She
hides earwig insects

in mountaineer's ears with geographical
precision. She protects the earwigs from
scientist's fiscal desires dressed up in
lab coats and park acts.

She cradles fallen climbers in a metal
basket that she flies to slick uniformed men.
Men hate rescue by her. Male rangers pose
for the news, while dreams

of dead mountaineers float in bloodstains on her
boots. She squats to pee on them while the ranger
men stare scowling. Forest breezes caress the
pages of her skin.

VIVIAN DEMUTH is a Canadian poet, visual artist, and fiction writer. She is the author of a novel, *Eyes of the Forest*, and a poetry collection, *Breathing Nose Mountain*, and her work has appeared in anthologies in Canada, Europe, Mexico, and the United States. Vivian has worked as a park ranger/park warden, an outdoor educator, and as a mountain firelookout in the Rocky Mountains, where she hosts an annual Poetry on the Peaks event. She has taught community-based creative writing workshops and serves on PEN's Freedom to Write Committee. Her website is www.viviandemuth.wordpress.com

List of Publications

Eyes of the Forest. Novel. Grande Prairie, Alberta: Smoky Peace Press, 2007.

Breathing Nose Mountain. Poetry chapbook. Hoboken, NJ: Long Shot Productions, 2004.

Bear War-den, a novel-in-progress.

Earth Works, a recently completed poetry manuscript.

Poems and short stories included in the following selected anthologies and journals: *Writing the Land: Alberta Through its Poets*, *The Boreal Factor*, *Nose Mountain Moods*, *Lake (forthcoming)*, *Ciclo Literario*, *Poets for Living Waters*, *La Revue Commune*, *Napalm Health Spa*, *Other Voices*, *Reflections*, *Long Shot*, *Wildflowers*, *Political Affairs*, *Logos.*

Book Reviews

"Bargain Hunting," Lisa Szabo-Jones

Book Review Contents

The Goose welcomes submissions of criticism, fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, photo essays, and web-ready artwork that address the relationships between literature, culture, and environment. Authors need not be Canadian, but preference will be given to submissions that are connected to Canada in some way (near or far). We are open to submissions that blur the boundaries between literature, criticism, and art. If you are also interested in writing a book review or a Regional Feature introducing our readership to a Canadian region of your choice, please send a query to contactus@alecc.ca. Submit your work as an email attachment to submissions@alecc.ca. For full submission guidelines visit www.alecc.ca/goose.php

The Sea Captain's Wife by **BETH POWNING**

Vintage, 2010 $22.00

Reviewed by **SUSANNE MARSHALL**

Atlantic Canadian bookstores and bookshelves are filled with editions of journals kept by sea captains of the nineteenth century, detailing their daily lives onboard ship, their mercantile triumphs, and the frequent perils they faced during their circumnavigations of the earth by sailing ship. What is less known is that their wives sometimes accompanied them on these voyages, sharing hardship and adventure, while meeting—or discarding—the social expectations of a Victorian woman of leisure. Accounts like the letters of Grace Ladd (*Quite a Curiosity: The Sea Letters of Grace F. Ladd*, ed. Louise Nichols), on my own bookshelf, are a fascinating window into the nautical life of more than a century ago particularly because they outline the experience —which readers themselves share, though differently, through barriers of time and culture— of being entirely alien to this world, grasping to identify its cultural expectations and boundaries.

Powning's well-researched novel, which includes a glossary, draws on these women's travel accounts to construct its narrative, placing themes of alienation, isolation, and the desire for freedom at its heart. The plot traces the story of Azuba, the young wife of austere sea captain Nathaniel Bradstock, who chafes at village life in the fictional New Brunswick shipbuilding village of Whelan's Cove and, owing to her community's suspicions of her wildness and infidelity, is grudgingly granted her desire to sail with her husband as he follows trade routes from South America to Europe and Hong Kong. Azuba's naïve euphoria at escaping the confinement of her ordinary life is dispelled as she realizes the spheres she thought so opposed are actually in some ways parallel: she exchanges the ornamented "sail house" on land for a ship's cramped quarters below decks; she is herself like "the little hen beating its wings, a creature of barnyards, swallowed by the sea." Proximity to her husband fails to dispel the emotional distance that gendered social expectations, suspicion, and natural reticence have created. Azuba yearns for agency and recognition, for the opportunity to be her husband's equal and companion and to inhabit his world, but she remains largely unable to achieve these aspirations. She is finally able to share her husband's life only because his injuries prevent him from returning to sea; Powning suggests such an uncomplicated resolution is beyond her grasp, and that contentment must derive instead from compromise and recognition of another's frailties and sacrifices, which are the "true size of the world."

Powning sympathetically and carefully explores the gulf between masculine and feminine roles in the Bradstocks' sphere: Azuba's presence is unwelcome on the ship, both because women are "Jonahs," said to bring bad luck, and because proprieties of the time forbid the men their usual freedom of dress and language when she is present. Consequently she spends her time in the ship's salon, far from air, light, and the social and technical challenges of working the ship; even there, she comes to realize that her presence inhibits her husband's respite from the crew. Still, she savours the relative freedom from the pampered, tedious leisure of the life of a captain's wife ashore that voyaging permits.

While the novel certainly fulfils the expectations of an adventure novel with its exotic locales and chilling dangers, the first half of the narrative is possessed by Azuba's longing for escape, and Powning's narrative choices emphasize its claustrophobia: dialogue is often fragmented and spare, and much of Azuba's conversation is with her young daughter, Claire, and thus quite straightforward. Azuba's thoughts, too, are inchoate and oblique as she struggles to

define her wishes. The point of view never departs from Azuba herself, except in occasional excerpts from letters, allowing the reader to feel her frustration quite viscerally.

Later parts of *The Sea Captain's Wife*, particularly the scenes in Antwerp and the family's final return to New Brunswick, feel expansive in contrast: Powning dwells more closely on the beauty and detail of the natural world in these passages, expertly highlighting sensory experience and the joy of being in place in a manner readers anticipate from the author of *Edge Seasons* and *Seeds of Another Summer*. The novel's physicality is notable: the patterns of domestic labour, the indignities of shipboard deprivation, and the intimacies of sex are vividly written. Powning's prose is clean yet lush: "Azuba stood on the wet cobblestones gazing up at the Gothic profusion of spires. It was foreboding, ecstatic. She pictured her own white-painted church set in the midst of hayfields, a sky brewing storm, and the muttering of thunder as women descended from carriages carrying delphiniums and peonies." Some passages seem abrupt, like the pirate attack, and some of the secondary characters, like Lisette, feel slightly underdeveloped, given Powning's resolute focus on Azuba's interiority, but the overall effect is magnetic. *The Sea Captain's Wife* not only immerses us in the discovery of another place and time, but foregrounds the joys and challenges of being in the world.

SUSANNE MARSHALL earned her PhD at Dalhousie University. She researches literary representations of regionalism and globalization.

Voices of Newfoundland's Past

The Fetch by **NICO ROGERS**
Brick Books, 2010 $19.00

Reviewed by **JENNIFER BOWERING DELISLE**

Subtitled *A Book of Voices*, Nico Rogers' *The Fetch* is neither prose poetry nor short stories: each vignette is like wandering into someone's kitchen where the storytelling is already under way. The book, Rogers' first, draws from interviews and extensive archival research to imagine the rich world of outport Newfoundland in the early twentieth century.

Each piece captures a different voice, but almost all have a nostalgic tone, the feel of a grandparent telling a story of their past to their grandchild. Some are strange folksy tales of the supernatural. Others are reminiscences of childhood games, love, or labour on the ice and fishing flakes of pre-confederation Newfoundland. The details are memorable: a boy of twelve joins the crew of a schooner for the summer, just to buy a coveted can of tobacco. A senile lady is stuck in the time of her husband's drowning, perpetually telling visitors that the casket is in the parlour. A premature baby is incubated in a stewing pot on the stove. But there is more here than the quaint details of days-gone-by on an isolated coast. There is meaningful and sensitive writing, and full, compelling characters. The story of the baby warmed in the stove is not quirky or humourous, but tender and full of awe at the strength of the tiny boy: "the midwife said you were hardly fit to live a day," it begins, "coming into the world like that, quiet as morning frost."

There are weaker sections too, where Rogers experiments with a more poetic, ethereal voice. A piece like "The Drowned," which attempts to capture a voice from beyond the grave, feels stilted alongside the rich vernacular realism of the rest of the book. "Barking Down a Tree," the book's opening vignette, is too didactic in tone, too much like a history lesson. The speakers in these sections are vague, generalized. The best pieces are the ones that capture a concrete character, briefly immersing us in a moment in time. In "Last Chance," Rogers weaves a tale of a childhood dare with all the suspense of

a fireside ghost story. In “Sweet Vengeance,” the rough life of a sealing ship is vividly recounted in the voice of a young swiler. Though set down on paper, these longer pieces beautifully capture the rhythm of an oral storytelling tradition.

Because the voices are so compelling, however, I craved a narrative thread through the book. The odd name recurs, suggesting the intimacies of a small community. But these brief echoes are not enough to give a sense of connection. We learn through an offhand reference that the baby in the stew pot goes on to nurse a deformed calf with a baby bottle in “Rosebloom.” But it is not clear if it is his voice that appears in other sections, and we lose him amongst the crowd. This complaint, however, is a testament to Rogers’ ability to construct real characters that gesture to the secrets of an entire life. I wanted to know what happens to the young swiler in “Sweet Vengeance,” who sets a trip string to a can full of molasses for the ship bully. Does he become the man who gets lost in the fog and meets a mysterious spirit, in “The Fetch?” Is he the one whose wife sewed old pieces of her nightgown into his pants to protect his knees from the hard wood and salt water of the fishing stage?

The back cover of the book lists the meanings of the word “fetch,” according to the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English.* A fetch is at once a schooner, a spirit who wanders vessels at sea, and a vision of someone’s imminent death. It is the perfect title, then, for this book, evoking both the fishing culture upon which Newfoundland was built and the rich folklore that developed there over five hundred years of settlement. It suggests being carried away, to another time and place, and indeed that is what Rogers achieves with much of this work.

JENNIFER BOWERING DELISLE holds a PhD in English from the University of British Columbia, and is currently a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at McMaster University.

Fishing with Gubby by GARY KENT, illus. KIM LA FAVE
Harbour, 2010 $19.95

Reviewed by **RICHARD PICKARD**

This is in some ways an unnecessary review, because Gary Kent and Kim La Fave's children's graphic novel *Fishing with Gubby* no longer needs publicity in the same way it might have last year: it’s one of this year’s nominees for the British Columbia Book Prizes, namely the Bill Duthie Booksellers’ Choice Award. With the nominees and winner of this award chosen by ballot among BC bookstore owners on the basis of “public appeal, initiative, design, production and content,” the book can be assumed to have sold at least reasonably well in stores all across the province.

For readers interested in a historical perspective on coastal BC fisheries, particularly in the now virtually extinct small-boat fishery and its individual owner-operators, *Fishing with Gubby* offers an accessible reminder of the golden days. An experienced fisher, Gubby leaves his wife Millie at their home near Vancouver to take his cat Puss north around Vancouver Island to fish near Winter Harbour, on the west coast. In the narrative, Gubby functions a bit like a BC coast Forrest Gump: his boat is struck by a rare basking shark, he visits a floating logging camp, and he stays briefly with his cousin Bergie, a true woman of the woods: "Haven’t talked to a living soul in months!" she cheerfully complains, while feeding him stew made from a moose she’d shot the previous day and before giving him a sweater of mountain-goat wool she’d spun herself. Whether clinking his coffee cup at sunset against an urban boater’s martini glass, eating ginger chicken with other fishermen at Hong Foo’s cafe in Port Hardy, or leaving port alone to hit the fishing grounds first while everyone is still asleep, Gubby’s a good-hearted fellow with a keen sense

for the fish and people of his coast.

There are some issues, though. While the illustrated pickups have the curves of classic late 1950s models, for example, Gubby at one point visits a larger boat whose captain receives updated fishing information by fax. Still, with a graphic novel for children, there's little reason to demand absolute verisimilitude, especially when the book in question provides an engaging lesson in BC's coastal history, geography, and economics.

There remains, however, the nagging question of readership, and of just who is being engaged by this book. Not being a child myself, I test-drove *Fishing with Gubby* on actual children, since that's the book's intended audience. And you know, they weren't overly keen on it: not the ones who read it on their own, and not the ones who read it with an adult. They found sections and elements engaging, and certainly they enjoyed the book's admirable gentleness. But the story is long and detailed, and neither dramatic nor fast-paced, and the only character present throughout is Gubby, a man old enough to be bald on top with a gray fringe, so he's not an easy character for children to identify with.

In other words, there's a disjunction between the book's reception by its intended audience, and its sales as implied by its nomination for the Duthie award.

Fishing with Gubby falls between stools, to some extent, if appealingly. Nostalgic material has been finding a ready audience recently in BC, including 2010's nearly sold-out summer-long run at the Royal BC Museum of *Good Timber*—a musical revue based almost entirely on the logging poetry of Robert Swanson—so it's the right time to release a book like this. There's a story here, but the book's not nearly as imaginative as Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' brilliant Haida manga *Red* (2008). Its evocation of fishing the BC coast in the 1960s is very good, but it lacks the documentary realism of Bus Griffiths' classic graphic novel *Now You're Logging* (1979). Most importantly, the book sustains rather than challenges nostalgia: it offers no sense that Gubby and his fellows played a crucial role in the depletion of BC's fisheries, and little deep sense of how the coast has been changing (except in how the fishers are inconvenienced by tourists).

Some children will greatly enjoy this book, and they might be inspired by it to at least imagine natural resources work other than with oil, and ideologically, I'd support that. But in the end, I expect that the actual market for *Fishing with Gubby* is the same adults worried enough to be reading Tim Bowling's *The Lost Coast: Salmon, Memory, and the Death of Wild Culture*, Taras Grescoe's *Bottomfeeder: How to Eat Ethically in a World of Vanishing Seafood*, and Alanna Mitchell's *Sea Sick: The Hidden Crisis in the Global Ocean*—or perhaps wishing they didn't have to read them.

For those of us in that audience—and I genuinely include myself in that "us"—Kent and La Fave's book represents a nostalgic history of a time when the BC coast's fishery was ruled by the small operator with deep personal roots on the coast. It's a pleasant version of history, and nostalgia can keep a person surprisingly warm at night, but we're not fishing with Gubby anymore. Gubby's gone from the coast now, along with far too many of the fish he spent his working life hunting genially toward the edge of extinction. I liked Gubby, and I suspect I'd like both Gary Kent and Kim La Fave, but this is children's literature for adults. And when it comes to BC's coastal fisheries, we need to be thinking far more carefully than that.

RICHARD PICKARD is a senior instructor in the Department of English at the University of Victoria. While specializing in the teaching of writing, he also teaches in the department's Literature of the West Coast MA program and is the department's usual instructor for its variable-content four-year course in literature and environment. He is currently ALECC's past-president.

Could be by **HEATHER CADSBY**

Brick Books, 2011 $19.00

Reviewed by **MATTHEW ZANTINGH**

Heather Cadsby's latest book of poems, *Could Be*, is both wry and intimate. Her poems move from delight in the everyday world to lament for failing relationships and broken intimacies. While her poems travel a wide range of experience and ideas, the collection as a whole is threaded by a number of reflections on Mimico Creek, a watercourse that cuts through the city of Toronto. Cadsby is not a nature poet in the mould of Gary Snyder or Don McKay, but the seven different references to this watershed centres her work in a specific ecological place. In "Recursus," Mimico Creek becomes a "clear sign" that is "enough / to make me a believer" even in the face of a city torn by racial violence. The natural world functions as both a place in which to find joy and a sign that life itself is marked by moments of joy.

Cadsby's poetry also explores the aubade poetic form. This form involves a love song sung either at dawn or dusk, and Cadsby shows a versatility of interpretation in using the form as a hymn to the everyday. Her first aubade, "Praise be," extols the "angels of morning breath," "a crusty eyelid," "a missed step at first light," and "the promise of pancakes." Her evocation of the everyday centres the poem on a different kind of love: a love based on day-to-day realities rather than an ideal or poetically overinflated form of love. Some of the other aubades touch on grieving for a lost father, a toothache, a nervous nature-lover anxiously awaiting coyotes, and the early morning chorus of birds. These poems evoke a sense of the daily rhythms of life in the city. For Cadsby, the city is not a place that is devoid of nature, but instead is a place where the natural world as symbolized by the veery and wildbird intertwines with human life in a sometimes painful, sometimes joyful relationship.

A number of poems, including "The Shadow Life," "Precursors," and "Lines Upon Lines," meditate upon the act of writing poetry itself. In "Don't worry Frizzhead if the poetry thing don't work out, I'll buy you a hairdressing place," the speaker struggles to create a poem that lives up to such a grand title. She asks, "Where's the edgewise word?" before comparing her own poetic process to that of hairdressing. This wry use of hairdressing belies Cadsby's ability to play with language as the ending poem "Lines Upon Lines" demonstrates. In it, Cadsby explores the meaning of lines in her poetry, stating "A line is thin / A thin bare line can a lot / It is able and capable of ample / It is once or every fourth." Cadsby shows a humility concerning her own ability to convey poetic meaning, but, as the volume shows, her lines, even if thin and bare, manage to contain vast amounts of meaning and resonance.

Cadsby's poetry moves gracefully between ruminations on language, relationships, and the wider world in *Could Be*. She is not a polemical poet who forces political views on her audience, but her quiet urgency nevertheless guides readers into a re-engagement with the world, even while her smooth writing offers a meditative reprieve from it.

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'Slip Sliding Away': Language and Scientific Certainty

The Mirage of a Space between Nature and

Nurture by **EVELYN FOX KELLER**
Duke University Press, 2010 $16.95

Reviewed by **PATRICK HOWARD**

Human beings crave certainty. We are inclined to gravitate toward those who purport to have "the answer," those who exude the confidence of clarity and the authority of unshakeable assurance. Generally, humans do not live well in the grey, but thrive in the black and white. And so it is that in 2011 the vexed nature-nurture debate is vigorous enough to be worthy of another attempt to put it to rest. Historian and philosopher of science Evelyn Fox Keller opens her slim volume with a disclaimer. She is not out to "crush the nature-nurture debate, but rather to understand why the debate continues to cause us so much trouble." While this may be her stated aim, the reader gets the distinct impression she would like to deliver the coup de grace. The particular interest this book has for those in the humanities and social sciences is that Fox Keller, in addition to having an impressive knowledge of molecular genetics and evolutionary biology, is able to show that this perennially problematical scientific debate comes down to the most quintessential of human capacities—language.

The author argues compellingly that the nature-nurture debate persists because it is fossilized by misunderstanding, obfuscation, ambiguity, and "slippage in the very language we use to talk about the issue." Rock is indiscernible from bone. Is our human capacity attributable to our genetic endowment or to our environment? Fox Keller points out the question is usually asked in relation to individual traits. Historically, the interest was in human *differences*. The author writes, "We want to know not simply what makes Suzy different from Billy, but also what makes people like us different from people like them. That is, we have a tendency to sort people into demarcated groups with the express intention of comparing them to one another." These may be perfectly legitimate questions, but the inquiry, "what makes Suzy taller than Billy?" is of a different kind than "what makes Suzy grow to almost six feet in height?"

To help the reader understand the difference between these questions, the essential flaw in the nature-nurture division, she uses Hans Klummer's analogy of drumming as a way to illustrate the essential futility in posing such questions and cementing for us what most scientists and lay people know—that genes and environment must interact to produce any biological trait, that nature (understood as heredity) and nurture (understood as environment) are not alternatives. It is futile to attempt to discern if the drumming we hear at the concert hall is made by the percussionist or by his instrument "because each of the two variables on which the sound—the percussionist's performance (x) and the resonance of the instrument (y)—is influenced by the other in a way that does not permit separation." Despite this, according to Fox Keller, the image of separable ingredients continues to exert a surprisingly strong hold on the imagination, "even long after we know better." I would have liked for the author to spend some time applying this logic to the thorny issues that have historically been associated with genetic research and the nature-nurture debate—namely eugenics, institutionalized racism, and gender bias—but she intentionally skirts these issues. She references Lawrence Summer's (then-Harvard president) 2005 speculation that women's under-representation in math and science may be attributable to innate differences in the sexes. Fox Keller acknowledges the sensitive political nature of such controversial claims, but defers to other writers who have "eloquently addressed" these concerns. Rather than ducking these issues, though, I would have liked to see her bring her own powerful critique to the table. One should never pass over an

opportunity to point out the fundamentally flawed thinking associated with Social Darwinism, eugenics, sexism, and racism.

Instead, Fox Keller stays focused on the anterior issues that lead to the "muddle" at the heart of the debate and prevent us from posing even meaningful questions. Once again she cites the "slippage in meaning or polysemy of our basic vocabulary." The author takes the time to tease apart terms easily and often confused, confounded, and conflated. What exactly is a gene? What do we mean by environment? The author's rigorous unpacking of the terms *inherited* and *heritability* underscores the potential for confusion and frames the misunderstanding and the "elusiveness" of "clarity" in the nature-nurture debate. Fox Keller points out the slippage in the use of such terms in the work of prominent researchers in genetics and developmental biology. The persistent need for clarity keeps moving away from us as we make enormous progress since the early days of molecular biology. Yet, our language lags and discredited ideas and associations are sedimented into our thinking.

Throughout the book, Fox Keller reminds us of the complexity in molecular biology that becomes more apparent with each new discovery and that defies any claims of simple causality. She writes, "the causal interactions between DNA, proteins and trait development are so entangled, so dynamic, and so dependent on context that the very question of what genes *do* no longer makes much sense." Rather than succumb to the paralysis presented by the limitations of language and our human propensity to lose our selves in polysemy, Fox Keller suggests we embrace the ambiguity of the terms we use and *extend* them. She says, "Doing so would not solve the perennial slide between the technical and colloquial uses of the term, but I believe it would undercut the basic dichotomy that slippage serves." In reminding us of the limitations of language and the potential language holds for confusions and misunderstandings, the author provides an antidote for the myth of scientific authoritarianism that sees science as somehow suspended above the sway of language and culture. *The Mirage of Space between Nature and Nurture* provides an important contribution to the philosophy of science and offers a way forward in an ongoing debate that should have run its course decades ago, yet doggedly persists. Fox Keller's objective is not to prove the poststructuralist critique of scientific objectivity, but to show, relative to an important scientific debate, how language constructs meaning in a dynamic interplay that invariably defies clarity and certainty. Understanding this and learning to live with slippage, muddle, and confusion is as much a condition of science as any other human pursuit.

That being said, Fox Keller does not dodge the inevitable expectation her readers have: what of the debate? What's the final word? On this, she states unequivocally, "to the extent our interest is what makes us what we are; it is useless to proceed by trying to separate nature from nurture and looking at how they interact. The causal effects of nature and nurture on development are simply not separable."

It seems of this much we are certain.

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Botero's Beautiful Horses by **JAN CONN**

Brick Books, 2009 $19.00

Reviewed by **JANET GRAFTON**

The gashed and bleeding angel on the cover of Jan Conn's *Botero's Beautiful Horses*

hints at the serenity, violence, and divinity within the book's pages. Plunging into Conn's seventh collection of poetry confirms that she has created something extraordinary and fundamentally captivating.

In *Botero's Beautiful Horses*, Conn navigates the transformative forces of art and place. Set largely in Latin America, the work is full of Mayan and Spanish names and locations. Conn allows the unfamiliar to become part of her as she responds through poetry to these places and to the artists who belong to them. By deliberately engaging with languages and cultures outside her own, she embraces otherness to such an extent as to nearly dissolve the concept. Constant, fearless interjection of herself into the moments and works of others in places and times outside her experience reveals a boundlessness that is both natural and startling.

Her poetry, arranged in six poem sequences, becomes an act of archaeology—resurrecting, interpreting, and re-imagining the histories of others. In "Angel Falls," she tells of an expedition from the 1940s where the people

> paint body and face red with vegetable dyes,
>
> chant their magical songs—
>
> The whole expedition coming back as howler monkeys,
>
> pumas, pale-throated sloths, long-tailed weasels
>
> in the next life,
>
> forgetting words, fitting into the sky.

She does not limit herself by time or geography; she contains "no single self but multitudes, all squeezed into the same body." Yet with a sense of contradiction that characterizes her work, she writes in "People of the Left-Sided hummingbird" of a torn heart whose "pieces long to be reunited, but it's too late." In her attempt to connect the fragments of her experience, Conn transforms the places she has contact with and the memories attached to them, sometimes closing the divide, other times mourning the separation of loss.

Her desire for transformation, "to see [her] old selves sloughed off as painlessly" as snakeskin, drives much of her writing and connects her to both the physical world and the landscape of memory and dreams. In "Yellow Dog," dreams entwine with reality; either the memory of a dreamtime dog comes back to her when she wakes, or "a yellow scrap of a dog" she meets in the daytime enters her dreams. Whichever the true encounter, her contact with this dog alters both worlds for her. The dream world counts in Conn's work. "I'm rehearsing my dreams / for an interview with Salvador Dali," she writes.

Conn's response to art and dreamscapes is anchored by her engagement with the natural world. She identifies with the land: "when they tremble, I tremble," she says of her "Spanish mountains." And in "Cameta," colours of the landscape mix with memory and emotion:

> Once I rowed a wooden boat
>
> to a cobalt island, where all the rocks were shades
>
> of blue. I dreamed this again and again.
>
> Perhaps I was trying to grow up but could not,
>
> for the blue was the blue of raw feelings, confusion, somehow
>
> mixed in with my mother's sudden death.

In drawing on a place that bleeds and gushes colour, a place that demands response, Conn seems to find an antidote to numbness and loss of meaning. Conversely, the river journey in "Orinoco" centres on a struggle to interpret the natural world, "fingers brushing the leaves / as though reading Braille."

Adopting a biocentric viewpoint in "The Suriname Frog" allows Conn to merge the narrator's existence with that of the eponymous frog's, sidestepping the confines of the physical

world in the process. But her sense of the natural world is also grounded by contemporary concerns: the environmental crisis inherent in "Climactic" ends in the nightmare of "oceans rising."

In her book of poetry, Conn captures the danger of life, the howling, wounded, sacred things, and the moments of green, rarely peaceful, but tangled and vibrant. Conn's work reveals her understanding of ecology, and as a poet and a biologist she merges art and science, writing of "delirious magnolia / and crepe myrtle" in the same breath as "the clipped language of mathematics." Conn fully inhabits the world, uses it to explore her multitudes, and does not separate herself even from the unfamiliar.

Botero's Beautiful Horses is elegantly produced, with notes at the end explaining cultural details and references. Inspired cover art by Leslie Zeidenweber reflects the pause between violence and divinity that Conn references in a perfectly chosen epigraph by Octavio Paz: "Time is resting."

Just as the strong, lavish bodies of Fernando Botero's horse sculptures were built to shoulder ideologies, so Conn has with reworked materials created something intractable and elemental. Her work is embedded with contrast and contradictions, is harsh and pliable, full of starlight and fire and blood, and yet she achieves equilibrium that knocks the reader off kilter: look up from the page, steady yourself, and you are changed.

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Luka and the Fire of Life by **SALMAN RUSHDIE**

Knopf Canada, 2009 $29.95

Reviewed by **JOLENE ARMSTRONG**

Salman Rushdie's novel *Luka and the Fire of Life* follows his 1989 novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* in offering readers a rollicking and irreverent adventure into the land of the imagination and story. Rushdie returns to the imaginary world of Haroun, but this time focuses on the significantly younger brother, Luka, who has yet to have his great life adventure, something he yearns for and envies in his older brother, Haroun.

Luka is not an ordinary boy. He is adored by his parents, who view him as the miracle which stopped time, since his birth late in their lives makes them feel young again. Initially, Luka reveals that he possesses the extraordinary skill of cursing. When he pronounces the curse upon the circus master, Captain Aag, also known as Grandmaster Flame, Luka's adventure in the world of language and storytelling begins. With the assistance of his trusty magical pets, Luka embarks on a quest in the World of Magic to steal the Fire of Life in order to save his father, who has slipped into a pleasant but disconcertingly prolonged sleep.

Luka spots the spectre of his father, an entity Luka names Nobodaddy (borrowed from William Blake), and enters the World of Magic. The adventure proceeds quickly, as Luka realizes that the World of Magic's logic is based on premises similar to those in his beloved video games: he must collect lives and save his progress after each level. While the device of constructing the narrative around the video game premise is a little gimmicky at times and can feel tacked on to appeal to contemporary young readers, the novel manages to perform a critique of our own passive relationship with these devices: if we don't take

care to maintain the practice of language and story, of actively engaging with our world through narrative, then we are in danger of losing these arts.

Of course, Luka has been well taught by the storyteller Rashid, the Shah of Blah, who is the very model of irreverence, like an overgrown child in his challenges to authority and his unconventional approach to life. As a result of Rashid's tutelage, Luka is able to successfully challenge the authority of the gods and goddesses, the rules of the realms that he travels through and the myriad deadly perils he encounters in his journey to steal the Fire of Life. The lesson to be learned from this novel's adventure and from its title character is that the irreverent wisdom of children trumps the limited logic and imagination of adults. In the end, it is not Luka's experience as a gamer that allows him to save the day—indeed, Rushdie's ability to successfully integrate that trope is limited and fades into obscurity for large portions of the novel. Rather, Luka succeeds in his quest because of his imagination and childish wisdom.

While the story offers a wild adventure rich with intertextuality, Rushdie cannot seem to restrain himself from trying too hard to convince the reader of its contemporary relevance. The novel is full of corny lines, too many repetitions of the "Dog named Bear and Bear named Dog" joke, and excessive—pointless—word play. Rushdie adds a footnote late in the novel to reveal the "real name" of the Assault of Magic: "The Overthrow of the Dictatorship of the Aalim by the Inhabitants of the Heart of the Magical World, and Its Replacement by a More Sensible Relationship with Time, Allowing for Dream—Time, Lateness, Vagueness, Delays, Reluctances, and the Widespread Dislike of Growing Old." While these ramblings display Rushdie's clever ability to manipulate language, such interjections disrupt the pace and urgency of the adventure.

Overall, readers will be satisfied with Rushdie's adventure story, both the young and the young at heart. But the novel feels rushed and lacks the necessary disappointments and failures of a real quest story. Sure, Luka loses a few of his lives now and then, but he is never in any real peril of either losing his life or of failing in his quest, at least not convincingly so. Thus, when Luka returns to the real world, it isn't clear that he has learned anything more than he had already been taught by his storytelling father and even applied, nor has he grown in any appreciable way. The description of his homecoming party as taking place under "the stationary, unchanging stars" is disappointingly appropriate for the outcome of this adventure.

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Urquhart's Poetics of People and Place

Sanctuary Line by **JANE URQUHART**
McClelland and Stewart, 2010 $29.99

Reviewed by **AFRA KAVANAGH**

Jane Urquhart's latest novel, *Sanctuary Line*, is a seductive tale about people and place undergoing change told as a direct address to a recipient whose identity is not intuited until the end of the novel. As Liz, an entomologist who has returned to the family farm to study the Monarch butterflies she had witnessed here in her youth, narrates, she emphasizes the connections between countries, between family members, and between the past and the present. She is aware that as a child, she did not understand, but

that now as an adult, looking back, she can attempt to interpret her family history and the significance of the apple farm and its disappearance: “The trees unpruned; the humans…departed.” She had enjoyed the summers at the farm throughout her childhood and youth, until one day, it was all taken away from her: the farm; the storytelling uncle; and the two cousins she loved, one a product of her uncle’s hidden relationship with one of his Mexican labourers and the other the beautiful and smart Mandy who becomes a soldier and dies in Afghanistan, both joining “the fallen” to whom the book is dedicated.

The novel is about the stories that the uncle told and the influence they had on the children’s relationship to place. As she does in her 2005 novel, *A Map of Glass*, Urquhart here too writes in a nostalgic voice about the changes to the Lake Erie shore and the disappearance of certain landscapes. Here too, she works with time passing, things changing, and loss ensuing. These are both in nature and in the human world a pattern; however, humans have to be considered responsible for the damage they cause to the land, to themselves, and to others. Paradoxically, it is the “lovely” ones who draw others to them, who create families, who spin webs with their stories (histories and genealogies), reconstruct the past and connect it to the present, that in the end destroy the connections that they had constructed, just as the uncle who disappears. He had made their childhood magical, but ruins their youth and splits the family asunder when his clandestine affair is revealed with tragic consequences. As a mature woman reviewing this past, Liz asks many questions, and has no answers, but she is able to forgive.

In *A Map of Glass*, Urquhart intertwined three narratives, but in this new novel, she focuses on one place, one family. Liz is telling her family’s history to Mandy’s secret lover. By telling him their story, Liz gives him something of Mandy to hold on to, but she also gives herself her own history back; she can welcome feeling back into her life when she accepts him. In fact, just by recounting how “each summer [they] were stunned by what [they] came to call the butterfly tree…[which appeared as] a burning bush…a cedar alight with wings,” she recaptures the enthrallment she felt as she watched the live butterflies in their beauty and freedom, so different from the dead specimens she now studies.

Urquhart begins Liz’s memory book in the present: “the cultivated landscape of this farm has decayed so completely now, it is difficult to believe that the fields and orchards ever existed outside of my own memories, my own imagination…” She is the inheritor of her missing uncle, the storyteller, so she must recall and share all the details. She makes it possible for the reader to appreciate both the existing and the disappeared world.

Urquhart’s writing is seductive. She draws us into the Butler family’s pain and transformation. She moves us with her descriptions, especially of the natural world. She creates connections (the lake is a link between two great countries; the family line crosses oceans and borders). She invokes the poetry of several greats, such as R. L. Stevenson and Emily Dickinson, who also wrote about nature and the loss of innocence. She shows us that there is comfort in telling and reviewing our stories. And finally, she convinces us that we are not unlike those short-lived butterflies through the symbolism of the sanctuary line to which the butterflies always return. We too have need of a sanctuary, a beloved place which, even though changed, can still provide us with comfort.

AFRA KAVANAGH teaches English at Cape Breton University. She also coordinates the Annual CBU Storytelling Symposium, which draws international story enthusiasts to Cape Breton and has led to the publication by CBU Press of two books of proceedings, from the first

Symposium (*The Power of the Story*, 1998) and from the third (*Women and Storytelling*, 2000).

Incontinent Housemates: Esther Woolfson's Life with Birds

Corvuus: A Life with Birds by **ESTHER WOOLFSON**
Granta, 2008 $17.95

Reviewed by **NEALE MACDONALD**

Esther Woolfson's *Corvuus: A Life with Birds* documents her years spent with various adopted birds: starting with one rook led to the acquisition of birds such as doves, an eastern rosella parrot, and a South American sun conure. One of the most entertaining elements of this book is Woolfson's description of how each bird spends its time within the confines of a house. A life with birds is a humorous confrontation between Woolfson, who accepts and lives with her corvid caching (the storing of food for future consumption) poached salmon between the laces of her boots or the "turn-ups" of her jeans, while the birds, for lack of wild space, find thrills in chasing toy mice and preening human hair. Woolfson does not attempt to portray her life with birds as a perfectly harmonious union, but her story accepts and embraces the otherness of the birds while relishing the moments when she feels a closeness with her winged housemates.

Throughout the book, Woolfson achieves great moments of humour and insight when, for instance, she comes to understand that there is "a connection between self-expression and defecation" in birds. According to Woolfson, to attempt to train this out of them would deny them "the right of discourse and opinion." Woolfson describes her life with birds as "keeping a houseful of opinionated incontinents."

Corvuus also presents a range of scientific and historical information on birds that, without being oversimplified, remains accessible to a reader with little prior knowledge. For instance, in the chapter "Of Flight and Feather," Woolfson provides a brief but detailed overview of the dynamics of bird flight and various wing designs. The extent of her research and knowledge in this chapter appears throughout the book on other topics such as birdsong, diet, and habitat. The author also provides a history of how corvids have been unfairly or inaccurately characterized in literature. In doing this, Woolfson proves the uniqueness of her take on birds but does not claim a complete knowledge of the animal and acknowledges the inadequacy of language in attempting to do them justice.

Corvuus, in some ways, is similar to Brian Brett's *Trauma Farm* (2009), which does with farming what Woolfson does with corvids, as both provide a general history of its subject framed within a personal history. However, the structure of Brett's novel, even with its numerous and wide-ranging anecdotes, maintains an imaginary or exaggerated chronology, which works very well in avoiding too extreme a digression. The body of *Corvuus* feels somewhat fragmented and a stronger structure would have given the reader a clearer sense of the work's cohesion. However, Woolfson's retelling of her life with birds is a delightful read in which corvids surpass symbolism and anthropomorphism to become far more fascinating than their often-assigned clichés and generalizations.

NEALE MACDONALD, originally from Ottawa, is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. Her thesis, "Flourishing as Productive Paradox in Mary Oliver's Poetry," is currently being examined. After submitting her thesis, Neale moved to the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island, where she has a view of Aoraki/Mount Cook and a short walk to Fox Glacier.

Materialist (Re)Turns

New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics edited by **DIANA COOLE** and **SAMANTHA FROST**
Duke UP, 2011 $89.95

Reviewed by **ASTRIDA NEIMANIS**

When I picked up this collection—the third I've read in as many months that demands we rethink subjectivity, agency, politics, and ontology from a materialist, often posthumanist, perspective—it was clear that "the materialist turn" is in full swing. On our current theoretical landscape, matter matters. Poststructuralist discursive constructivism taught us much, but the material world continues to "bite back." Ecocultural theorists and ecologically-inspired creative writers, I suspect, have long been aware of the material world's clamour, but apparently many social and political theorists are just waking up to this realization. Or, perhaps this is a *re*awakening, a *re*membering. This is precisely what *New Materialisms* suggests. For even though the Editorial Introduction purports to "introduce" readers to the "new materialisms," after several chapters one begins to wonder: haven't we met somewhere before?

The editors themselves remark that this collection concerns a "*re*orientation" towards matter. Moreover, as Pheng Cheah points out in his chapter, "the force of materiality is not 'new.'" Other authors, like Jane Bennett and Sara Ahmed, remind us that critically materialist theories never left us. And the chapters themselves are dominated not by new theoretical paradigms, but rather by *re*introductions to a wide array of "materialist" theorists. Some chapters reread thinkers through a "new materialist" lens (e.g. Hobbes, Marx, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir), while others resurrect past thinkers into their rightful place within a "new materialist" genealogy (e.g. Nietzsche, Driesch, Bergson). Some thinkers, like Deleuze, just make continual reappearances.

Such a materialist return is not in itself problematic (it is often such a pleasure to run into old acquaintances!). But if this terminology is going to persist, we should be clear about what exactly is so "new" here. The editors provide an answer in their defence: "if we nonetheless persist in our call for...a *new* materialism, it is because we are aware that unprecedented things are currently being done with and to matter, nature, life, production, and reproduction. It is in this contemporary context that theorists are compelled to rediscover older materialist traditions while pushing them in novel...directions" (4). New times call for new theories—or in this case, a revisiting and redeployment of those we perhaps too quickly left behind.

The collection is divided (somewhat arbitrarily, the editors admit) into three sections. The first, "the Force of Materiality" begins with Jane Bennett's revisiting of the vitalist philosophy of Hans Driesch (1867–1941), in particular his concept of entelechy as "creative causality" and "impersonal agency." The highlight of the essay—and perhaps of the collection—is Bennett's application of this vitalism to an appraisal of the Bush era (anti-choice, pro-"preemptive" war) "culture of life." In the second chapter, Pheng Cheah discusses "Non-Dialectical Materialism," and provides a fantastic comparative primer on the materialisms of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. The third and fourth chapters in this section—Diana Coole's "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh" and Melissa Orlie's "Impersonal Matter"—recuperate the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Friedrich Nietzsche, respectively. In a rejection of many commonplace humanist readings of Merleau-Ponty, Coole insists that we find in his work "an anti- or posthumanist philosophy" that posits "an embodied humanity enveloped in"—rather than

dominant over—"nature" (113). Orlie argues for Nietzsche's thorough overturning of any human-nature distinction, whereby *all* bodies are made of stuff "over which nothing is master and whose entirety no one is in a position to know" (122).

Part Two, "Political Matters," begins with Elizabeth Grosz's "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom," where she articulates a Bergson-infused positive conception of "freedom"—that is, "freedom *to*" rather than "freedom *from*." While Grosz's take on Bergson (and critiques thereof) can be read elsewhere, this is a pithy standalone piece with a compelling conclusion: "the challenge facing feminism today is no longer only how to give women a more equal place within existing social networks and relations, but how to enable women to partake in the creation of a future unlike the present" (154). Next, in "Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy," Samantha Frost offers us a primarily exegetical study of Hobbes and his materialist conception of fear as enabling (human) political agency. William Connolly's chapter "Materialities of Experience" returns to Merleau-Ponty, but this time in conversation with Foucault and Deleuze. Most persuasive among the chapter's numerous strengths is Connolly's argument for a science-infused "immanent materialist" phenomenological analysis as necessary for coming to terms with the human subjectivity in an accelerated, media-saturated, ecologically fragile contemporary world. Part Two ends with Rosi Braidotti's "The Politics of 'Life Itself' and New Ways of Dying," which rehearses arguments laid out more fully in *Transpositions* (Polity 2006). For Braidotti, materialist ontologies are necessary to lay the ground for "affirmative ethics." Instead of current "ethical" obsessions with blame, rights, and compensation, such an ethics would create conditions of endurance in the service of future generations.

Part Three, "Economies of Disruption," commences with Rey Chow's "The Illusive Material, What the Dog Doesn't Understand." This quirky contribution asks about iterative practices and the possibility of "immaterial corporeality" in a *post*-poststructuralist theoretical world. Sarah Ahmed follows with a phenomenology of the coincidence of bodies and things in her chapter "Orientations Matter"—also rehearsed in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (Duke 2006). In "Simone de Beauvoir: Engaging Discrepant Materialisms," Sonia Kruks first notes the commonplace divides between a neo-Marxist materialism of social structure, poststructuralist "materialization," and the materially embodied discourses of phenomenology. Second, through a discussion of Beauvoir's *Old Age*, Kruks suggests that the work of this iconic feminist thinker meaningfully traverses and engages all of these antagonistic materialisms. The collection closes with Jason Edwards's "The Materialism of Historical Materialism" which argues for a historical materialism that foregrounds an analysis of the multiplicity of everyday material practices in their particular historical and spatial dimensions.

As this brief rundown hopefully highlights, this collection is wonderfully rich with contributions from established scholars across various traditions. Yet it is unlikely that every chapter will be useful for every reader. While only few collections are read cover-to-cover, in this case perhaps the collection's selective appeal also indicates a lack of cohesion in the book as a whole. Because the chapters themselves show little sign of explicit dialogue with one another (despite some lovely resonances), readers are left to their own devices to discern how, say, Beauvoir's theory of aging (Kruks) belongs in the same anthology as, say, a discussion of Deleuze and neuroscience (Connolly). While the editors' introduction is very thorough in its elaboration of how the multivalent uptakes of (new) materialisms in general intersect across various fields of inquiry, the discussion of this collection's specific contributions is bare-bones, and their various intersections are not discussed at all.

On a related point, I was somewhat disappointed that few chapters pay sustained attention to the more-than-human world, while others remain primarily concerned with the materiality of human bodies and social institutions. These latter analyses (e.g. Edwards' and Frost's) are innovative and strong on their own terms, but I did wonder how these chapters were *new* materialist. These chapters don't really discuss the "matter" towards which new materialism is purportedly oriented. I wonder if calling such analyses "new materialist" runs the risk of once again casting the so-called "natural" or material world as a passive, mute backdrop to more lofty human endeavours.

Again in the editors' defence, their stated aim is to open up the field of new materialism and show its great diversity. From this perspective, the various interpretations of "materialism" in this collection constitute a strength. Instead of closing inwards on an increasingly narrow definition, this collection moves outwards, in an ever-expanding possibility of what "new materialism" might be, in an invitation to debate.That said, if we are to consider all of these contributions as "new materialist," I am tempted to reconsider my own use of this terminology as a descriptor of my work. In such broad application, might it be too catch-all to be all that meaningful?

Finally, the collection also foregrounds some of my reservations around our current theoretical love affair with "material agency." This concept entails much privileging of acting, doing, asserting—often linked to a distinctly *self*-creation—as the most valuable modes of existence. While Braidotti's call to "put the action back into activism" (210) is appreciated, I wonder if material agency might not be but another anthropocentric (and masculinist) corralling of the more-than-human into the human realm. Radical passivity, gestation, providing a milieu for another to flourish—these are all equally crucial modes of being that seem to be elided in these discussions. The exception here is Cheah's beautiful articulation of both Derrida and Deleuze's thought that offer us ways of thinking beyond the binaristic couplings of activity and passivity, or actuality and potentiality (which is equally applicable to various feminist philosophers). It would be great to see the "new" materialisms continue thinking beyond the valourization of action and self. Yet despite these reservations, this collection remains timely and valuable, with much provocative "matter" for thought.

ASTRIDA NEIMANIS is a feminist writer and academic. She currently serves as Chair of the Editorial Board of *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture* (phaenex.uwindsor.ca) and is co-organizer of the *Thinking with Water* project (thinkingwithwater.net). From September 2011, she can be found at the Gender Institute of the London School of Economics (lse.ac.uk/genderInstitute).

Noble Gas, Penny Black by **DAVID O'MEARA**

Brick Books, 2008 $18.00

Reviewed by **MATTHEW ZANTINGH**

N*oble Gas, Penny Black*, David O'Meara's third collection of poetry, is a world traveller. Several of the poems are set in those in-between spaces of travel, such as airports and train stations. Others travel to places as far distant as South Korea, Japan, and Turkey. These travel poems form the thematic spine of the book, but interspersed throughout are more localized reflections on past relationships, childhood events, and everyday experience.

Several poems recreate grand historical events, but focus on the gritty everyday reality of

such an event. “Tales from the Revolution,” a reflection on the first night and day of the Cuban Revolution, records Lucky Luciano admiring “the waves’ blunt force rushing the rails of the Malecón” before Batista’s last dinner party in Cuba, while Edwin Tetlow, a British foreign correspondent, is “startled awake by a sudden / unmistakeable burst / of silence.” In “The Day of the Invasion,” the speaker focuses on “weather, sports, and traffic. Local / reports,” while granting the American invasion of Iraq only a passing mention as if it is a mere shadow on his or her experience. This moment in world history, important as it is, becomes for the speaker transient, much as the steam in a bathroom after a shower will continue to roll on amidst such momentous occasions.

O’Meara is also intensely interested in past relationships, especially broken or lost ones. “The Old Story,” the longest poem in the collection, is composed of five sections detailing the arc of a love relationship from its initial swelling to its levelling off and finishing with its amicable yet disastrous conclusion. The two main characters in the poem are not named, and most readers will be able to relate to this arc whether through their own experience or their friends’. In “Boswell by the Fire,” one of the strongest poems in the collection, O’Meara writes a wistful letter from James Boswell to Isabelle de Charrière, a Dutch lady Boswell met on his European travels. Set in Utrecht in the eighteenth century, the poem recalls badminton, games of whist in a salon, the “pleated billows” of Isabelle’s skirts. The poem is soaked in longing for a different time and place—that comfortable place of being found in others. Throughout the collection, O’Meara reflects on this place, both its construction and its eventual dissolution.

O’Meara’s poems are comfortable like an intimate conversation with a close friend who has been travelling. Stylistically, O’Meara is not trying to push the formal boundaries of poetry, instead building vignettes of other places and times. However, the collection is by no means parochial, as O’Meara works carefully to craft poems rooted in everyday experiences, familiar to his Canadian audience even if they occur in Sunch’on, South Korea. *Noble Gas, Penny Black* will remind readers that poetry is a conversation—a conversation that we are both included in and kept outside of. My only disappointment with it is that it is not as long as I could have hoped, lasting only 63 pages. The collection ends like a late-night conversation cut short by the necessity of sleep and the twinklings of the dawn in the window.

MATTHEW ZANTINGH is a PhD Student in English & Cultural Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. His research focuses on urban nature in Canadian literature, asking the question of how our experience of the city mediates a relationship with the natural world.

Mowat’s Missing Pieces

Eastern Passage by **FARLEY MOWAT**
M&S, 2010 $32.99

Reviewed by **DAVID NUÑEZ TOEWS**

In what is said to be his final work, iconic author Farley Mowat fills the gaps in his autobiography. *Eastern Passage* and its preceding work, *Otherwise* (2008), constitute a memoir of Mowat’s life from 1937 to 1954: late adolescence to the beginnings of his career as an author. Though he touches on stories that have been told before, these books elaborate where details have been missed and clarify where there has been obfuscation or controversy. *Eastern Passage* picks up where *Otherwise* left off. Mowat and his wife Fran leave the Keewatin region of the Northwest Territories, where he had been sent to study

wildlife, to spend the winter in Brochet, Manitoba within the southern range of the Barrenland Caribou. In Keewatin and Brochet, Mowat is witness to neglect and abuse of the native populations by what he calls the "ruling triumvirate" of the North: missionaries, traders, and the RCMP. His outrage precipitates a falling out with his employers who feel he should be focusing on caribou and wolves. His fervour to bring the issue into the public eye launches his writing career. Mowat tells of the enemies he made with the publication of *People of the Deer* (1952). He considers them the ultimate source of the infamous 1996 article in *Saturday Night* which accused him of falsely contriving some of his most celebrated works. Mowat is quick to point out the institutional biases of those who oppose him and remains secure in his decision to tell the stories the way he did.

Mowat's response to his critics is fascinating to anyone who has followed the controversy, but the real gems of *Eastern Passage* are to be found in the second half of the book where the story of Mowat's own life serves as a frame to a handful of other anecdotes. One gets the feeling that these are stories the author has long wished to tell but found no place for in other volumes. While doing research for what would become his second major publication, *The Regiment* (1955), Mowat learns of Harv Gunter, the grandfather of Cliff Broad, whom Mowat fought alongside in WWII. The stories Mowat relates of Harv, moonshiner and woodsman in rural Ontario, are as improbable as they are endearing.

In the final chapter, within a tale of sailing down the St. Lawrence in his father's ketch, Mowat tells of a tugboat's first mate who witnessed a massive explosion in the same waterway in 1950. This, he says, was the emergency disposal and detonation by a distressed American aircraft of a Mark IV nuclear weapon, similar to the Mark III dropped on Nagasaki in 1945. The bomb had supposedly been disarmed, meaning the plutonium was removed, but the high explosives and uranium remained in place and the explosion was seen and felt for many miles around. Mowat connects this incident to reports of a massive drop in the beluga whale population and an increase in the rate of birth defects among the humans of the region. Here, in Mowat's final work, he sees fit to drop a bomb of his own, suggesting that this long concealed incident also contributed to long-term contamination of the fisheries and high cancer rates downstream on the Magdalen islands.

Eastern Passage is Mowat in a nutshell. He is indignant and endearing, cynical and hilarious. He is forever the defender of endangered and extinct ways of life, fearful of the machine age that now consumes us. Though his most controversial stories have been revised many times, he has never apologized for telling them, nor does he now as he closes his long literary career. *Eastern Passage* fills out his personal story and makes room for the stories of others that needed telling. While it may seem disjointed for those unfamiliar with Mowat, this is essential reading for Mowat devotees.

DAVID NUÑEZ TOEWS is writing an MA thesis on Mowat's work at the University of Calgary.

Every Living Being: Representations of Nonhuman Animals in the Exploration of Human Well-Being by **MARIE-FRANCE BOISSONNEAULT**

Inkwater Press, 2010 $21.95 (US)

Reviewed by **STEPHANIE POSTHUMUS**

Bringing together the arts, communication studies, literature, psychology, animal behaviour studies, and ethics, Marie-France Boissonneault's book *Every Living Being* uses a wide interdisciplinary lens to examine the

animal question. An adjunct professor at the Ontario Veterinary College, holding a PhD. in Communications, Media, and IT, as well as a B.Sc. in Marine Studies and a B.A. in psychology and film, Boissonneault is well situated to take on such a task.

The book's subtitle about animals and human well-being is what first caught my eye. When Boissonneault limits herself to this subject, she is at her best. In two of the eight chapters, she offers an extensive literature review of the use of animals as caregivers (in the form of companion animals) and as healers (in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, psychological settings, etc.) It is in these two chapters that I most often wrote the comment "Interesting" in the book's margins (for example, about the presence of dogs having an effect on the therapist as well as the patient and about the fact that animal-protection laws came into being before child-protection laws). What is missing from these chapters, though, is a critical perspective examining how disciplinary lenses in psychology and behaviour therapy play a role in defining what Boissonneault calls quite broadly "quality of life," "well-being," and the "nonhuman animal."

The book's other chapters reveal just how much Boissonneault has taken on in her study: the representation of animals in history, literature, art, and contemporary media, the visual imagery of animals, animals as caregivers and healers, the ethics of farm animals, and animals' emotional lives. If Boissonneault had limited her study to the question of human well-being, she may have been able to broach such a wide variety of research areas. Unfortunately, I often felt she was moving much too quickly over some very difficult and complex issues.

Since I am a literary critic, I will raise some initial questions about the chapter "The Historical, Literary, Artistic, and Contemporary Media's Portrayal of the Nonhuman Animal in the Human Milieu." While limiting herself to the analysis of three fairytales, *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*, Boissonneault treats literature as a "window into the historical concepts that have guided societal opinions." While recognizing this genre's "fluidity" and "wide variation," Boissonneault nevertheless chooses to concentrate on resemblances between versions in order to analyse the representation of the human-animal relationship in each fairytale. She concludes that the wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood* is a negative representation, while the birds in *Cinderella* and the cat in *Puss in Boots* represent positive interspecies relationships. Such reduction is unfortunate. Boissonneault seems to want to measure literary representations in terms of animals' "actual" behaviour and at the same time to promote "positive" representations of animals. This leads her to a strange conclusion at the end of the book: false conceptions of animals in books are bad when they are detrimental to the animal being represented. Does this mean "false" conceptions of an animal that nevertheless portray a positive image are good?

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Bloom by **SIMMONS B. BUNTIN**

Salmon Poetry, 2010 $17.00

Reviewed by **RASMUS R. SIMONSEN**

Wisdom wisdom: a peachblossom blooms on a particular
tree on a particular day:
unity cannot do anything in particular
A. R. Ammons, "Guide"

Bloom is the latest collection of poems from Simmons B. Buntin, chronicling five years of lyrical output. Here he explores environmental questions ("Plastic") as well as the legacy of such catastrophic events as the bombing of Hiroshima; chiefly, however, Buntin's poems relate to his own immediate environment, the borderlands of Arizona. The poems that deal with questions of representation and the tense connection between the human and the nonhuman are by far the most successful and interesting in *Bloom*. Buntin's musings on the Internet and websites like Amazon.com appear stale, even quaint, in comparison, as they lack the intensity of his desert poems.

Most of the imagery in *Bloom* draws heavily on the brilliant yet eerie illuminations of the desert. In "The Vernacular of Fire and Rain," the "sprawling flames on the mountainside" and the "venomous flare / asping through bent and blackened trees" index the volatile structure of the poem itself. The abundant and fierce enjambments of Buntin's *terza libre* form are reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's "poetic booby-trap" technique that characterized her early poetry (see the collections *The Animals in that Country* and *Power Politics*, for example). Uneven stanzas and lines breaking apart highlight the post-organic quality of his poetry. Like Wordsworth before him, Buntin labours to construct a suitable means by which to commune with nature in its native tongue, which is "the language of the sense" (*Tintern Abbey*). However, Buntin seems to give up on the Wordsworthean idea that nature holds the key to the "egotistical sublime." As becomes clear in the poem "Question," Buntin's desert surroundings do not serve as an anchor to the poet's thoughts: "The scorpions have their own / concerns." The acknowledged failure of the poet to adopt the vernacular of the earth results in a gesture of supplementarity, the creation of a glossary at the back of the book which would aid the reader in contextualizing the many potentially foreign—depending on the particular reader—names of plants and places.

We are introduced to *Bloom* by a scene of reading in which the speaker addresses his reader directly ("you"); at the threshold of the collection proper, through direct address, we become instantly implicated in what is to come. From the very first poem of *Bloom*—excluding the introductory text—it becomes clear that Buntin's aim is to create a textual mesh or network of sense impressions that defies the conventional boundaries by which we are used to thinking about the world: culture/nature, human/nonhuman. "Shine" describes travelling in car by night through the American southwest. The world we are presented with here is not only confusing to the senses ("black light" pours "into every crevice"), but also not immediately responsive to human needs or expression; this is the domain of "poisonous scorpions," whose "exoskeletons" shine "like intricate green / imps stealing moths at twilight"—an image that, so Buntin's explanatory notes tell us, is apparently inspired by the pastime of "'shining' scorpions with ultraviolet lights" in the Arizona-Sonora Desert at night. Nevertheless, "Shine" leaves absent a human source for this supernatural illumination; instead, human agency is reduced to following the incommensurable signals of unreliable nature appearing across and crossing our path through *Bloom*, and we are caught between "the white grin / of the moon" and "the dark teeth / of the dawn" ("Opuntia"). For this reason, reading this collection is a highly involved, shocking experience which is exacerbated by the often erratic form of his poetry. For example, the scattered syntax of

"Sting" endeavours to approximate the cross-fertilizing efforts of the "ground-dwelling bees" in the Israeli desert. But their trajectory is impeded by a human structure ("a wall / to keep a people / out"), and Buntin thus points subtly to the impact that political unrest has on the flow of the natural as well as the human world. As a consequence, it would appear that nature has grown impatient with our presence, even hostile at times, as when "a heavy beetle / hurls itself at the shuddering glass" of the poet's house in "Question."

The nature that Buntin aims to depict is neither interested in human life nor directly available to language. In this way, it seems fitting that he should end the poem "Radiance" with the following rhetorical question: "How could any of us divine / the unfathomable day, sing / swift radiance from impossible night?" This is Buntin at his bleakest. The "impossibility" of this line alludes to the speaker's expressed frustration over the powerlessness of words to tame not only the "new vocabulary" that the "rain chants down" in "The Vernacular of Fire and Rain" but also—and more pressingly—"a neighbor's blossoming / disease." In this instance, the particularity of Ammons's peachblossom resonates with Buntin's work, in that the latter does not achieve a sense of unity with nature; indeed, the "gruesome glow" of the scorpions and the "shining" fangs of the coral snake in "Shine" point to the ways in which nature is seen to resist such a communality. In fact, the iterant blossoming of Buntin's metaphors is menacing to the very integrity of his text, which is always on the verge of coming apart under the pressure exerted on it by the "mad glory of wings pounding" ("The Vernacular of Fire and Rain").

In the end, the presence of the feminine is what saves *Bloom* from textual disintegration. However, this also means that at times Buntin reverts to an unfortunate traditional view of "woman" as being inherently closer to the soil than the masculine. In "Story," after the birth of the couple's second daughter, the placenta acts as a fertilizer to the palo verde plant in their front yard. And, in this way, his wife and daughters come to function as liaisons between Buntin's own inadequate—because, ironically, too masculine—poetic voice and nature. It must be said, then, that this masculinist bias somewhat taints his otherwise intriguing and touchingly mournful descriptions of the "bleeding hills" ("Opuntia") and the "sulfur blooms" ("Antler among Poppies") of the desert landscape. Be that as it may, it is difficult to resist the affirmation of the closing stanzas of the collection—a long poem ("Inflorescence") detailing his daughter's recovery from a serious accident. The branch of an agave tree is thus metaphorically linked to her convalescence:

> already you can see the yellow-
> tipped fingers, the nectared flowers
> nearly open, and where
> the inflorescence severs
> *Look there!*
> …
> how it blooms.

RASMUS R. SIMONSEN is a Ph.D. student in the Department of English at The University of Western Ontario. He is the author of "Even or(r) Odd: The Game of Narration in Paul Auster's *Oracle Night*" (American Studies in Scandinavia, 2009) and "Appetite for Disruption: The Cinematic Zombie and Queer Theory" (forthcoming). He has presented papers at a variety of conferences, ranging in topic from the intellectual intersections of Thoreau and Heidegger to queer veganism.

At Home in the Ecotone

Man Facing West by **DON GAYTON**
Thistledown, 2010 $18.95

Reviewed by **MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS**

Don Gayton has long occupied an intermediate zone between science and literature, arguing for the coexistence of (and conversation among) differing points of view and kinds of knowledge. Trained and working in science, drawn to literary writing, his best work brings to bear insights from both domains. He's used to a kind of mixed vision, but that's not to say he's found it easy to reconcile science's demand for clarity and verification with the free-ranging reach of his imagination.

Combining essays with short stories, *Man Facing West* enacts Gayton's attempt to bridge another divide, that between fiction and nonfiction. His decision to mix forms creates a work that is less focussed than, say, *The Wheatgrass Mechanism*'s exploration of a single landscape. But at the same time the assemblage suggests that a landscape—or for that matter a book or a life—is more capacious and less explicable than we usually think it.

Though Gayton states this collection is "neither memoir nor autobiography" ("Prologue"), what I find most fascinating is the way the contours of a self emerge from its disparate pieces. Not all carry the same weight, but all contribute to a sense of the personality and intelligence behind them. In *Man Facing* West we meet an evolving self, shifting not fixed, much like a landscape. Perhaps this is not surprising, since Gayton writes: "many people define themselves through jobs and achievements. I look to landscape."

Family may be the earliest of our defining landscapes. Gayton explores his in several essays, remarking that "guns, military history, and Republican politics were all major themes in our household, as they were in the country itself at the time." But the family also read John Muir and Thoreau: "there was also a persistent minor theme…of the importance of the individual conscience…of patriotic dissent."

These notions of individual conscience and dissent generate a recurrent presence in *Man Facing West:* the figure on the periphery. By inclination or by accident this individual finds himself on the edges of groups and communities. His ideas differ from conventional or dominant ones, and lead to his either being excluded or choosing to leave. Where he fits is a conundrum. He may be a fictional character or Gayton himself.

In "Flag Day," the young Don Gayton takes a dare and climbs the Wolf Cub flagpole. When the pole snaps he plummets to the ground wrapped in the flag: "an unearthly, horrified silence prevailed. I had just broken the fundamental vow of every American—to never, ever let our flag touch the ground." Expelled from the pack, "a tectonic shift had occurred, and I was alone on a new continent."

In high school, Gayton learned to make a home in not belonging. In "Renegade Letterman," he observes that "a desire to be different, always there in the background, was now a strong motivation." Naturally athletic, he played football happily but refused to wear his letter or go to club meetings; drawn to literature, he hung out with the other "callow seventeen-year-old dissidents." Athletics and art, both marginal to mainstream life in the school, made odd bedfellows, but it would seem that Gayton was at home in both of them, rendering his own ecotone.

The Vietnam War looms large. It led to Gayton's breaking with his family and eventual move to Canada. Though rejecting the war, he was haunted by doubts about his own courage. In the essay "Resisterville," he describes a 2006 reunion for Vietnam-era draft dodgers, veterans, and political emigrants where "the scattered flotsam of anti-war experiences merged into a long-delayed, spiritual convalescence, and a collective vindication of our solitary convictions." His reflections on the War and its long term effects are valuable, not only for himself but for making visible to us the "virtually invisible demographic" of Canadians who share that

wounding experience.

The botanist Bonpland, narrator of the story "Humboldt and Bonpland," abandons Humboldt and their explorations in Venezuela "for a shedding of science, of taxonomy, of culture" because, he writes to Alexander, "You demonstrated to me that analysis can never be separated from conquest, so I am formally abandoning analysis." This is a radical assessment and a commitment to a different way of knowing.

Gayton's determination to think imaginatively as a scientist fuels much of this book. His essays observe and ask questions, but his fiction extends ideas and observations, giving them vividness and emotional force. "Gliding into the Pleistocene" is haunting in its depiction of the Pleistocene landscape, a place made real through Gayton's imaginative longing to inhabit it, combined with his deep understanding of landscape formation.

An ecotone is a transitional area between two ecological communities—a forest and a grassland for instance. Including species from both communities, and also edge species (those that are unique to the ecotone), it displays greater biodiversity than its bounding communities. This between-place is suggestive of psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's transitional space, an area between our inner and outer worlds where identity is created and imagination is in play. Don Gayton finds himself in both versions of between places. In this book, he's feeling his way into their overlap, where two different ways of knowing mingle.

Like any landscape, *Man Facing West* is amenable to various readings and resists summary. I've followed one track through it, casting an occasional glance along some side trails: to think lovingly about the land and our place in it is its invitation.

MAUREEN SCOTT HARRIS, poet and essayist, was born in Prince Rupert, grew up in Winnipeg, and now lives in Toronto. Her awards include the Trillium Book Award for Poetry for *Drowning Lessons* (2005), first prize in *Prairie Fire*'s creative nonfiction contest (2007), and the WildCare Tasmania Nature Writing Prize (2009).

The Biotechnologies, Biopolitics, and Bioethics of Making Meat

Animals as Biotechnology: Ethics, Sustainability and Critical Animal Studies by **RICHARD TWINE**
Earthscan, 2010 $88.95

Reviewed by **ROSEMARY-CLAIRE COLLARD**

What meat is–materially and imaginatively–has changed significantly over the past century. How and where it is consumed (or not); how it is perceived and valued; how it is produced–by what technologies and according to what knowledges; by what precisely it is constituted (from macro to micro scales)–all of these things vary over space and time, according to a shifting constellation of cultural, political, economic, and techno-scientific conditions. Richard Twine's *Animals as Biotechnology* is written in response to two shifts in the conditions affecting what meat is: 1) the twentieth century emergence of a politically powerful biotechnological regime–a specialized set of biological sciences–for breeding farm animals; and 2) the last four decades' development of an interdisciplinary field of animal studies. Each of these trends has been transformative. The first reconfigured how meat is made, scaling up the degree and reach of commercialization, particularly with respect to molecular techniques of breeding, and the second moved the animal figure and human-animal relationships out of the academic shadows, and politicized human-animal relations in the academy and beyond. Both

trends also continue their transformative work. Twine's book tracks the animal body through these trends' historical unfolding, through projections of how these trends might evolve, and with respect to their potential implications for ethics, sustainability, and, of course, meat.

Twine's book opens with a comprehensive review of key debates within a recently enlivened animal studies, focusing on links with his own discipline, sociology, and also following connections between animal studies and feminist theory, science studies, and posthumanism. Twine then turns to the focus of his book: the application of genomics and biotechnology to animal agriculture. The assumption that worldwide we are moving toward more respectful and less exploitative human-animal relations is contradicted, he argues, by the commercialization of molecular techniques that "normalize new techniques of breeding animals and herald a novel authorial power over other animals." Animal biotechnology–defined by Twine as particular techniques related to molecular knowledge and contemporary biology–is thus "one of the most ambitious attempts yet to extend the human domination of nature." At the same time, this commercialization is part of a spatial sequestration that effectively hides violent human-animal relations from the public gaze and critical scrutiny, allowing the assumption of a more benign human to flourish. Focusing on the United Kingdom as a site of analysis Twine aims to bring these violent geographies into view, drawing on dozens of interviews, government and industry reports, and laws and policies, to trace the emergence of animal biotech, its economies, knowledges and practices, and how it fits within broader discourses around climate change and sustainability.

To interpret this empirical material, the latter part of Twine's book, in particular, contributes to and draws from a burgeoning conversation between social theorists across disciplines who bring Foucault's discussions of biopower (power of/over life) to bear on animal life. In parallel with these theorists, Twine finds value in Foucault's work (however anthropocentric it might have been) for picking apart the collection of technologies, knowledges, and practices that manages animal life to a deeper degree, he argues, than human life, due to the absence of norms such as privacy, autonomy, and justice. Twine is also attends to intersections between the calculated management of farmed animal life, and the consequences for human life and survival, showing that "the biopolitical proliferation of the sheer global scale of exploited farmed animal life [...] is simultaneously anthropocentric and misanthropic" in that it exploits animals and also directs resources like land, energy, water, and food away from marginal human populations and towards the intensive production of meat. The reality of biotechnologically farmed animals flies in the face of industry marketing that increasingly frames animal biotech as sustainable and healthful for humans and animals.

Twine arguably wrote *Animals as Biotechnology* in part to debunk the biotech industry's positive framing of its work. His book has, in response, two broad and interrelated aims: (1) to emphasise the bioethical importance of animal biotechnology; and (2) to expand what is commonly understood to be the "bio" in bioethics. Animals currently linger on the periphery of bioethics. Twine wants to bring them squarely into the centre. But not by turning to animal ethics as it currently stands, too often diluted to animal welfare (which in turn is narrowed to productive "health"), or what Twine calls "welfare ethics," or "docile ethics": "domesticated, under control and with a deeper sense of ethical reflexivity curtailed." Welfare ethics are unable to actually challenge human practices that reproduce anthropocentric values. Instead, Twine argues, animal ethics must launch a "deeper critique of anthropocentrism that also operationalizes a broader relational ontology that

further undermines a resilient human-animal dualism," and this critique must inform a revitalized and re-claimed bioethics.

What does this mean for sustainability, then? In the case of animal biotechnology, it means that "sustainability cannot be captured in the genome but must unfold in the reflexive knowledge accrued around the corporeal and ecological contexts of human-nonhuman interaction and the normative questioning of hubris." Policies of redress for undervalued nonhuman actors must destabilize the human-animal dualism and hierarchy. Specifically in the case of climate change, Twine advises animal advocacy groups not to use this issue as the dominant register for promoting vegetarianism or veganism. Instead, climate change discourse should call into question our values towards nonhuman animals, and should underline the likely impacts of climate change for animals. In parallel, theorists and researchers must, Twine argues, (1) attend to the symbolic power of meat/dairy by (2) using a framework of intersectionality to construct an understanding of how meat/dairy consumption is interwoven with the construction of human identities and socialities, and 3) challenge this symbolic power by highlighting the practices and flourishing of existing vegetarians and vegans.

It is my hope that this book will be read by more than just the animal advocates and vegans listed above. Likely little in Twine's book will come as a surprise to them, although the depth of his critique and prescriptions may challenge some of those readers. My wish is that Twine's book also ends up in the hands of (future) biotech industry representatives and decision-making officials who will be prompted by Twine's empirically supported arguments and the profundity of what is at stake to arrest the rapid deployment of animal technologies and reorganize who profits and who loses from the management of animal life and the making of meat.

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Help Me, Jacques Cousteau by **GIL ADAMSON**

House of Anansi Press, $18.95

Reviewed by **HARRY VANDERVLIST**

Gil Adamson was already an accomplished novelist and poet when, in 2007, her novel *The Outlander* was awarded the Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Hammett Prize, and was also featured on CBC's Canada Reads. Receiving so many honours in one year meant that the novel's notoriety was assured. Yet it was also a word-of-mouth favourite. I know my own copy made it through at least six further readers before disappearing from view. (If you have it, please return it.) Meanwhile *Help Me, Jacques Cousteau,* her 1995 collection of linked stories, had fallen out of print. (It had been first published by The Porcupine's Quill, in another demonstration of taste and prescience on the part of one of Canada's indispensable small presses.) House of Anansi wisely chose to reissue the book (slightly revised) in 2010.

Adamson's title invites readers to ask: who calls upon Jacques Cousteau for help, invoking a television submariner as if he were St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes? Someone like Hazel, the narrator of *Help Me, Jacques Cousteau.* She is a young girl who feels out of her element, living in a place even stranger than Cousteau's Undersea World. (Hazel is a child of the 1960s, when the famous man in the woollen watch cap was an inescapable cultural reference.) For Hazel, "the world is at a funny angle" from the very

beginning. Readers first watch her world tilt and sway while her family voyages back home to Canada by ship, at the conclusion of her father's teaching stint in Australia. Adamson's narrator is a child of the antipodes. For her, every ordinary aspect of her new Canadian life seems strange: the "torturous, unbending snowsuit—a whole world of children waddling around in torturous, unbending snowsuits. A world of sleds and snow and slush and ice-balls down the back of my neck and the maddening *zzt-zzt* of nylon snow pants."

Hazel is a child on whom nothing is lost: her preternatural hearing makes her, like an eavesdropper armed with one of those "Whisper2000" devices seen on infomercials, dangerously well-informed about everyone around her. She observes her family, her neighbours (at times with binoculars from atop the garage roof) and herself with such a tone of loving puzzlement that it is impossible not to be drawn in.

It is not just Hazel's anthropologist-from-Mars viewpoint that allows the book to paint the everyday episodes of childhood with such an affecting tinge of the surreal. There is also the fact that her family is filled with genuine eccentrics. Especially the men. Her grandfather who drives around for a week with the defunct family dog in the back of the family Cadillac. Her father North who compulsively rewires the family home when under stress. Uncle Bishop who tells tales so tall, yet compelling, that if they are not true "they should be." Her uncle Castor who, like all the men in the book, so exasperates the women around him that they leave, only to return for more exasperation.

It makes sense that this book's epigraph —"heaven is a place where nothing ever happens"— comes from The Talking Heads, another inescapable reference for any 1960s child who became a 1970s adolescent. One main difficulty of life, for Hazel, is that so much is happening all the time. Much of it is wonderful, some of it horrible, but all of it is so fleeting. At the end of the book she offers her vision of paradise: it involves simply arresting time so that her family can be held in a tableau. Tellingly, it's not a serene or affectionate moment that she wishes to seize. It is a moment of pure chaos and real danger, with everyone present reacting in completely different and characteristic ways. As so often in the book, the scene blends the comic with a sense of real menace.

Perhaps it is this vivid sense of moments being continually lost to the procession of time which led *Guardian* reviewer Nicola Barr to say "this book will break your heart." While it will certainly touch your heart, I found its poignancy cocooned within a strange aura of safety. Adamson uses the everyday magic of electricity to convey the mix of safety and peril in the family home: yes, a deadly force lives within the walls, but however much it is toyed with, it never truly harms anyone. Even when North leaves a live wire lying across the basement floor one day, and inevitably (and comically) everyone steps on it, it is merely startling. Nobody dies. While the worst does eventually happen—sooner or later the family must "disappear, go our separate ways and lose everything"—Hazel's fascination with the world, and her sheer enjoyment of her family, never falter.

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That Other Beauty by **KAREN ENNS**

Brick Books, 2010 $19.00

Reviewed by **CASSEL BUSSE**

T*hat Other Beauty* is a debut collection of poetry written by Karen Enns, whose poetry has also appeared in Canadian publications such as

The Fiddlehead, *The Antigonish Review*, and *Grain Magazine*. Enns is a current resident of Victoria B.C. but hails from a Mennonite community in Southern Ontario—a locale that, for a fellow dweller of that region, rings true in much of the poetry in this new volume. Indeed, for anyone that has lived in or visited the small towns and rural landscapes of Southern Ontario, the "low stone walls around the orchards," "stalks of ragweed" in mid-winter fields, and corner markets displaying "tulip pails/pots of mums, begonias, asian lilies/wrapped in paper cones" portray a familiar landscape captured well by Enns' perceptive eye for detail and almost methodical poetic voice. Many of these poems read like an inventory of places, objects, and human emotions, evoking the affects and landscapes of other works such as Gary Snyder's "Hay for the Horses" or William Carlos Williams' prevailing red wheelbarrow.

Yet, what I find makes Enns' poems stand out against this tradition of imagery poetry is that they do not necessarily capture the cozy farmhouse feeling one might expect of such a rurally focused collection. "That other beauty"—present in moments that are poised, suspended, expectant like drops of water clung to spider's webs—for the poet does not describe the immediately beautiful, but rather the lost, the melancholy, and the bare aspects of life that may not readily capture our attention. What Enns does for us, then, is allow for a meditation on these moments, exposing the beauty hidden in leafless maples "shaking in a northern wind," or the worn body of an aged house-painter waiting for a bus, "stained from his cap to his steel-toed boots / all the weight of his long-muscled days held bare / in the circles under his eye." In landscapes so familiar, perhaps even painfully so, Enns holds her gaze on the often overlooked and dismissed.

I must admit, however, that at times I found Enns' poetry almost too meditative, to the point where the argument of this collection—that beauty is found in the attention to the minutiae, however mundane, mournful or bleak—is potentially lost in some of the more repetitious uses of imagery and subject matter. What is most problematic about this ephemeral yet undeniably weighty archive is the risk it runs of making certain lives, histories and even traumatic events banal. The seemingly effortless way in which these poems skip from the predominant fields and roads of Canada to Depression-era Russia, industrial Ukraine and village life in Nigeria using the same imagery of working-class poverty and foreboding murders of crows troublingly paints these diverse locations with the same inhospitable and dreary brush (perhaps save for Nigeria). Do the "hollow faces, crowds" of Enns' poem "Train Station, Moscow, 1929" map so easily onto the "yellowed eyes" and tattered clothes of the elderly characters in the previous poem "Sparrow," a poem which has no mentioned location and only shares the simple pleasure of feeding birds on a park bench? Or, for that matter, the desiccated rivers and "boots that have no soles" depicted in "Leaving Zaporozhye"? It is moments such as these in *That Other Beauty* that risk not documenting the beauty of these quiet or grief-stricken moments, but making the singularity of them as innocuous as "fields of goldenrods and cabbages burning in the sun."

Despite the potential problems these few instances present in *That Other Beauty*, they do not detract from the poet's overall project. As a debut collection of poetry, there is indeed much quality in the strange beauty examined here by Karen Enns, and much importance in the attention she pays to the life around us, however small—as "the oriole nest suspended in the dying elm"—or large—as the "barely felt, but felt" pull of the "magnet's lone north end."

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politics. An avid reader of poetry, Cassel particularly enjoys the urban works of Torontonian poet Jones and New York poet Frank O'Hara.

"In the torso of the raven": David Abram's Poetics of Experience

Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology by **DAVID ABRAM**
Random House, 2010 $32.00

Reviewed by **JASMINE JOHNSTON**

In *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*, David Abram writes that the "rejuvenation of oral culture is an ecological imperative." This is the central message of this work as well as his previous work, the acclaimed *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. Abram's second book is similar to his first in methodology as well as message: *Becoming Animal*, like *The Spell of the Sensuous*, is a descriptive *tour de force* of the diverse and unendingly complex material primacy of the natural world. Both books emphasize the importance of sensuous, animal embodiment by using the tenets of phenomenology to demonstrate how felt experience shapes cognition, "perceptual logic" that in turn shapes how we see the world and determines whether we conserve or destroy it. Abram suggests that oral communication is the key to conservation. Digital, mechanized, and written forms of communication, while useful and marvellous accomplishments, can also be destructive because they entail abstract thinking. (Abram would probably point out that "abstract" is from the Latin, *abs-*, "off, away," and *tractus*, *trahere*, "to draw"—as in, to draw out of, to pull away from—an act of dissection of a functional whole into disjointed parts.) The purported intangibility of digital technology, machinery that separates resources from their original deposition, and the alphabet's non-pictorial semiotics form cognitive models that separate the visible from invisible, inner from outer, thought from world. The result is a cosmos reduced to inert planetary resources that we as a species cannot seem to find a compelling enough reason to conserve and prevent environmental crisis.

It is the conceptual division between thought and world that Abram seeks to break down in *Becoming Animal.* His focus on the human body, the bodies of other animal species, and the body of the earth itself distinguishes this book from his previous work. In fourteen chapters, Abram alternates between two rhetorical modes—the lyrical and the analytical—to argue for the animality or animism of the cosmos. Chapter titles focus his meditations on things such as "Shadow," "House," "Depth," "Mind," and "Shapeshifting." Abram's core thesis is that the world itself is conscious, at least from the unique dialogical perspectives of our embodied minds (or, perhaps more faithfully to Abram's thesis, our enminded bodies). Some chapters are evocative descriptions of a person—usually addressed in the second person to "you"—hiking up mountains, along arroyos, and through woods. In these chapters, Abram demonstrates that cognitive blending between the self and world is a kind of sense-based magic, metamorphosis, punning, illusion, shape-shifting, or communion. These descriptive chapters bear witness to the ways that our environing world seems to respond to us as we respond to it. Abram sets the tone by "[t]uning our animal senses to the sensible terrain: blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers, mingling our ears with the thunder and the thrumming of frogs, and our eyes with the molten gray sky." In other chapters, Abram, drawing on philosophers such as Thoreau, Merleau-Ponty, and Spinoza to construct a model for understanding sensuous

experience that is decidedly different from the scientific model, discusses the implications of how "you" encounter the natural world for conservation. Abram's cognitive model is based on the poetics of experience—the way experiences are made: "[m]ind arises, and dwells, between the body and the Earth, and hence is as much an attribute of this leafing world as of our own immodest species." While he argues that the scientific model has proven very effective for developing technology that has damaged the environment, he concedes that it may also help to repair the planet. The objective of his argumentation is that the oral, not the technological, must become our primary medium and metaphor for communication and even communion with the cosmos. Orality is carnally experiential, requiring the land, the body, and all the senses in order to convey meaning. Only in oral language can we truly understand that we are deeply intertwined with our world.

Abram effectively communicates a genuine love for the land, for animals, and for the animality of the human mind and body. However, *Becoming Animal* does lack certain apparatuses that would, I believe, enable readers to use it more effectively. Footnotes are present, in which Abram comments on scholars such as Deleuze and Guattari, Lakoff and Johnson. However, the addition of an index and a list of references would allow teachers and students to more precisely access Abram's insights and allusions to other scholars that at times may go unrecognized. I detect shades of Buber, William James, and Elaine Scarry, and wonder, because of a lack of recourse to a reference list, if Abram, in his meditations on the torsos of ravens, alludes to Charles Williams' poem, "Arthurian Torso" (1948) —a fragmentary and strange depiction of an occult cosmos. A reference list that cites the oral and/or written works of Abram's indigenous or aboriginal teachers would also have been useful.

Abram does not apply his model of perceptual logic to the problem of conservation to any historical degree. Speaking, singing, or gesturing reverence for the world may affect the physical environment positively, but this seems to me primarily a very personal and hopeful practice. Can such practices influence the day-to-day legal and public battles over, for example, preserving wetlands? Abram requires faith from the reader that the fusing of our perspectives with world is the catalyst to effecting discernible change. Further, although Abram briefly refers to the beauty and potential animacy of cities in his work, he does not address either the importance or tragedies of cities with fewer advantages than New York or Prague.

The environmental abject, the intensity and extent of environmental degradation, and the consequent suffering of all species, including human, remain relatively unexamined (although I do appreciate that it is his prerogative to focus on lakes, frogs, and starlight rather than the aesthetics of nuclear waste, garbage cities, or digital hardware dumps). I allude deliberately here to Timothy Morton's important work on the idea of ecomimetic "ambient poetics" that aim to "hold the slimy in view"—and to some of Morton's comments on Abram's work. Morton's critique of the ecology of magic and the animal cosmos amusingly and perhaps necessarily blasphemes dancing for trees, gazing at ravens, and other such affirmations of our unity with the world. Yet Abram conveys a certain kind of message, which is that beauty and truth are found in an experiential, on-the-ground fidelity to the articulations between all self-reproducing bodies—between frogs from spawn and granite rocks from the earth's magma. In reading *Becoming Animal*, I am reminded of my own skin and the skin of the earth.

I believe that Abram's book is a valuable and equally necessary contribution to multiple fields—philosophy, poetics, ecocriticism—because he interweaves attentive, nuanced observations of real experiences into his years of philosophical studies to produce a work that

must be read as a whole to be understood, and which may encourage a deeper appreciation of a world that most readers do want very much to conserve and restore. This book is a primary work of intellect and imagination that readers can delve into, critique, comment on, and apply; its correlations between ravens and torsos read like a sustained prose-poem. Perhaps Abram's material cosmos is, as Kenneth Rexroth suggests to be true of all philosophy, really a species of art, and thus best read as poetry. And as Snyder suggests, such poetry is there to "make us love the world" ("Art")—a purpose that Abram's work indeed fits.

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Look Out!: Boning Up and Reinventing McStew's Poetry Offerings

Lookout by **JOHN STEFFLER**
McClelland & Stewart, 2010 $18.99
Ossuaries by **DIONNE BRAND**
McClelland & Stewart, 2010 p/b $18.99
The Reinvention of the Human Hand by **PAUL VERMEERSCH**
McClelland & Stewart, 2010 $18.99

Reviewed by **OWEN PERCY**

In his March 24, 2010 *Globe and Mail* review of John Steffler's *Lookout*, George Murray pointedly observed that Steffler does not fall prey to the ubiquitous CanPo plague of publishing an uneven or mediocre collection every other year—his books are lovingly crafted and carefully consistent in their (high) quality content. The economy with which Steffler chooses to publish his work—this is his first book of new work in a decade—will be well appreciated by his readers when they, ironically, find themselves lost in these poems with no desire to find their way out. *Lookout* is, I think, Steffler's best book yet.

Lookout is divided into four sections full of tightly-wrought free verse lyrics, prose poems, sonnets, found poems, and personal essays. The opening section, "Limestone Barrens" brings us back to Steffler's *That Night We Were Ravenous* (1997) and *The Grey Islands* (2000) in their surgical attention to the landscapes of Newfoundland and those who wander, wonder-full, on/in it. The poem "Barrens Willow" opens: "Dumb giant, I have no words to fit what I find on Burnt / Cape," but then proceeds, for 19 more lines, if to fail, to fail beautifully to capture sublimity before closing with the regenerational image of "A willow seed open[ing] / a trunk of its mother's letters." The relationship between the ecological and the economic is never far from Steffler's mind, and it is rarely trivialized as a simple binary; in "Wind Shadow, L'Anse Aux Meadows," for example, we come to understand that "The local people want / more boulders like L'Anse Aux Meadows, more / nooks where money drifts in, especially now / that the Strait is raked clean of cod."

Steffler is always concerned with the anxieties of the "we" within environments. "Dividing Island," for example, sets the breaking up of a family against the "ache of a landscape / people have always had to leave," and "Mail From My Pregnant Daughter" tenderly renders the nearly imperceptible images on an ultrasound into a cosmic "constellation of vertebrae. Hubble / portrait. Reverse grave." In twenty pages, "Once"—the book's long-poem midsection—is an unconventional, moving, and well-written portrait of family, aging, and Alzheimers. The connections between memory, history, the human body, and the landscapes which tie them together are ubiquitous throughout the book. The book's closing section, "Colonial Building Archives," details with

ekphrastic fervour the photographic evidence of the industrialization of the area around Corner Brook since 1890. Steffler's speakers lament that "British money is opening jaws / that will tug off the island's whole green // pelt and chaw it down" ("A30-160 Building the Paper Mill"). The section concludes the book on an uncanny note with its retrospective recognition of the alarming nonchalance of the encroaching industry that has come to define the area in the present day.

Ossuaries is the latest of Dionne Brand's epic sociopolitical long poems that have tried to conceptualize "this big world, our ossuary // so brightly clad, almost heroic, almost dead." Like *Inventory* (2006), and *thirsty* (2002) before it, *Ossuaries* situates itself in the midst of a decaying urban space in a moment of fading modernity. That is, it recognizes that our revolutions have failed, that capitalism reigns without a human conscience, and that the future of the planet and its inhabitants is becoming increasingly uncertain as a result. *Ossuaries* seems, in fact, a kind of continuation of *Inventory*, a collection in which Brand took stock of the world's present social, political, and militaristic horrors. *Ossuaries*, then, is a kind of despairing love letter to a future generation who might, the poem hopes, discover our civilization's bones in some coming year long after our self-inflicted demise in order to learn from them: "if only someone opens this in that year, / I hope they won't understand all of it, / it should be dust too, it will, it will."

And a continuation it is indeed: the collection's breathless zeal to expound beautifully on our demise is slowed by occasional commas, but never any definitive periods. The punctuation breaks we do get come only in the form of question marks. The fifteen "ossuaries" of various lengths that comprise the poem are written in tight, though metrically erratic lyrical tercets which mimic the underlying and decayed "invisible architecture" of a society that aspired in its modernity to strict order but failed. The poem alternates between the "I, the slippery pronoun, the ambivalent, glistening, / long sheath of the alphabet" of Yasmine, a woman living purposefully under the radar of institutionality since her political and criminal involvement in a radical Marxist group some years ago, and a third-person voice who speaks knowingly *of* Yasmine's experiences of the world. Yasmine's (Brand's?) considerations of her city and planet are bleak in their flippant prophecies: "the flights of starlings interrupted, / the genocides of September insects, / the disappearances after of sugar bees and quick footsteps / … / here's to the fatal future." Brand does not often let we modern readers off the hook for our participation in Yasmine's realities. She laments, consistently, "what brutal hours, what brutal days, / do not say, oh find the good in it, do not say, / there was virtue; there was no virtue, not even in me // let us begin from there." *Ossuaries* is remarkably lyrical and beautiful given its content; the poem opens with Yasmine's declaration that "I lived and loved, some might say, / in momentous times." Beginning from there, *Ossuaries* leaves the virtue and good-yet-to-be in the hands of we fellow citizens.

Paul Vermeersch, who studied with Brand in the University of Guelph MFA program, also seems to pick up where he left off—at least in his new collection's return to the fraught relationships between humans and the natural world that ran through his last collection, *Between the Walls* (2005). *The Reinvention of the Human Hand* is, too, Vermeersch's best writing yet; it is a remarkably coherent and consistently fresh book whose poems tend towards a common consideration of the ways in which we remain connected to all that has come before us. "The Painted Beasts of Lascaux" opens the collection with the assertion that the discovery of the nearly 20,000 year-old cave paintings in southern France "has been a kind of homecoming, too. / Part of you has been here before, germinal, hidden." In fact, the poet suggests, the hoof beats of the charging horses

on the cave walls "are still the drums that drive the song in your blood, / the abiding chant of the hundred billion dead / who came before you … / … / Their song the song / that's been snarled in your heart – breaking it, / trying to pound its way free – for your entire life." When we come across, in one of the book's final poems, "Beautiful and Swift," a hunter "mak[ing] an image / on the wall and speak[ing] the word," the collection's thesis —if you'll permit my reductiveness here—is complete; the book's closing lines assure us that "We keep becoming" ("Lost Things") always.

Our connection to our primate relatives is a particular preoccupation of this collection. "Ape," in its primitive syntax, invites the famed California-raised signing gorillas Koko and Michael into speech, before acknowledging that such speech must now likely come "from government- / funded genome projects, on glass slides of blood, from / the ancient common darkness inside cells." Elsewhere, we humans recall that "Where we formed a circle / against the snarling cosmos, / they formed their circle beyond us, farther still" ("Twenty-one Days With a Baboon Heart") even though, as the poet hauntingly reminds us, we have begun to mine their organs against our own demise. But the collection is not distractingly didactic or overly glum as a whole. The solemn "In the Glorious Absence of Gods," a five-part suite on what Vermeersch, a few pages later, calls "the cruelty of evolution" ("Last of the Blondes") is included alongside hilariously thoughtful poems like "Three Anthropomorphic Studies," a tribute to Daffy Duck, Wile E. Coyote, and Bugs Bunny. Nowhere does Vermeersch shy away from contemporanaeity or pop culture, but instead he exposes its deeply-engrained roots in human desire and elementality in poems like the video game-inspired "This Is Where Your Life Begins" (58) and cell phone "Ringtones" which are "downloaded from a prenatal / memory." But even in the technological jungle of the contemporary moment, these poems still marvel, also, at the non-digital chirruping of frogs who

> slept through the final
> dying of the trilobites, the same choir
> that lullabyed diplodocus into its grave,
> and smilodon, and thylacine, and dodo.
> And still they sing, though not for us,
> their ancestors' mantra: *I am here, I am here*. ("Sorrow for Frogsong")

There are too many poignant and memorable moments in these poems to do justice in this review space, but suffice it to say that, with its considerable and consistent ability to stop its readers in their tracks with its originality, imagery, and general linguistic muscle—"Such extraordinary ordinariness!" ("Altarpiece with False Teeth and Parkinson's Disease")—Vermeersch's book could well have appeared alongside those of his publishing housemates on the shortlist for this year's Griffin Prize. Given the promise and strength of *The Reinvention of the Human Hand*, Vermeersch's place alongside such relative giants as Steffler and Brand is a comfortable one, and very well deserved.

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Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self by **STACY ALAIMO**

Indiana University Press 2010 $24.95 (US)

Reviewed by **CHERYL LOUSLEY**

With *Bodily Natures*, Stacy Alaimo continues the theoretical project initiated with her earlier books, *Undomesticated Ground* (2000) and *Material Feminisms* (2008, edited with Susan Hekman): to develop a theoretically robust and socially just way of engaging with materiality in literary and cultural studies. Although an engagement with materiality has been a defining focus of American ecocriticism, Alaimo's work

belongs to the "new materialism" or science studies stream of environmental thought and the environmental justice side of environmental politics. Materiality and nature are not the solid, familiar ground for Alaimo but dynamic sites where ordinary familiarities become estranged, and where the bodies we thought were ours are Other in new and disorienting ways. In this book, Alaimo explores the permeability of human and other living bodies, what she calls our "trans-corporeality": our particular and variable openness to silica and uranium dust, neurological sensitivity to synthetic chemicals, and toxic travels across the placenta and breast milk. Noting that the dominant cultural paradigm remains the medical model of the enclosed modern body, Alaimo uncovers a minor literature where trans-corporeal subjectivity is explored.

One such literature is a genre she terms the "material memoir," life writing by those suffering from illnesses or threats that may be environmentally related. The very uncertainty about cause is the key tension in the material memoirs Alaimo discusses, and what prompts a reshaping of the memoir form. Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980) is one of the earliest examples, and startles not only because of its rage—which is emblematic of Lorde's writing—but the way in which Lorde weaves discussion of scientific research (citing the *British Journal of Cancer*, for example) into private self-reflection, and combines both in her call for political action. Unlike the now ubiquitous pink ribbon campaigns and their relentless efforts to make breast cancer upbeat, these material memoirs mark how the difficulty of establishing direct lines of cause and effect between environmental contamination and particular bodily manifestations of ill health undermines the individual's quest for a narrative that might make sense of the illness. Epidemiological research can make general associations between particular hazards and trends in population health, but as yet such possible connections cannot be individualized. A frustrating indeterminacy thwarts the desire for a clear-cut enemy or responsible agent.

Alaimo takes Susanne Antonetta's *Body Toxic* (2001) to be the most interesting of the material memoirs. Its narrative circuitry shows the simultaneous destabilization of self and body in Antonetta's quest for treatment and understanding of her myriad reproductive and mental health disorders. Memory is interrogated afresh in Antonetta's work as she traces how environmental health risks are strangely absent from her New Jersey family's memory, despite their evident presence on the land and their ill bodies. The memoir raises new questions about how the environment is backgrounded in western lives, suggesting it is repressed into an environmental unconscious thoroughly denied and disavowed.

Cinematic and photographic approaches to multiple chemical sensitivity—a cluster of symptoms not consistently recognized as an illness by the mainstream medical community—similarly produce new accounts of the self, as those with symptoms find themselves socially unrecognized and ostracized, unable to live and work in "ordinary" chemically saturated homes and buildings. Alaimo discusses Rhonda Zwillinger's *The Dispossessed* (1998), a portrait photography series of people living with multiple chemical sensitivities (and which informed Todd Haynes's film *Safe*), noting how the photographs tend to position their subjects as overpowered by their environments. One woman, living in her carport, is crowded out by the domestic and medical apparatuses needed to make the space a living space; her face is covered by a mask. In another photograph, a couple in white in a white room on white sheets eerily recreate Yoko Ono and John Lennon's "Bed In" but without the hedonistic optimism, as they seem to blend entirely into the room.

The photographs in the *Memories Come to Us* (1997) collection by the Navajo Uranium Miner Oral History and Photography Project,

which Alaimo reads in conjunction with the uranium mining poems of Simon Ortiz, similarly seek to make visible that which is risky precisely because not visible to the ordinary senses, and outside the experience of the "average American." This project combines oral history with photography in order to bear witness to the radioactivity ever present in their lives and bodies yet invisible in the photographs of seemingly ordinary life.

Quite unlike earlier postmodern celebrations of the liberating possibilities of narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, and decentring of the subject, these aesthetic projects present a more ambivalent, cautionary note. As Alaimo insists, "trans-corporeality is a site not for affirmation, but rather for epistemological reflection and precautionary principles" (144). The subjects really do want treatment and cure; medical closure and environmental protection remain a necessary desire even as the aesthetic projects show how elusive they are in twentieth and twenty-first century risk society.

Other genres that Alaimo discusses include the modernist documentary long poem, environmental justice murder mystery, and evolutionary science fiction. Although what I find most significant about Alaimo's work is her insistence on the aesthetic challenges posed by the inadequacy of ordinary knowledge in risk society, the book remains more suggestive than comprehensive in its working through of the trans-corporeal significance of these genres. This is partly due to its exclusively American focus (understandable as Alaimo is a scholar of American studies). So many times I felt that the analysis would have been fruitfully extended by including Canadian (and other) writing in the same genre. What a shame, I thought, to discuss Percival Everett's *Watershed* (1996), an environmental murder mystery set on a fictionalized Lakota Sioux reservation, without relating it to Thomas King's environmental murder mysteries, *DreadfulWater Shows Up* and *The Red Power Murders*. Or to miss reading Muriel Rukeyser's documentary long poem *The Book of the Dead* (1938) alongside Dorothy Livesay. But these are areas where we each can build on Alaimo's fruitful groundwork.

I do have my own cautionary note about the theoretical account of trans-corporeality. Alaimo differentiates her approach from other leading feminist engagements with epistemological realism and materiality, notably Elizabeth Grosz and Lorraine Code. Alaimo expresses concern at Grosz's ludic embrace of species extinction, while she notes that Code's ecological subject is "materially situated" whereas the trans-corporeal subject "is not so much situated, which suggests stability and coherence, but rather caught up in and transformed by myriad, often unpredictable material agencies" (146). I appreciate Alaimo's emphasis on the dynamic nature of material bodies but the recurring language of entanglement and the passivity of the subject "caught up in" these other agencies seems to repeat rather than interrogate the fatalism of Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society*, a source text for Alaimo's analysis. The feminist turn to "situated knowledges" was about democratizing and historicizing the production of knowledge. The permeability and frustration of Alaimo's trans-corporeal subjects, by contrast, seems to do little to create space for political analysis or action. Relatedly, the text omits the political economies of these trans-corporeal material relations. While I find *Bodily Natures* an important contribution to environmental and literary study, I am not yet convinced trans-corporeality adequately elucidates the political moment in which we live —in a way that might help us change it.

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The Environmental Prairie

Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally by **JENNY KERBER**
Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010

Reviewed by **KIT DOBSON**

Jenny Kerber's *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* is an important contribution from a critic who promises to be integral to the future of our conversations about Canadian literature and the environment. It is a successful, succinct, and intelligent book that reads a selection of prairie literature in order to generate an environmentally focused understanding of its focal region. Published in Wilfrid Laurier's Environmental Humanities series, it demonstrates a seamlessly interdisciplinary approach that crosses literary and environmental studies.

The specific interest of *Writing in Dust* is that of tracking a particular form of story about the prairie. Rather than confining the book to a single genre (although each of the core chapters in the book takes a genre-based approach), Kerber is interested more broadly in how narratives of Eden and Apocalypse, or etiology and eschatology, appear in prairie literature. Kerber warns that a constant focus upon beginnings and endings, which she sees as a feature of the dominant narratives of colonial prairie settlement, is harmful, because it denies the processual nature of life on the prairies. The goal of *Writing in Dust*, therefore, becomes one of uncovering how we might tell stories of the prairies differently. Kerber is interested in tracing "how different writers have invoked, contested, and transformed tropes of environmental origins and endings over the past century" in order to more consciously deploy these tropes in the future. "What is needed," Kerber asserts, "is a sense of *context*," because

> without narratives to situate [today's] crises within broader social, historical, and political matrices, phenomena such as dead birds, new diseases, increasing droughts, or rising seas can appear as signs of nature's capriciousness, things we fear and loathe but otherwise feel quite helpless to change.

The goal of *Writing in Dust* is to reverse such challenges, to allow readers to understand precisely what kind of stories we have been telling, and to begin changing them.

Kerber begins her analysis with investigations of Robert J.C. Stead's 1926 novel *Grain*, Edward McCourt's 1947 novel *Music at the Close*, and W.O. Mitchell's 1947 *Who Has Seen the Wind* in order to understand and "rethink earlier critical assumptions about the prairies as inherently either an Eden or a wasteland." Her analysis of these interwar and mid-century novels enables Kerber to examine how these narrative forms have underwritten our understandings of the prairies; her reading of the "connections between the practices of agriculture and war" in her reading of *Grain* is particularly compelling.

From there, Kerber shifts her focus in the next chapter to what she terms the "prairie nature memoir," a genre in which she includes Frederick Philip Grove's 1922 *Over Prairie Trails*, Wallace Stegner's 1955 *Wolf Willow*, and Trevor Herriot's 2000 *River in a Dry Land*. The goal in this chapter is to demonstrate the complexity of the memoir in its representation of a real space, one that, Kerber notes, is also always invented in such texts. The memoir is useful for her analysis in that she notes in this mode of writing "a growing interest in indigenous and Métis peoples as valued sources of knowledge about how to live sustainably." Her reading in this chapter demonstrates how discourses of environmental purity, along these lines, can be troubling: "what

constitutes a native prairie species?," she asks, and the problem is more complex than it at first seems. The desire for "native" prairie connects directly to the desire for the prairie as the sort of fetishized Edenic space against which Kerber argues.

The following chapter moves again generically, this time to poetry, and specifically the recent work of Tim Lilburn, Louise Halfe, and Madeline Coopsammy. Kerber reads their work in order to examine what she calls "at-homeness" within the prairie, seeing these writers as writing in response to earlier prairie poets like Robert Kroetsch, who demonstrate what Kerber sees as an "archaeological poetics." The result is a "transnational ethics of place" that opens up understandings of the prairie to alternative narrative structures.

Such narrative structures abound in the following analysis of the novels *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King (1993), *Sweeter than All the World* by Rudy Wiebe (2001), and *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence (1974). This chapter demonstrates very strongly Kerber's intention of reading the prairie differently; she reads each text "as a means of breaking interpretations of prairie writing and environment out of entrenched Edenic-apocalyptic dualisms." These are all texts that clearly challenge teleological narrative arcs in a variety of ways, and they do a great job of supporting Kerber's overall argument.

Ultimately, Kerber's even-handed approach to her texts enables her to move in a different direction than Jon Paul Fiorentino and Robert Kroetsch in their recent anthology *Post-Prairie* and to put Edenic and Apocalyptic narratives to another purpose than Marlene Goldman does in *Rewriting Apocalypse in Canadian Fiction*. One notes the depth of her research, particularly evident in the apparatus of the text, which manages nevertheless not to disturb the focus of her writing. That she balances her argument against the hefty existing scholarship with ease demonstrates that Kerber is a critic who is comfortable with her assertions about what we might do, as readers and as humans, to improve life on the prairies. Kerber proposes a sort of therapy through narrative for those who believe that the prairie can be an endpoint, either a return to Eden, or the final reckoning: "we cannot begin to comprehend the myriad ecological challenges that the prairies face today," she argues, "without first examining the impact that particular environmental stories have had on perceptions of the region." She reasonably proposes that the prairie is an idea, a process, and a space. Untangling these threads through the stories that we have told about the prairie, however, proves to be a rather more important challenge, one that Kerber is very much up to.

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Process: Landscape and Text edited by **CATHERINE BRACE** and **ADELINE JOHNS-PUTRA**

Rodopi, 2010. $97.00 USD

Reviewed by **RICHARD PICKARD**

I always enjoy reading collections of scholarly essays, because it is so often fascinating simply to see how the contributors have interpreted the call for papers to which they've responded. Almost invariably, the editors had a clear focus for their intended volume, still visible in their introduction or other framing material,

and their CFP asked for responses to this focus, and yet respondents to the CFP wanted to pursue their own approaches. Even if there's some relationship between the editors' and the respondents' intents, the resulting volume will always illuminate the extent to which scholarship is both a collaborative and an idiosyncratic process.

Such, you would by now be justified in assuming, is precisely the situation for Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra's *Process: Landscape and Text*. As a result, I need to respond separately to Brace and Johns-Putra's editorial intent (which is more than simply intriguing), and to the separate contributions to the volume (some of which are rather stronger than others).

The book's aim is spelled out clearly in its introduction, namely, to answer the question, "by what process does landscape become text? That is, by what process does the environment inform, shape, produce or inspire the written word?" Brace and Johns-Putra hope that their volume provides an eclectic set of approaches to making visible "the contours and co-ordinates of that process," and in some ways it does.

At bottom, this collection pushes the boundaries of what is often referred to as phenomenology, but which the editors more usefully (and broadly) refer to as "non-representational theory." To some extent, they want to draw on the power of excavation offered by post-structuralist language-based critiques of text and world, while resisting any residual seductiveness still to be found in post-structuralism. Similarly, they want to draw on the experientially rich approach of phenomenology, while resisting the collapse of intellectual distance that can derive from a phenomenological approach. The book largely lives up to this general desire, in that contributors appear comfortable writing about Derrida and Foucault on the one hand, and about David Abram and Tim Ingold on the other. However, I cannot but read as unhelpfully naive the editors' remark that "it is necessary, from the perspective of literary scholarship, to rescue the author from the sentence of death pronounced by post-structuralism." Surely this is a conversation that long since passed from being, as they describe it, necessary. In a similar vein, it is unclear to me just how one might distinguish consistently between "eco-criticism and its successor, environmental criticism," as Brace and Johns-Putra suggest, and it is by no means certain whether "environmental criticism" represents a succeeding or a coterminous critical mode in relation to eco-criticism. Unfortunately, I came away from their introduction uneasy about the cogency of their theoretical principles.

In spite of some imprecision with terminology and unsteadiness of theory, though, Brace and Johns-Putra are very much to be commended for attempting to generate a set of readings focused on this key issue of how landscape and text interrelate. And the readings themselves, many of them, are excellent. Even if the essays don't always do what the editors might have wanted, the editors have set up some very productive dialogue between their ideas.

Certainly I had some favourites, though. For example, I was fascinated by Richard Kerridge's theoretical framing of narrative form in "Environmental Fiction and Narrative Openness," though his discussion of texts was abbreviated to the point of verging on gestural (other than for Hardy, which section Kerridge notes is a rewrite of his 2001 essay "Ecological Hardy"). Like Kerridge's piece, Pamela Banting's "Geography as Intertext" is also an elaboration on a previous text, but it's a rich enough advancement on her previous work that her two essays both need to be read; her analysis of Thomas Wharton's *Icefields* is striking, and her theoretical handling of intertextuality and geography is inspired.

Very good critical work is offered here as well by Roger Ebbatson (on Edward Thomas), Sylvie Crinquand (on landscape descriptions in

letters by Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats), Christine Berberich (on Jonathan Raban's *Coasting*), and Kym Martindale (on Alice Oswald's *Dart*).

The volume's weakness, it seems to me, is with the pieces that try to cross generic boundaries. The dependably interesting John Wylie, for example, shifts here between self-conscious summary of his own holiday travels, Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the "uncanny" landscape, and phenomenology: the fit is uneven, though some sparks are struck. Less successful yet are the more creative works, such as Frank Gohlke's photos of scenes along latitude 42.30 N in Massachusetts, with poems by Herbert Gottfried connected to the same locations, or Jolie B. Kaytes' essay "Dirty Words," which involves both her own short poems and detailed theoretical reflections thereon. There is room in a collection like this one for a multiplicity of textual modes, so again I support Brace and Johns-Putra in their editorial intent: perhaps other readers will find more merit than I do, anyway, in the works I find the least successful, but I find them distinctly less successful even on their own terms.

In sum, selections from this determinedly eclectic book will have very different degrees of appeal for different readers. While I must say that my interests here were primarily theoretical, secondarily critical, and only finally literary, and hence I was pre-disposed to read the book the way I did, I really do think that the theoretical and critical work is the volume's most successful contribution to the study of literature and environment, of landscape and text.

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Okanagan Odyssey: Journeys through Terrain, Terroir, and Culture by **DON GAYTON**

Rocky Mountain Books, 2010 $16.95

Here Is Where We Disembark by **CLEA ROBERTS**

Freehand, 2010 $16.95

Reviewed by **NAOMI SMEDBOL**

Although a review that addresses on the one hand creative nonfiction and on the other an anthology of free-verse poetry might initially seem at odds, Don Gayton's *Okanagan Odyssey: Journeys through Terrain, Terroir, and Culture* and Clea Roberts's *Here is Where We Disembark* address similar fascinations with regions—ecological and cultural—and serve as interesting points of comparison and contrast in their respective approaches to writing place. Gayton's text addresses the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, reaching through place-specific wine, food, and reading triplings toward a sort of cultural ecology of his home, while Roberts chooses a vast range of subjects, from winter to grosbeaks to laundry to ticks, to illustrate a multiplicity of Norths. Both authors rely on the use of vignettes—Gayton perhaps more literally—to evoke their regions as dynamic; by focusing tightly on a series of loosely related moments in a particular series of places, their collections suggest fluid space between each vignette in which the landscapes and actants shift and change.

Gayton deliberately engages a sort of poetic diction in places to imply, it would seem, a particular ecology of language for the Okanagan.

This is more successful in some instances than in others; the opening passage, for instance, weaves together his impressions as a grassland ecologist and as a writer and sets the tone for the rest of his collection:

> I felt as I was walking among meditating, grey-bearded ancients. One should show respect and not bump into them, I thought; they could be close to resolving some profound mystery. Despite my efforts, it was difficult to avoid their stiff branches. I can see why ecologists consider sagebrush to be a nurse shrub. Their flaring forms allow for plenty of room underneath for flowers and grasses to reproduce, away from the prying muzzles of cows and deer.

His delicate treatment of both historical and natural ecologies as they are described in this sort of terrain characterizes his approach in this text to each vignette. This quasi-poetic approach to nonfiction resonates with Gayton's earlier work (such as *Interwoven Wild*), but is especially apparent in this collection, to varying degrees of success. The "graceful metaphorical leap...[to] span the cultural practices in a local winery to the cultural practice of writing local books" is sometimes less graceful than he might hope. But his overall attempt to illuminate how "wine terroir resembles literature" is, I think, ultimately successful. As a reader, I sample the Okanagan along with him, am engaged too in the processes of his triplings, and can sense his delight in discovering his region: "beyond the complex craft of making books or wine is the rich enjoyment of the product, which can be critical or unfocused, depending on the moment." There is a vicarious pleasure in the connections he makes while indulging in the ecologies, foods, wines, and histories of the Okanagan.

And there is certainly a sense of indulgence in the text; Gayton is himself deliberately present in each of the sections, not only in his active triplings that frame his approach, but also in his self-conscious reflections on his method: "Early depictions of our landscapes fascinate me. I am also irresistibly drawn to the compelling but poorly remunerated field of historical ecology." He might be expected to stop there and shift to another example, but instead further personalizes his fascination: "this is partly due to a quirk in my nature: the more obscure a topic is, the more I am engaged by it." In instances like this one, though the hope is to self-situate compellingly, it is sometimes actually alienating for the reader. Still, Gayton is careful to bring his observations back from himself to the grander context—so though "our" landscapes are often *his* landscapes, they are yet landscapes in and of themselves, as well: "but mainly it is because I sense that past ecosystems can shed light on present and future ones." For he is concerned in this text not only with characterizing his indulgence in a nice glass of local wine and sheaf of literature, but also in how enjoying the fruits of his region might contribute to more sustainable environmental imaginations.

Don McKay's review of Clea Roberts's *Here is Where We Disembark* claims that "there is a northerly edge to Clea Roberts's poems, and it extends beyond the obvious content." There certainly is, and it certainly does; the language in this anthology evokes simultaneously close-knit communities and a haunting sort of isolation. The anthology is divided into two sections. The first presents a series of observations whose titles are primarily concerned with Northern places and species, while the second features a series of call-and-response pairings between characters, some human, some more-than-human, each framed by a single noun.

In the final section of "Transmutations," Roberts provides a sense of scale: "you were suddenly content / with your diminishing, / frayed boundaries / —the weather, its intent / and randomness / too big for you." As the second person emerges, the vastness that is North, spatially and thematically, is emphasized. Indeed,

navigating the space between landscapes and language, between subject and theme, is perhaps where this collection is most successful. Like her speaker's subject, Roberts adapts the language and form of her poems to rest delicately and responsively—as well as responsibly—between origin and silence: "the boots were rated to -50 C / —you wore an extra pair of socks." Rather than trying to access the randomness, to challenge the fraying boundaries and intent, rather than adopting the elusive language of the sublime, which might ostensibly be applicable to the sort of landscapes she's accessing, Roberts focuses on vignettes of detail, a series of poetic manuals and still-frames, to convey that which in their landscapes overwhelms the subjects of her collection.

At least, this approach is so in the first part of *Here is Where We Disembark.* The second part grapples more clearly with voice, with the characterization and perspective of both human and more-than-human actants. There is a sense of reciprocity in these failed attempts by the speakers to surmount their endless distances of (mis)communication: some of the nonhuman voices represented as either call or response—this alternation a particularly successful choice on the part of Roberts—include a king salmon, a river, a ghost, and a wolf. In "Claim," the call is that of a girl who is "fourteen / plain and humourless / as an egg" and knows "there is a name / for everything" but refuses to legitimize the older man and "what you put in me / up there on the berry patch / sometimes twice in one afternoon" with such names. His response describes him as a "known immoral character," and one who "for no good reason / [feels] entitlement / to your pious, awkward / body," comparing his desire to "a release like river ice / at breakup scraping the shore clean / of last year's willow." Even in the voice of the humans there are direct connections with the landscapes in which the dramas of their lives unfold—indeed, their self-characterization depends on them.

Both collections are successful to varying degrees, as is perhaps to be expected, but should certainly be considered by those concerned with either the regions they're characterizing or with regional studies more generally. The similarities in their approaches to landscape are complemented by their respective forms, genres, and methods of framing each collection. While Gayton's project strives openly to make connections between ecologies and cultures, history and landscape, region and community, Roberts is more subtly concerned with each of these approaches to regional writing. Both collections are certainly strong contributions as Canadian environmental literatures, each vignette worth savouring once given time to breathe.

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Revisioning the Prairie Woman

Looking Back: Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History, and Identity by **S. LEIGH MATTHEWS**
U Calgary P, 2010. $39.95

Reviewed by **KATJA LEE**

If your knowledge of prairie settlement memoirs, like my own, begins and ends with Nellie McClung, S. Leigh Matthews' *Looking Back: Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History, and Identity* might be the text for you.

Drawing on thirty full-length, published

memoirs written by white, English-speaking women who settled in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba from 1870-1950, *Looking Back* argues for the richness and diversity of this "untilled field." Yet Matthews' work with prairie women's memoirs is not simply a recovery exercise (although she is very much invested in rescuing these "lost" texts); she also uses these memoirs to trouble the various cultural scripts that have dominated both the settlement memoir genre and the image of the "Prairie Woman." Such scripts, Matthews argues, are neither representative nor terribly accurate but she is careful to trace their development in order to help us read how these women, through memoirs designed to "enter into the ongoing conversation about and construction of a prairie heritage," signal gestures of complicity and sites of negotiation with the master narratives that claim to represent them.

When the representations of the prairie shifted in the mid-19th century from a discourse of barren wasteland to an agricultural promised land, women were predominantly absent from that vision of settlement. Over time, that vision came to represent women but firmly in relation to a man's labour on the land and other nation-building projects—she was a mother and a wife whose domesticity could reproduce both the nation's population and the moral framework that served Britain's imperialist aims. This "Prairie Woman" image/archetype/script, as defined by Matthews, is white, English-speaking, maternal, feminine, and cheerfully capable of balancing the contradictory expectations that demand both gentility and usefulness in ungentle and unforgiving spaces. In her project to interrogate that cultural script, Matthews turns to a selection of memoirs written by or about such women as might be expected to fulfill that script. It is a project that, by necessity, excludes various other settler groups (and the inhabitants who were displaced by these groups), but it is also designed to allow these women to, as much as possible, respond in their own voices: after an introduction which meticulously traces Matthews' extensive research, the memoirs dominate the text and we are exposed to a wide cross-section of experiences and voices.

While this diversity suggests that there is no representative prairie settlement experience, there are, nevertheless, reoccurring issues and narrative strategies that Matthews has organized into themed chapters. The latter half of the text, for example, has a chapter on space (geographic, bodily, and textual) and another on ecocritical readings of women's relationships to non-white populations and animals. While these broad strokes enable Matthews to cover a lot of ground, I was, admittedly, more drawn to the first half of the text which positioned these memoirs within various narrative traditions and showcased both the regional and national importance of Matthews' work. In a bid to undo the Strickland sisters' dominion of the settlement memoir genre, Matthews unpacks the extraordinary influence that Catherine Parr Traill's and Susanna Moodie's memoirs have had on cultural scripts for representing the settler woman in fiction and non-fiction. In place of the false binary of female settler experience (where one is either cheerfully resigned to accommodating hardship or resentful and unwilling to adapt), Matthews uses prairie women's memoirs to transform that binary into a continuum of experience wherein the majority of the memoirists represent themselves or their mothers negotiating the complex spaces between these two extremes. Also of particular interest is how Matthews positions these domestic memoirs as an attempt not to challenge or oppose but to *redress* the imbalance created when cultural narratives favour tales of heroic, masculine labour expended in pursuit of a future commercial agriculture empire. If those narratives foregrounded the "stead-building" in the larger home-steading effort, these memoirs with their focus on the domestic every day and the present, local, and familial conditions that

governed it, effectively argue for the critical importance of women's home-building labour in the settlement project.

There are some disadvantages, however, to Matthews' thematic approach. In *Looking Back*, memoirs are never examined as whole literary units but, rather, as resources from which relevant fragments might be extracted and mobilized—an approach that makes it impossible to trace the ways in which these women might have contested or challenged the "Prairie Woman" script or memoir genre traditions in the structure of their texts. It is an approach that also precludes the ability to thoroughly develop any one of the thematic or theoretical frameworks; but this is less a failing of Matthews' scholarship than a testament to the rich possibilities for further inquiry into this field. Having traced important strategies and broad themes at work across a wide sample of texts, Matthews makes a strong argument for continuing to investigate the important contributions these texts might make to ecocriticism, the settlement memoir genre and, I would emphasize, feminist readings of the every day and nostalgia. The revision of the "Prairie Woman" script by these memoirs is thus only one way that these personal narratives might inscribe women's experiences into histories that have otherwise ignored or overwritten them. But, we are reminded, the success of such projects requires us to create spaces for this process: *Looking Back* is such a space and should be considered a useful contribution to the existing body of Canadian scholarship on settlement memoirs and prairie historiography.

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The World of Wolves: New Perspectives on Ecology, Behavior, and Management
edited by **MARCO MUSIANI, LUIGI BOITANI, and PAUL C. PAQUET**
UCalgary P, 2010 $34.95

A New Era for Wolves and People: Wolf Recovery, Human Attitudes, and Policy
edited by **MARCO MUSIANI, LUIGI BOITANI,** and **PAUL C. PAQUET**
U of Calgary P, 2009 $29.95

Reviewed by **MICHAEL LUKAS**

Across wildlife management discourses worldwide, few animals have sustained the polarizing caché of the wolf. Significant successes in wolf conservation, recovery, and reintroduction programs are perhaps evidence of our growing tolerance toward the presence of wolves in the landscape; however, the future of wolf-human relationships comes further to the fore as humans learn to live with wolves not merely "out there," as symbols of wilderness, but at our doorsteps. The wolf, seemingly a wild denizen of wilderness, is increasingly adapting to areas of human habitation. This presents obvious challenges to environmental discourse, ethics, policy, activism, and wildlife management, while offering opportunities for critical engagement with broader issues of ecology. In consideration of this changing context and arising out of the international World of Wolves Project, biologists/ecologists, editors and contributors Marco Musiani, Luigi Boitani, and Paul C. Paquet have fashioned two collections of essays stemming from contemporary wolf research, management, activism, and social research, *A New Era for Wolves and People: Wolf Recovery, Human Attitudes, and Policy* (2009) and *The World of Wolves: New Perspectives on Ecology, Behavior and Management* (2010).

There is certainly no shortage of wolf texts that are of interest to eco-critics; fiction, memoirs, manifestos, even children's books, and classics like Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf*, Barry

Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men*, and Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac,* have arguably help to shape the contemporary Western imagination of wolves, wilderness, and ecology since the 1950's. In the early stages of wolf recovery in North America, wildlife biologist L. David Mech's *The Wolf: The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species* (1981) was foundational not only because of the detailed research Mech gleaned from his Isle Royale studies, but the ecological contextualization he emphasized in presenting wolves' various relationships with other species. Mech's early work gives a robust picture of a species living day to day in its environment, indirectly challenging much of the sensational mythos built up around the idea of the wolf in Western culture. *A New Era for Wolves and People* and *World of Wolves* can be seen in the tradition of *The Wolf* and the later compendium by Mech and Boitani, *Wolves* (2005), in opening up core controversies raised in Mech's works concerning wolves' roles on the landscape and the "human dimensions" of wildlife biology and management, while also going beyond this work in attempting to more explicitly engage questions concerning human attitudes and ethics in management and policy.

While distinct books in their own right, the essays in *World of Wolves* and *New Era* share in the World of Wolves project's emphasis on understanding the human dimensions of wolf ecology through specific case studies, examining wolf behavior in particular environments, and analyzing trends in wildlife management. This analysis, as the project mission states, is intended not only to increase understanding of issues related to wolves, but is put forth with "the intent of providing counsel on how to ease conflict and promote co-existence." The shape that these goals bestow on the project is notable in the apparent assertion of values, which may not be surprising to some readers familiar with conservation biology, but certainly goes beyond traditional notions of value-free science. Perhaps because of such intentional advocacy, both works are fairly user-friendly for those outside the hard sciences; a bevy of maps, figures, tables, graphs, and quality colour photographs help facilitate understanding of the rigorous research and analysis.

Though second chronologically in the project, *The World of Wolves* is foundational in its attempt to define the wolf from a biological perspective, or at least show the difficulty in doing so. The wolf is dynamic and adaptive: defining what a wolf is, even within what we consider to be its “natural” habitat, turns out to be no simple matter. The book's first section considers issues of wolf genetics and population flows, along with ecosystem effects of wolves on habitat and other species. The genetic testing methods and population studies reveal the instability of defining the wolf, thereby challenging notions of the distinctness of the wolf as a species. Other essays in this section speak to the role of wolves in trophic cascades, emphasizing their effects on both prey species (like elk) and habitat, like the Banff and Yellowstone Park riparian zones studied by Hebblewhite and Smith. The collection's second section considers how humans influence the behaviour of wolves, whether intentionally through wildlife management practices, or unintentionally through human behaviour. The case studies here are internationally diverse and often striking in revealing how locally specific behaviours and attitudes differently effect wolf management. The particularities of human and wolf behaviour disorient management—in one region, snow machines enable natives to kill 633 wolves in a region; in another, they let wolves access winter game that would otherwise be too much effort. As the essays in *World of Wolves* attest, the dynamic roles of wolves in the landscape and human influences on those roles accentuate the complexity of determining what and who is managed.

As the title arguably implies, *A New Era*

For Wolves and Humans more overtly expresses an aspiration for future human-wolf relations. Broadly, it is as advertised: a "set of case studies on how human attitudes influence management for recovering wolf populations." The book's first section offers diverse perspectives of wildlife biologists and managers enacting wolf policy in the American Northern Rockies (Bangs) and Great Lakes (Wydeven) regions, and in Spain (Blanco) and Europe as a whole (Boitani). There is a diversity of perspectives represented in this first section, with human attitudes, political boundaries, and institutional authority all helping to shape regional management policy. For those such as Boitani, the frustration of implementing a more favoured eco-systemic approach in Europe is obvious; for those like Bangs, resistance to lethal management of wolves is a frustration out West. In this way, the essays in this section are particularly interesting as these biologists perhaps unwittingly press ethical claims grounded in their respective management strategies. In *New Era*'s second section, the editors' stated goal in the introduction, to "reform the way society in the 21st century evaluates and responds to the inevitable conflicts between wolves and humans," is more clearly evident. Here, Marc Bekoff and Camilla Fox's essay argues for empathic ethical reflection in our relationships with wolves, claiming that the wolf's point of view is neglected in management decisions where, for instance, lethal controls may adversely affect pack structures. The remaining essays largely focus on examining and understanding negative attitudes toward wolves. Aiming to build tolerance, the authors point to the challenges of using education to confront value-based perceptions regarding wolves. Much of the analysis offered is striking in revealing the cognitive conflicts apparent in perceptions of wolves. Indeed, some of the results of the attitudinal analysis offered are surprising: for example, Stone's research in the Rockies reveals that depredation compensation for ranchers does not increase tolerance, but that wolves would not be tolerated without it. While the second section's more overt ethical claims and recommendations for methodological and epistemological change are obvious, one of the weaknesses of this text is that it is not at all clear how the second section's essays should be regarded in relation to the earlier essays in the text. It is not clear, for instance, how Bekoff and Fox's Leopoldian claims about the intrinsic value of individual wolves comports with Bangs' claims for periodic lethal control of wolves for anthropocentric interests and concerns.

Thus, while *New Era* is perhaps a more provocative and productive text for readers of ,*The Goose* interested in ethical issues regarding wolves and wildlife, *World of Wolves* is a more cohesive and coherent text despite its narrower biological lens. It is certainly a strength of *New Era* that it engages ethical considerations and epistemological claims regarding wolves in a way of interest to environmentally oriented critics; however, many of the theoretical and attitudinal concerns lack development. This clearly indicates a need for critical analysis of not just anthropocentric values, but of the biases and premises of many key terms operating in both works (Stone begins this analysis with “carrying capacity,” but terms such as “suitable habitat,” “management” and “tolerance” are also problematic). These criticisms aside, *The Goose* readers who are interested in animal studies, environmental philosophy, place-based studies, wildlife management, and the constructions of nature, culture, wilderness and environment will find the complexity of the case studies in both works interesting and productive. *World of Wolves* helps to establish a dialectical understanding of the wolf-human relationship in its diverse particularities, while *New Era* attempts to at least make clear the difficulties of negotiating how humans and wolves (and wildlife, more generally) coexist in the 21st

century. While scientifically grounded, the two anthologies that Musiani, Boitani, and Paquet have assembled offer a position of advocacy in pastiche, an impression of phenomenal complexity that resonates with the wolves we encounter in all of these essays.

MICHAEL LUKAS is an essayist, poet, and former Western Montana fishing guide currently pursuing a PhD in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought through the English Department at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. His dissertation research, tentatively entitled "The Rhetoric of Wolves," looks at the mediated and material relationships with wolves in the West as exemplified in literature, non-fiction, pop culture, and media.

A Walk with the Rainy Sisters: In Praise of British Columbia's Places by **STEPHEN HUME**

Harbour Publishing, 2010 $32.95

Reviewed by **MICHELLE SIOBHAN O'BRIEN-GROVES**

Stephen Hume's *A Walk with the Rainy Sisters: In Praise of British Columbia's Places* clearly illuminates the importance of actively engaging with where you live. The book is comprised of 35 short chapters, each providing a different snapshot of British Columbia: its creatures, the landscape, its culture, and its people. These vignettes effectively conflate the grandiose with the minute; in "Sexy, Sultry, Star-struck Summer," for instance, Hume presents us with a dizzying and rich image of summer in British Columbia, from the heights of Earth's thermosphere in summertime to the sensual "fruit and seed pods" that "swell on branch and vine." In several of the chapters, Hume focuses on these smallest facets of British Columbia's environment, and rather than imbue these features of the landscape with meaning, Hume uncovers and relates their already-present significance. "The Song of the Mason Bee" tells us that while "a honeybee will pollinate three hundred plants in a day," these native bees of British Columbia "pollinate three thousand plants" per day. "The Secret Dance of Dragonflies," on the other hand, not only depicts the beauty of these "brilliant splinters of nature's prism," but also reminds us that their timelessness is indicative of "everything that is ours to lose."

Hume is exceptionally adept at providing readers with a pansynthetic portrait of British Columbia's places. Chapters like "Archeology in a Kitchen Garden" and the collection's final story, "The Last of the Blackberry Wine," appeal to the senses while effectively retaining their narrative thrust. The latter chapter describes the taste of ice tea, the "perfume of cinquefoil and laurel," the "froggy melodies from down in the flooded bottom of Coal Creek," and the sight of "bees fumb[ling] at the rock heather" while effectively imparting the necessity of considering the "hurtful side" of BC's history and who has been excluded from its historical narrative. The latter of these stories provides us with a sensual depiction of consuming a bottle of Blackberry wine with a good friend, while relating what he learned from this friend about British Columbia's environmental legacy and, more significantly, the effect on this legacy that one person can have by simply "acting locally" and considering one's relationship to community.

In fact, Hume's book is not just about British Columbia's places, but is equally about the people who retain an active relationship with these places. Several of the chapters discuss individuals who are local heroes or unsung conservationists. "The Old Man and the River," for instance, is as much about the diminishing fish population in the Cowichan as it is about Joe Saysell's efforts to rectify this issue through edifying the individuals he guides along the river and by diligently transporting the stranded baby fry to the river's main stem. "All Things Bright in their Blessing" focuses on Van Gorman Egan of Campbell River, a "fly fisherman, professional guide, retired teacher" and writer, whose accounts about British Columbian writer and conservationist Roderick Haig-Brown impart the importance of recording and relating stories about the necessity of attempting to conserve BC's landscape: an act that obviously has great meaning for Hume.

There is, in fact, a persistent and apparent call for conservation that runs throughout the text. Although the message might at times seem unrelenting, Hume artfully indicates the specific efforts that must be made to preserve the places that he describes in such vivid detail. In "Brass Casings and Thirty Pieces of Silver," Hume asks us to consider and perhaps join the individuals who "never yiel[d] in their belief that we might yet salvage something of this province's natural splendour for the generations to come." He conveys that simply learning about a species, such as the threatened Roosevelt elk, which he describes in this chapter, might be a place to start. Not all of these vignettes are equally successful. "The Power of the Tide," for instance, simply condenses too many images into too few pages, and lacks the strong central story at the heart of most of the other chapters. Without a powerful narrative to follow in each chapter, the book can be dense and overwhelming at times, and risks losing readers amongst the descriptions of "the heaving darkness of the sea," "unborn babies floating in a salty fluid," the voyage of the *Thermopylae,* and current Canadian consumerism. There is also a distinct West Coast bias to the text; readers expecting a panoptic view of British Columbia's places will have to accept the fact that Hume predominately discusses the areas he knows the best. Yet despite the few occasions where the book may falter, it remains compelling in its breadth: he whisks readers to the height of British Columbia's mountains in winter in one chapter and in the next gives a glimpse into "fragrant and soft" autumn afternoons on the coast before children return to school.

Ultimately, *A Walk with the Rainy Sisters* is a hard book to categorize, as Hume is part historian, part poet, part conservationist, and part teacher. Yet this book is equally valuable as a series of snapshots that compel us to consider our relationship to British Columbia if not in its entirety, then as a tangible and rich portrait of its vibrant landscape, and as such would make a good gift to a friend or family member.

MICHELLE SIOBHAN O'BRIEN-GROVES is a graduate student in English at Simon Fraser University.

Red Fox, Brian Bartlett

Derrick Stacey Denholm

Artwork, & Excerpts from

Dead Salmon Dialectics

1.

no obstacle
“all living is a meeting”
mediated by invertebrates
fungi bacteria
each a physical process
a means
inevitability

if art really is a dream
a nutrient recycling pathway
she should not limit herself
to human views
domesticated by the excretions
of traditional composition

when studying rain salmon in streams
towards the awakening of minds
the blind gumboot poet/ecologist
must make herself
clairvoyant

when one thousand rain salmon tell her:
“time is a landscape
years are a revolving world”
that “it’s an event geography”
that beauty is the vocation of the world
she records that this may be the most obvious
yet not the most crucial perspective

as around, above, away from her
not all branches sway in unison

(while the stream-edge courses
that cement will make her feet hurt

4.
anadromous,
rain salmon natural in conditions
load the upstream enormous
(as nutrient streamlines
serve dynamic conduit systems
ascription of carbon
nitrogen
phosphorus

where
accessible habitat
is to suitable distribution
as input-derived ocean materials
are to freshwater and terrestrial systems
poetry as often becomes automatic
protects itself against any
and all thought
as essay as following off a blog

(as Snyder assays:
"as climax forest is to biome
and fungus is to the recycling of energy
so 'enlightened mind' is to the daily ego mind
and art to the recycling
of neglected inner potential"

thus
rangy gilled
from portland inlet
up the *Kiteen*
anadromust re-enter (in
access smaller and smaller
tributaries until they disperse
(deeper than particle physics
and what the occident has fixed
as true into tiny headwater streams
as far as far
in/to the interior

and the difficult
non-picturesque poem
in which nothing comes easily
where—so it reads—no beauty lingers

and ignorance repeats only (its own
emptinest
palimpsest
etc.

creatures entering a forest

22.
scattered
to plentiful
shallow accumulations
of organic soils
in shaded crevices
between stream-edge rocks
phosphorus logbooks
through average runs
of spawning rain salmon
a wet counter soriasmus
lichen breeze discursive
script to the ‘normal’
ordering of ‘things’
meeting or exceeding
the shade-tolerant work
of subcanopy epiphytes’
indifference effort to defamiliarize
the hunky dory idiot strings
of authority ideology
to crown to branch to root
to fungus to stone
to stream-out

a counter-repetition
a *Stó:lō* girl
named Stacey
wearing a t-shirt
that reads “go home”
an intensive disruption
of established
perception habits
replacing both
fatalistic passivity
and get-rich schemes
with circumpolar ferns
submontane liverworts
cosmopolitan shrubs
transcontinental forbs
submaritime mosses
spray-tolerant
evergreen conifers
interconnected
fresh to moist
to very moist
semi-terrestrial
wet cool
mesothermal
marginalia

24.
this is not a poem
commonly found
on the ground
after windstorms
to sit and read
directly but a running
streamcourse to decipher
in the round
deep consonant flux
of entropics
water-shedding
and water-receiving
a wringing-out of the senses
in specific sites by season
within annuals shifting

opposite beside before
Other nonhuman entities
whose occurrences
increase with increases
in precipitation
distances from power lines
indifferences to logging-in
from the other side
of the logged-off
edge interface
just a minor literature
gauging Land
as gift

28.
look in Dr. Out
insectivorous
riparian
passerines
thrive
in greater densities
along phenomena
the natal stream reveal
rain salmon-borne
marine-derived nitrogen
the ancient
phylogenetic experiment
cycle clock of the long here
perpetual now wonderings of *where is your dictionary?* instinct
motivations of propitious
evolutionary corollaries
pragmatic conscious decisions
occurring amongst
interacting wild communities
bird allsorts unlocking
your hat with natural response
survival system pivot
dodge and spiral floooo
hiding
in basal rosette
swamp lantern

oblong-elliptical corydalis
coarse-toothed sitka
valerian lance- to spoon-shaped
shootingstar loose umbel
mountain sweet-cicely
shaggy hairy nootka
lupin wing-stalked
rusty saxifrage

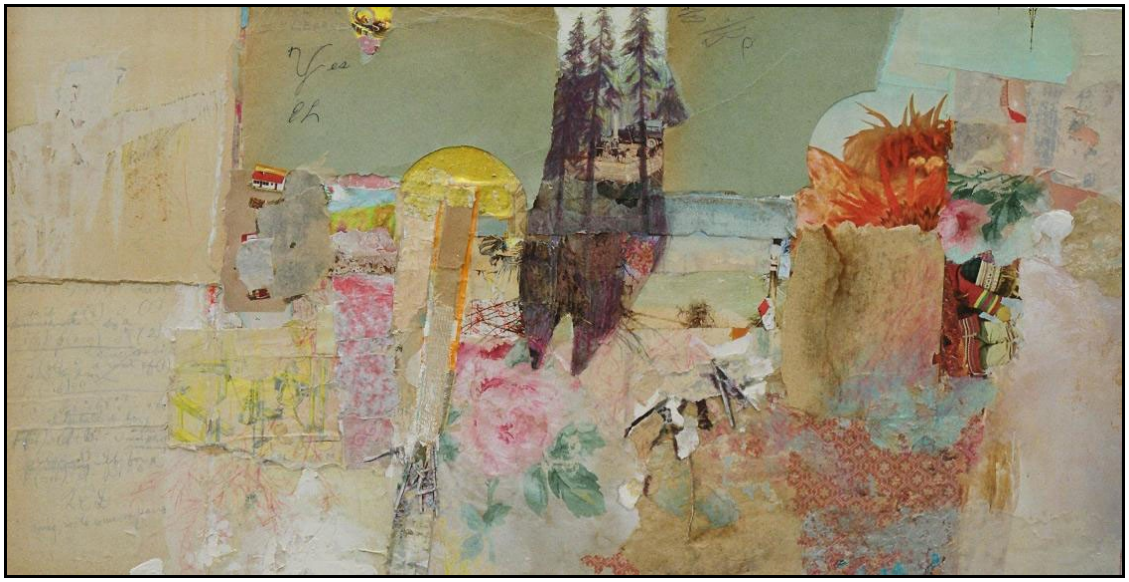
look out Dr. In
to the natal stream pulse
of invertebrates produced
through the abundance
of decaying salmon
demonstrations
of themselves
gift proof data
that there must
be a tearing out
not just of pages
but that something desperate
must not *take* place

displacing the auto-reification scourge
of homogenous upholstery moulderings
“crack-head mirrors licking the soiled mint”
across the one-dimensional linoleum of place
stupefying and infantilizing
corporate-hybridizations
of consumer consensus traits
of *where is my achieving the plateau reward?* in carefully indexed phloem
pages torn out
to roll choice
doobs smoke-out
cells instead of growing
free streamside improvisation
where “salmon squirting through”
suspend absolutes of meaning
revegitate industrial-scrape helicopter access
denuded halogen-flood management
of the once TSA-thirsty overstory

even if she could find

a triple-prong current bush
with surge protection
she knows that a google search bar
can't do much *in* the *Damdochax*
—won't reify a twig; but *to* it?
virtually, Dr. In still answers to Dr. Down
whose algorithms
are water-tight

while water itself remains open
sea-run typographic prominences
spawn shaded understories
the musicolous flow
of elevation persistence
within open-canopy last stands



Moose Hoof

33.
although it may seem to drop wakefulness
upon her alone
terrestrial vegetation also responds
to the ambiguity of the poetic/ecologic text
to the plankton light of her step in salmon streams
the poem arriving suddenly getting things lifesize
making small intuitive missives
of local comprehension
out of cosmological responsibility
if not wholly concurrent meanings

that no longer impose
the resolution of opposites
demonstrating the foraging activities of bears
where once the rain rang things unsaid
editorial yet still transmitting messages
denoting referents
to scavenging invertebrates
detritivores
microbes
a filament burns
upon her desk
seat back in the dam(p) office
the datum presence of rotting salmon carcasses
integrating so-called redundancies
of expression———— —- —- - — - — - - — -
herstory———————————————- - - -
and content——————— - - — – - —- -
trinomial lines that dissolve
amongst terrestrial vegetation
as if her response was based on fact
of which her overdue poem/report
must take precedence
at the drop of a gill raker
out of the top
of a spruce tree

Sandhill Crane

41.
north of caution
she slip~
~tumbles *Heiltsuk* rain
dance scrapes moss
oofs rock
cracks the screen
of her GPS kills it
on the granatic batholith
realizes that here
november rain
is more fish slime than water
is no love restrained

that not only are the bones of the *Nisga'a*
composed entirely of salmon
but the whole archipelago is a drenched green blanket
morphology of throbbing red arteries
woven under drooping conifer murk
that redcedar flags of *Tlingit* persistence
drizzle constant seaward migrant smolt
that hemlocks run *Haisla* returns of keta and tyee
up and down vascular salmonid cambium
below a *Gitksan* lateral line swell between xylem and bark
that sitka spruce cruise-dart a pollock phylogeny
around the seasonal kype of the alaskan gyre
that black bears surge underwater under roots
fathoming the deep black/white fear of orca
that 700 yr-old silver candelabra scatter-chase
shore pine herring around *Talunkwan* shoals
vociferous understory red alder screech dive & swoop
sleek on glaucous *Haida* wings over the blowhole
that shining schools of mackerel lean 500 years
of marine-derived sapwood over *Kitkiata*
spreading tiny transparent rootfins
to thrive tinier mychorrizal associations
while ancient ravens of wood and whale blast a *Quaaalkrrrrr* cycle-soar
of *Tsimshian* spring-runs up the sockeye red oxbows of the *Quaaal*
humpbacking its narrows north to the *Gilttoyees*
all to a last/first/eternal yellow cypress octopus-root gravel spawn
a wet dream flutter and death decay up and down the *Kxngeal*

north of caution
november rain squalls

throw sardines ferns & microbes
grey whales marten & eel-grass
murrelets crustaceans & wolves
in scaly purple-hard time capsules
from crown-heavy fur
down through her hair
into the creek
where technology sits
leaking poison

These eight pieces are from a recent interdisciplinary project, *Dead Salmon Dialectics*, a book-length series of poems written for the North Coast of British Columbia, which was done to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Lyell island Haida logging blockades. The pieces are bricolage-forms that start as an engagement and reprocessual of technical data from scientific studies of the salmon/bear/forest recycling trophic, as done by Dr. Tom Reimchen from the University of Victoria. These works also utilize and conflate Robert Bringhurst's "grammar of the wild" with Félix Guattari's ecosophical theories from *Three Ecologies*, among many other things.

A little background: Derrick was born in British Columbia, holds an undergrad degree in English literature from UBC and is writing a grad thesis in creative writing at UNBC. He has poetry published and upcoming for publication in *The Capilano Review*, *filling*Station, and *Drunken Boat*, and he has a piece of ecocritical fiction published at *stone:stone*. He is the winner of the 2011 Barry McKinnon Chapbook Award for *Dead Salmon Dialectics*. As well, he has a diploma in visual art from Red Deer College (1988-91), and won an award for emerging visual artist of the year in Alberta in 1994. He has spent the time between art school and returning to university working and living in the forest lands of northern British Columbia and developing his creative practice.

Jonathan Meakin / Pastoral

Photo: Borislav Borisov

Pastoral

I. Mud

Always a struggle:
subject
as backdrop, hubris grounded
with the press
of firm prints;
object
as matter, humus forged
between finger
and thumb –

a sublimated tension
to subsumed forms:

sale flyers and ticket stubs
cigarettes and nerves

a drunk's busted nose
(the staggering fidelity of blood!)

cracked cars and willed oil
asphalt glass metal

road kill packed in cubed light
road kill unfettered by magpies

dog turds leaves spent dust
plastic panic rain rot rust –

yet lists fail
a gaze and grab technique
of shifting referents:
a field
milled with uncertain fingers
the palimpsest
of self;
a text
scored on deferred planes
the "always already"
of decay.

II. Magpie

Black-suited and visitant
waiting for a cultural event or funeral,
politic in smart trousers;

consummate *flâneur*
ambling through streets and public parks
stooping to admire
gardens, monuments, trinkets;

boisterous hoodlum, gangster,
invasive pest skirting monocultures and Larsen traps
cheap food and new roads –

representations
denatured
made complicit

by the eye (and the eye's doubt)
by the deliberate patio (choking in exhaust)
by the flower beds (bound with molecules)
by the bauble fruit (waxed lyrical)
by the trade-marked trees (in which grubs grow).

Magpie loiters among natures
is the willed projection
of splintered light.

Magpie is stammered hunger
a rough-hewn cry, a lean stab snatching
eyes crusts guts –
an indiscriminate text
while we pay for (pray for)
toxic, vain conceits.

III. Field

Harsh frost numb air severe light –
a field a glare of blinding fractals

a singular winter morning
reduced to unstable metaphors

conceits of deft fingers
now a fading site:

field gate, symmetry clipped by a tractor,
pitted steel printing palms,
rust becoming grass;

hawthorn hedgerow, binding pleachers
laid by brush hook and pipe smoke;

pipeline scar, burnt coppices fenced
with barbed wire, the rise
and fall of my father's arms;

and magpies, bold prattlers
that skim angled light
fantail settle strut
unruly yet wary
of a crow in an oak
of four magpies strung up
for pennies –
dull bodies as
weathered almanacs.

This field is a struggle of representation;
these frozen grasses pressed
between thumb and finger
are a ruptured outline

of calloused hands
sweat, twine-burn, blood;

of magpies that cleave bright eggs,
that tease a spectrum eyes
capture and create;

of my grandfather's stroke
beneath a beech's bough,
his stubborn collapse
in this still field;

of natures
in unreliable hands.

JONATHAN MEAKIN writes poetry and fiction and has had poems and reviews published in England and Canada. He is also a dabbler in small press publishing, having co-founded and co-edited Edmonton's *The Olive Reading* and chapbook series and, more recently, the fledgling venture stately/Plump Publishing. Jonathan has worked as a communications specialist, university instructor, and arts administrator, and is currently the literary and media arts development consultant for the Government of Alberta while attempting to complete a PhD in Canadian literature at the University of Alberta.

Lisa Szabo-Jones

Interview

of

Harry Thurston

by

Lisa Szabo-Jones

Lisa Szabo-Jones

After ALECC's 2010 inaugural conference in Sidney, Cape Breton, I spent the summer and early fall touring Nova Scotia, interviewing writers, publishers, geologists, and local historians. On one of my stops, in Tidnish Bridge, I had the pleasure of interviewing the poet, creative nonfiction writer, and environmental journalist Harry Thurston. An initial email correspondence, then a meeting at ALECC's conference, where along with Anne Simpson, Thurston gave a night of memorable readings, led to a generous offer to visit him at his home. When I viewed his backyard, without thinking, I blurted, "If you're ever looking for a house-sitter...!" To experience suddenly a place that I had never before visited, but had imagined only through reading his seasonal memoir *A Place Between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflections on the Salt Marsh*, I was unprepared for the marsh's proximity to his house—literally, at high tide the river washes a few feet from his house. It was from this vantage, under an apple tree, looking out on to the Tantramar Marsh I had the pleasure to interview Harry Thurston.

Harry Thurston is the author of many collections of poetry, the most recent being *Animals of My Own Kind: New & Selected Poems (*2009), *Broken Vessel: Five Days in the Desert* (2007), and *A Ship Portrait* (2005); and numerous nonfiction and natural histories, such as *Island of the Blessed: The Secrets of Egypt's Everlasting Oasis* (2003), *The Sea Among the Rocks: Travels in Atlantic Canada (2002)*,*The Nature of Shorebirds: Nomads of the Wetlands* (1996), and *Tidal Life: A Natural History of the Bay of Fundy* (1990). His most recent collaboration with photographer Thaddeus Holownia, *Silver Ghost*, is a large format paean to North Atlantic salmon and spawning rivers. What follows is a transcript of the interview.

LSJ. Oh, this is just stunning here.

HT. Yeah, it's a beautiful spot, it really is, and I mean we don't own much here, land, we just own basically a lot but, this is, uh. . .

LSJ. ...your backyard...

HT. Yeah, this is our backyard so there's no downside to it.

LSJ. Thanks for doing the interview.

HT. Yeah well, I'm glad to do it. It's nice to be asked.

LSJ. It was a pleasure to hear you read and speak at the ALECC Conference on Cape Breton.

HT. Oh, thank you. Yeah, that was fun with Anne. We really hadn't devised what we were going to do until we drove up together. I especially enjoyed the poetry reading part, just trading off poems and,

LSJ. Yes, that was great.

HT. . . . that was unscripted, too, I mean we didn't. . . I had a few poems. . . well, it would have gone the other way I guess if she had started, right. (Laughs) [As Harry read a poem, Anne would choose one of her own that would, in essence, continue conversation with Harry's poem]

LSJ. Yeah. (Laughs)

HT. But I did have a selection of poems that I thought I wanted to read. . . but she was doing it totally impromptu, which was kind of fun.

LSJ. Yeah, it made for an interesting

conversation, that's for sure. So I have some questions...and my questions are probably going to go all over the map.

HT. That's fine (laughs).

LSJ. (Laughs) So have patience with me. I'm going to ask you about some older works, new works and how you got into the things you got into. But first, you mentioned at the ALECC conference that when you majored in science you would spend the days in the lab and then at nights you'd hang out with the arts students and so I'm curious...if you could just sort of speak to what it is that you see as integral to what biologist and poet Gary Paul Nabhan calls cross-pollination between the sciences and poetry—how cross-pollination plays out in your own work and what you see as the value of bringing those two together, the science and poetry.

HT. Yeah, the process of bringing my interest in science and the arts together was. . . was gradual. I had every intention of following science as a career and was a pre-med student and in fact eventually got accepted at U of T Medical School and didn't go.

It was an emotional response I think more than anything to. . . there was something that was lacking in the science curriculum for me emotionally. So, I began to write poetry, again without any intention of following it as a career. I was simply experimenting and there was a model in my own family – my oldest brother, Greg Cook is a poet. And he was already writing poetry and so, in a sense, I was emulating what he was doing. And then I discovered, through the process of writing, that it was somehow important to me. I think I spoke about this at the ALECC Conference. I've never accepted this notion of left brain, right brain (laughs). The separation of the hemispheres. I'm sure there's some validity in it in that we have certain affinities and we have certain innate abilities some better than others. But I think it's an artificial divide, not only for the individual but for society and I see that that divide, that that model, I think, is harmful to society in a way because we live in an age which is technologically driven, science driven, but we've never lost the need for the humanities and what that satisfies in us. And I think, from a personal point of view, as I went through my undergraduate work, I was trying to merge these two passions of mine.

You know, I. . . I'm. . . was and still am passionate about the aspect of discovery that the sciences hold and that discovery is directed outward toward the material world. But there's another process of discovery that is directed inward and. . . and that. . . that's the spirit of poetry and humanities; to me, they're both necessary intellectually and emotionally.

LSJ. I wonder if you could almost say that that inwardness is more the curiosity. You had discovery and curiosity, so it's the human curiosity of the material world prompted by. . .

HT. Yeah, I think the curiosity probably falls within the sphere of science. More so than within the sphere of the arts, and now I'm talking about a dichotomy that I don't want to embrace.

LSJ. (Laughs)

HT. But, I find myself, if I pick up a newspaper, I often read the science items first because I'm curious as to what people are discovering. And it's. . . the aspect of curious. . . or. . . curiosity is one aspect of scientific enquiry. But the result of that, I think, is wonder. And because the complexity of the material world, for me, always leaves me a bit gob-smacked with wonder. (Laughs)

LSJ. Yeah.

HT. It is so, in some ways, unlikely. Now how do you respond to that? I mean I think, if you have a certain type of curiosity, you respond by the scientific method. Or, what happened for me was that I wanted to move in the direction of finding a way of expressing that wonder. And so I think that led me down the path of poetry.

LSJ. And it also seems to have led you down the path towards environmental journalism. So what drew you to that as say opposed to just embracing the life of a poet and following that pursuit solely? You managed to do both.

HT. Yeah. There's a practical side, of course. (Laughs) That almost goes without saying. Because I didn't pursue a career in academia or even pursue a fine arts degree, I had to, at some point, settle upon a career. . . originally I walked away from the sciences as an area of enquiry and curiosity and I came to environmentalism, in part, through going back to my rural roots. I grew up on a farm and that farm failed in 1960, like a whole lot of other farms. So I was coming of age in the late '60s, graduating in '71. There was a whole back-to-the-land movement. And, I embraced that philosophically if not whole-heartedly in a practical sense, but I had friends who were, and I was helping a friend build a log cabin with horses and hand tools. He still lives there on that property.

LSJ. Amazing.

HT. And I moved back to. . . back in the woods in a sense and rented an old farmhouse and was writing about rural culture, trying to rediscover in a sense where I had come from, and in particular, oral culture, finding a way of writing about oral culture through poetry. So, that inevitably led me to environmental concerns. And what happened in terms of a career was that I discovered *Harrowsmith,* and I published a little tiny poem in *Harrowsmith*, the only poem they ever published, like back in the mid-'70s. And then I was doing some farm reporting, writing for a biweekly tabloid, doing every imaginable sort of thing, writing about triplet calves being born or the local meeting of the 4-H Club kind of thing. Pretty low-level stuff. But I turned one of those stories into a piece for *Harrowsmith* and it happened to be on what we called cream farms, which was the kind of farm I grew up on where you sell your cream and keep the milk and use that on the farm; it's kind of a mixed farm sustainable farming model. But that contact through *Harrowsmith* and subsequently *Equinox*, led me into environmental journalism. That was a very interesting time. What I discovered was the people who are running those magazines were my age.

It was a generational thing. We were. . . we really had a passion for those issues and ideology and we were kind of unashamed by it. And I continued to

develop those interests, and then what happened was that I could take that science background, and use it in a practical sense as a journalist. But it was an evolution that took me. . . I took the road of poetry exclusively for probably five or six years after I left university and then I came back to the sciences through environmental journalism. And, where's the divide between writing nature poetry and writing environmental journalism and writing natural history? They all seem pretty close to each other for me.

LSJ. Well these converging aspects certainly, I think, are one of the appealing characteristics of your work, that synthesis of those sort of different styles of writing that make it so rich and. . .

HT. Well, I've said this before maybe, maybe not on interview. But I don't get up in the morning and think "well who am I this morning."

LSJ. (Laughs)

HT. Am I an environmental journalist, am I a natural history writer or am I a nature poet. I sometimes think that that kind of categorization is too present in Canadian literature. There's a kind of yearning for purity. (Laughs)

LSJ. Yeah, yeah (laughs).

HT. And, philosophically I'm not sure whether I reject that so much as that's just not the way I work, and I don't think it's necessary to do so. I think you can merge these interests or I hope you can.

LSJ. Um-hmm. Well it's kind of interesting that you mention it because that sort of prevalence in Canadian literature, particularly among critics is to pigeonhole [categorization], and I can be just as guilty of that myself. In bioregionalism, or ecocriticism, there is an interrogation of geographical boundaries, political boundaries, and instead a consideration of the biota and abiota as demarcations of territories and how the overlaps constitute one another, how they feed into larger and larger systems. And I think that's what I find very attractive about your work—very evocative—is that you explore both these sort of, what can we call them, terrains or ideas or concepts. And so you're very much immersed in home place. Your writing is very mindful of home place but at the same time, you have this repeated fascination, it seems, where you keep returning to migration. And not just animal migrations, either, like your *A Ship Portrait.* . .

HT. Yeah, human migrations, yeah.

LSJ. This. . . the human migrations and this wonderful—I don't know, intermingling that's going on in your work—it's this subject of migration which returns to your work and I'm wondering if you could talk about that.

Tidnish Bridge (L. Szabo-Jones)

HT. Yeah, a work that seems to, in a sense, stand outside the bigger body of work that I've been doing for however long, three decades or whatever, is *A Ship Portrait*. . . but I was acutely aware growing up in Yarmouth of that shipping tradition. And added to that, I was painfully aware of the kind of regional stereotypes that Maritimers have. And I thought that that kind of stereotyping was not only hurtful but wrong. And because, in the Maritimes during the age of sail, there was an incredible cosmopolitanism. And it became obvious to me, just walking into parlours in Yarmouth where there were all these nicknacks from the Far East or. . . and it was a common thing among many, many families for seafarers to be travelling the globe, including my own. My grandfather's brother ended up in Hawaii, and there's a Thurston branch of the family still there, and he was just a common, everyday sailor. So, I saw that kind of cosmopolitanism, (yes, I think that's a better term to use in terms of culture), as part of my heritage. And part of the reason there was, in a sense an agenda behind writing about O'Brien and trying to revise that sense of worldliness that Maritimers have. My work as a journalist led me to places, frankly, that I wouldn't have anticipated going. Right? It wasn't planned. And I don't think I am a born adventurer, but what happened was that there were all these interesting stories and they happened farther and farther afield and so I ended up, for instance, in Egypt, [laughs] writing about an oasis. But, the book on the marsh and the book on the oasis, in many ways, are very similar. They're kind of microcosms, right? They're circumscribed areas and you can go deeply into them. And of course here [Harry's backyard, the Tidnish River], where the time scale is different. (Laughs)

LSJ. Yeah (laughs).

HT. Right? It's a seasonal time scale and you can say that it's a shorter time scale, because what I'm dealing with is the almanac which is the cycle of the seasons or you can say this is more or less the eternal time scale. It could be seen both as smaller and bigger. The oasis, it's both space and time again, where on the surface, at least, that time scale is huge. And it involves people coming to and through a place, which of course is what happens here. Only it's not so much. . . well, there is a succession of peoples here, too.

LSJ. Yes. And also, too, I guess, even from a scientific point of view, is how you approach a marsh or wetland. Whether you approach it from a biological standpoint or from a geological, I'm sure a geologist is going to approach a marsh much differently than an ecologist, for instance, and that geologists will consider more of the deep time change.

HT. Yes. Yeah, what happened here with the marsh book [*A Place Between the Tides*] was... I don't know whether it came as a surprise to me, but I had planned the book differently. Originally I thought it would be more or less a straightforward, natural history. But that in a sense ignored what excited me in the first place about being here, which was the fact that I had returned to the environment of my childhood. But I had returned better armed in a sense. I still had. . . I mean, to me the central metaphor in *A Place Between the Tides* is a boy at the window,

right? And it's there in the beginning and it's there at the end and I want it to be there because I want, ultimately, people to come away from the book with that sense of wonder, with that kind of freshness of vision. But I didn't intend it to become this kind of hybrid form until I sat down to write and realized that the memoir aspect of it gave it another dimension, another residence.

LSJ. An immediacy.

HT. And an immediacy, yeah. And an emotional investment. . . both. I mean that the emotional investment is transferred to the reader. There's the poem by Alden Nowlan, he says, "the secret ingredient in my wife's cooking is love and if you think that's funny, you should eat something she cooks without it."

LSJ. (Laughs)

HT. That's not an exact quote but it's close enough. And in a sense, that's the way it is with writing. I find if I'm writing from—if I love the subject. . .or if I'm invested emotionally in the subject, the writing somehow always turns out a bit better. So that's, in part, what happened with that book. But, as I said in *The Sea's Voice,* one of the wonderful things about natural history writing is that it is this chimera. It's this crazy hybrid. And so it's a very open form.

LSJ. Yeah, it is.

HT. And I like that.

LSJ. Yeah. And it's interesting because if you go to a book store, you can find the subject in autobiography, you can find it in nature writing, science writing and nonfiction. . . it's very hard to pin down.

HT. I may have gotten away from your question.

LSJ. No, no. I'm glad that you brought up the idea, the window in the. . .

HT. (Laughs) In *A Place Between the Tides*, yeah.

LSJ. . . . in *A Place Between the Tides,* but also how you mention that this [chronicle of natural history] also comes out of thirteen years of journal entries. . .of seasonal observations of the salt marsh. But you also note in the beginning that you set out to compile a phenology of the salt marsh, the study of seasonal cycles of flora and fauna. But, I like how the term phenology derives from the Greek to view or to appear to come into view. . .

HT. Yes.

LSJ. . . . so that opening with you as a young boy and your mother holding you up and you viewing the moonlight and the river and the spring flood and then seeing the black ducks. This is what's so interesting to me. . . that it is not just what appears or what emerges in that text through sight, but also how you developed all the other sort of sensory perceptions of the environment through sound, through smell, touch, taste. So this book is very much also a phenomenology of the salt marsh, and I sense, from not only the two terms' shared etymology but from this book as well, and your other writings, that these two approaches, phenology and phenomenology, are sort of an

inseparable approach.

HT. Yeah, I think you're right. I don't know whether I would have made that connection but... I'm highly invested in the notion that the writing has to proceed from the senses. I mentioned at ALECC my interest in [David] Abram's book. And that book was a revelation to me because he traces how our bodily response, which is reciprocal with the environment, is a source of language. And my wanting to write and wanting to become a poet was, in a sense, a search to express my wonder about the natural world. I mentioned this at the conference. The language of science, which is more empirical and more logical, was not inappropriate, but emotionally inadequate for me. And so I needed another medium and at first it was poetry, and then it became. . . it continues to be poetry, but I also found that with nature writing, natural history, I could find a way into the world through that as well.

You know, Thoreau said something like, in the end, phenology is what's most important. And, later in his life, that's what he got into. He was less sort of philosophically oriented. When I moved here, I thought, okay I have not only an opportunity but almost a responsibility to really see what's happening here. And it's going to take time, which it did. I had been immersed in a lot of issues, writing about issues as an environmental journalist and our view. . . that's why I stick that quote at the front of the book,* our view tends to be the big view, the long view. We've become so aware, through the media and through globalism generally, of what's happening remotely, that in some respects it becomes almost a distraction. And my responsibility I thought was to see what's happening right here in front of me. To use every sense that I had to give an accurate picture of the close-up view of the world. I mean the world is just a series of small places connected. there's no wall, there's no dividing line. . . I mean yes there are eco-zones and so on but they interface some place along the way.

LSJ. And what is interesting, too, because also in this local, you seem to like to focus on the common place, like say for instance *The Nature of Shorebirds: Nomads of the Wetland*s. I noticed that, even though you look at some of the more endangered species of shorebirds and such, that you seem to always keep returning to the *peeps,* which people, when they see them on a beach, probably just dismiss them as another brown bird. . .

HT. (Laughs) A *home*ly brown bird

LSJ. But you seem to. . . create, I guess, a sense of not exoticism of them but a de-familiarization of these birds [sandpipers] so that they become new, something novel.

HT. Uh-hmm. Well, yeah, I think that is, in part, my dedication to the commonplace as you say. I think, again, perhaps it arises out of that kind of rural background. . . of actually having grown up in a very modest environment. Perhaps culturally modest, *but* valuing it. Learning to value what was close at hand and, yeah, we tend to be attracted to the megafauna, and the more exotic it is, you know, (laughs) the more excited we become.

LSJ. Yeah, sexy beasts, right? (laughs)

HT. Yeah, the sexy beats. But, most of our

existence we interact more with the familiar than with the exotic. And so why should we value it less? Perhaps we should value it more because it is our world. I don't know whether I ever thought of it philosophically; part of the reason for going back to the *peeps* is because I know them well, too. . . I mean you have a knowledge base and part of it is probably artifice in the sense that you need to return the reader to something familiar every once in awhile. Or they get out of. . . it's like losing. . . it's like arrhythmia. (Laughs)

LSJ. (Laughs)

HT. You have to get in sync with their heartbeat. . . and they go oh yeah, now I know, now I remember what it is. And maybe we do this, as writers. Sometimes you do these things unconsciously and other times you see a pattern. I'm afraid I'm getting a little tangential here, but one of the things that most fascinated me about writing about the marsh was to unearth, as it were, the patterns. The things that give rhythm to our lives and just valuing that fundamentally. I think because the media is so multi-tentacled, we tend to be reaching out all the time. I mean there's nothing wrong with that; it has many good effects democratically, in particular. But, at the same time, I think it tends to alienate us from our life.

LSJ. Yeah, no, definitely. And there was a wonderful, I can't recall it off-hand, quote that you cite, an epigraph in one of the chapters in *The Nature of Shorebirds* about that idea: the commonplace is what you have to pay attention to because that's probably the first thing that's going to disappear before you realize it.

HT. Yeah, one of the things about shorebirds in particular, too, is that, because they tend to concentrate so massively in certain areas, that the length between numbers and extinction is erased. When we think, oh there are huge numbers therefore the species can't go extinct. But, if you bring numbers and space together then suddenly that equation breaks down. I was thinking about. . . just another thought about *A Place Between the Tides*, when people ask me what that book was about, I first say, facetiously it's about my backyard. But my more serious answer to that is that it's about perception. It's about, well a more common term, observation. But it's about perception. And almost a monkish dedication to seeing what you can see. And there's an emotional dimension to that, too. I mean that's sort of like what you were referring to—the phenomenology—you see something and see how you were changed by that. There's a reciprocity. The thing that I really liked about Abram's ideas is that there's this kind of membrane between the human and the non-human world.

Harry Thurston and his backyard

LSJ. I think one of my most memorable moments in Abram's book is when he describes a tree as it touches you, it's not necessarily you brushing against the tree but the tree actually standing out and brushing itself onto you, touching you.

HT. Yeah, it's a permeable membrane...

LSJ. I'm really curious about how you collaborate. . . it seems you do quite a bit with visual artists. . . particularly with photographers. I just had the chance, yesterday to check out *Silver Ghost*, which you made with Thaddeus Holownia—beautiful. So can you tell me how this project came about, and what was the process?

HT. Well, Thaddeus and I had collaborated previously, although not on a project that ambitious. We had done this project on bird eggs.

LSJ. Yes, I've read some of the poems from the collection, but not seen the actual book.

HT. Our relationship goes back a long ways. Now Thaddeus made the decision that he wanted to do something close to home. He wanted a book project that was relevant to *his* place. And in New Brunswick, no better project than photographing salmon rivers. Because we had a relationship already, both professional and personal, he thought of me because I'm a natural history writer. [laughs] But he didn't know I was a fisherman. He didn't know I was a fly-fisherman. He didn't know that I was a really keen Atlantic salmon fisherman. And so that was an element that was unplanned in terms of the book. The process was five years of photographing and we would often travel together. I've worked with many photographers in the photojournalism field. . . and I mean very good ones, but I've never seen a photographer work the way Thaddeus does. Sometimes, we would go on a field trip to a river and he would take two photographs. On one occasion, he took none.

LSJ. Lighting's just not right (laughs).

HT. Well, no.

LSJ. No?

HT. Interestingly, lighting doesn't matter to him. I've never seen anybody work that way, either. He doesn't worry about whether it's dawn or dusk or dark or bright day. He changes the aperture and the exposure time and takes the photograph. It's seeing the photograph, actually seeing the photograph before you take it. So it's a compositional thing. The process from the collaboration is that we trust each other's artistic vision, and so there was never any discussion of what the text would be like.
None.

LSJ. None.

HT. And I didn't produce a text for five years. I didn't write anything. (Laughs)

LSJ. (Laughs) You just went on some good field trips.

HT. Yeah, I just went on a lot of good field trips and it must have, at one point or another, he never expressed panic, but he must have wondered whether I was going to

write anything. And when the photographic process was done, then I began to write, but I didn't write from the photographs. So it's, in my opinion, the best kind of collaboration where it begins in trust and respect between artists in different media. And it's a parallel track, right? It's not an attempt to artificially bring these two visions together. So the text is more driven by a concern for the fish and the experience of rivers with Atlantic salmon in them. And for the fate of the fish, and so it's more of an environmental text than the photographs per se.

LSJ. Well I noticed that with these collaborative works that—I mean I don't want to clump them with coffee table books because I think that's just a horrible term. It's sort of dismissive and that it's just there as eye-candy. I think that idea of your writing and the photography as being parallel, writing with the photos.

HT. I mean you're on track because you do have a subject. And so I mean there really is apples and oranges, you've got your vision trained on a particular subject, but the sensibility of the artist, I think, needs free-play. And the best sort of collaborative works there's a kind of. . . well, I think when they come together, they come together in surprising ways. And then you get the benefit of different visions of the same subject. It's very interesting, even the *Bay of Fundy* book, although it was a little bit more of a collaborative process in terms of the subject, we would talk about—

LSJ. And this was with [photographer] Stephen Homer.

HT. Yes, with Stephen Homer, we would talk about: "we need to go to. . . we need shots of the Tantramar Marsh, we needs s hots of the salt marsh, we need shots of the geology." But again, because the project evolved over a period of four or five years, there was an independence about it, too. And, somehow that's more comforting. (Laughs) As an artist.

LSJ. *The Nature of Shorebirds* though seemed a bit of a different tack, uses different photographers. Did you choose the photos to accompany the text or was it more an editorial choice?

HT. I did choose the photos, largely. But that's a different kind of book. It is a more traditional, in a sense, coffee table book. It's not the vision of two artists, right? Which the *Bay of Fundy* book is. And it's a book that I feel very good about, even twenty years later, partly because I think I started to get my stride a little as a nature writer. But the other part is that it's a book that actually maybe had some impact in the real world of changing people's perceptions of, again, a place that was in people's backyards but was taken for granted, and I think helped in some ways to create a sense of responsibility to protect this place. Which is again being challenged.

LSJ. Yeah, the tidal energy.

HT. You're going to have a lot of tape to listen to.

LSJ. I am going to have a lot of tape.

HT. No quick answers. (Laughs)

LSJ. Yeah—no, no—and I wasn't expecting quick answers at all...I'm curious because you mentioned earlier you did a residency

at the Haig-Brown House in Campbell River, British Columbia for a year. I find it interesting because *Silver Ghost* is a really nice parallel to Roderick Haig-Brown, fly-fisherman and conservationist, and here, you publish a book on Atlantic salmon. I come from the West Coast so my familiarity of the mythology and natural history of salmon is immersed in Pacific salmon. Did you find any sort of . . .

HT. Connection?

LSJ. . . . connections between, yeah, the Haig-Brown and. . .

HT. Yeah, well, when I tried to teach myself how to be a fly fisherman, how to fly fish, I read Haig-Brown's primer on fly fishing, which was one of his freelance projects. The most interesting critical article that I have read on Haig-Brown, and I read it while I was out there, was from *ISLE*. Anyway, he [Glen Love] compares Thoreau and Haig-Brown and he uses the example of Thoreau in the boat on the lake. . . on the pond with the old fisherman. And, the old fisherman is the guy who might be Haig-Brown, right? He knows how to catch a fish, not just how to write about it. But he makes a very interesting distinction. What he says is there are two schools of nature writing and he said, there's the Thoreauvian school, which tells you how to be in nature. And there's the Haig Brown school, which tells you how to act in nature. And, part of my respect for Haig Brown centres on that kind of practical relationship. He teaches you how to catch a fish. But also he was a dedicated environmentalist. I mean he. . . and Thoreau might have been an. . . I mean, arguably was, and he was definitely engaged through civil disobedience... But, Haig-Brown dedicated a great deal of his energy to conservation. Working on the ground, to the detriment of his writing and his later career. And I mean detriment in the sense that he didn't have time to write. I respect that. In a sense, when you're doing environmental journalism, as a writer, (I shouldn't speak in the second person), I sometimes wonder, well, should I be writing a poem? But because their impact can be quite different and the environmental journalism is, in a sense, the way to act in nature and the nature poem is often more a way to be in nature, I mean. . . I don't really embrace that distinction wholly but it is a curious. . . it is, I think, an interesting observation.

LSJ. Well, the phenomenological that you focus on in a lot of your writing, I think that is sort of a way of bridging the two. In a phenomenological approach, you're focusing more on the function or the motility of an environment. And so you end up looking at process rather than outcome, and that's what's more important, it's not about the big grand questions and *being* . . . we could be here for an eternity trying to find out about being. . .

HT. Yeah we would *be*. (Laughs)

LSJ. (Laughs) Whereas understanding process, looking at motility function and how we move through an environment, how we act in an environment, yeah, I think you're right, we come into a better understanding of how then to cultivate some sort of outdoor ethic, as Haig-Brown would call it.

HT. Yeah. Well, yeah, I. . . a bit of a pun, but I don't have time, actually, to think about

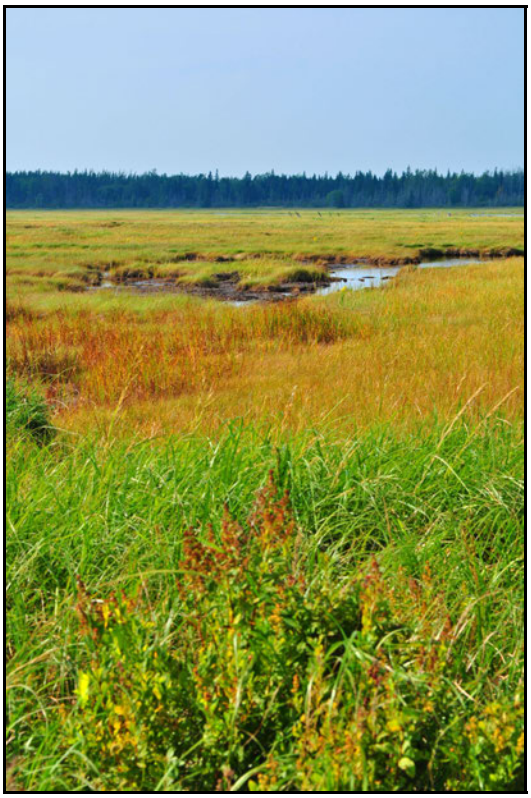
the other world or eternity.

LSJ. (Laughs)

HT. You know? (Laughs)

LSJ. Yeah.

HT. I only have time, really, to try to make sense of what's in front of me. And what is here is so remarkable, so complex. . . that I think our responsibility lies in trying to make what sense we can of it, including how we are placed within the bigger picture? I mean the irony of the title, there are people who dislike. . . some people intensely dislike the title *If Men Lived on Earth*, probably because of the use of *men* and I understand that. Except that it doesn't sound right to say humans, *If Humans Lived on Earth*, I could have done that but, on the other hand, in a sense, the irony in that title is about the patriarchy. . . so often *we're not here*. *We're just around*. We're not actually paying attention. I love that. . . there's that beautiful quote in Mary Oliver's poem, "Yes!No!," "to pay attention is our proper and endless work." And it comes as close as I've been able to come in describing what I try to do as a writer, and I think, part of that apprenticeship or part of understanding what it is I'm trying to do, that apprenticeship begins in the biology lab. When you're presented with something and you're actually in anatomy class, you have to describe it. So it's partly a very rational and deliberate methodology. But when you extend that into the artistic field, then it becomes—the question expands—what does this other creature or experience, what meaning does that have for me, how does that impact me? I don't mean that in a kind of self-centred way, all you can do is... I mean, you're just one instrument, right? And you hope that your example, in some way, is relevant to a human experience generally...



Tantramar Marsh (L. Szabo-Jones)

LSJ. What's next? Do you have anything in the works or anything planned?

HT. I'm finishing this book on the Atlantic Coast, which is this kind of omnibus book that I'm doing for Greystone and Suzuki. Beyond that, I'm not quite sure. I have a poetic project that I want to embark on which, in some ways, will be maybe a corollary of what I did with the marsh. I have some more writing to do about fishing. (Laughs)

I'm actually working on a short memoir about fishing with my father and understanding. I lost him at an early age,

and I'm writing this at. . . nearly at the age that he died. And I think I'm discovering through writing it that I. . . it's not just an exploration of the relationship we had or could have had, that it maybe is partly an exploration of who he was. And why. . . people who fish have a great need for solitude. (Laughs)

And one element of solitude is that there's beauty in solitude and there's something deeper and sadder in solitude, too. There's an emotional plane that I'm discovering. I'm going to write more poems and I'm going to write more natural history, but I think that the natural history will be more personal as well. I'm not looking, nor do I want, a project which involves a lot of primary research. (Laughs)

LSJ. Yeah, understandable (Laughs). Well thank you very much.

HT. Well thank you. I wish I could have given you more succinct answers but there doesn't seem to be any of. . . one doesn't seem to be able to do that—I can't. (Laughs)

- Opening quote to *A Place Between the Tides*: "In this electronic age our perception seems to be spread thin, diffused, as if our environment were viewed from outer space via satellite—so we get a remote view of life on the Earth as isolated patches of light. We may deduce that the rainforests of Brazil are burning as a result of human activity, or that Indonesia, too, is in flames from the effects of El Niño. This information is transmitted to us instantly; we get the big picture on demand. But how many of us train our vision, and our ears, noses—our senses—on the near-at-hand? How many know what's going on in our own backyards, over time? That is what I am striving to do, to create an up-close and continuous record of a single place. This has always been the naturalist's job" Author's journal, March 30, 1998.

LISA SZABO-JONES is a 2009 Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar, and a PhD Candidate in English & Film Studies at the University of Alberta. She is co-Editor of *The Goose*. She spends much time in salt marshes fending off mosquitoes.

Tintamarre (L. Szabo-Jones)

Haida Gwaii, Dianne Chisholm

NEW/FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

"Preservation in flight" Lisa Szabo-Jones

ANANSI

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culture, and history, author Herb Wyile highlights how these writers resist the image of Atlantic Canadians as improvident and regressive, if charming, folk." More…

Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada edited by J. Keri Cronin and Kirsty Robertson

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Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope edited by Tonya K. Davidson, Ondine Park, and Rob Shields

Genre: Urban studies; Cultural studies
ISBN: 978-1-55458-258-7
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Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities: Transformations and Continuities edited by Heather A. Howard and Craig Proulx

Genre: Indigenous studies; Urban studies
ISBN: 978-1-55458-260-0
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"Since the 1970s, Aboriginal people have been more likely to live in Canadian cities than on reserves or in rural areas. Aboriginal rural-to-urban migration and the development of urban Aboriginal communities represent one of the most significant shifts in the histories and cultures of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The essays in *Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities: Transformations and*

Continuities are from contributors directly engaged in urban Aboriginal communities; they draw on extensive ethnographic research on and by Aboriginal people and their own lived experiences." More…

Lisa Szabo-Jones

ALECC

Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada

The Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada / Association pour la littérature, l'environnement et la culture au Canada (ALECC) is an organization for the creation, appreciation, discussion, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge about the work of nature writers, environmental writers and journalists, eco-artists of all disciplines, ecocritics, and ecotheorists in Canada.

Collectively we are interested in artistic, critical and cultural studies work on activism, animals, ecology, the environment, environmental justice, geography, land, landscape, mountain literature and culture, nature and nature writing, natural history writing, plants, region, regionalism, the rural, sense of place, transborder environmental issues, wilderness and wilder places, and much more.

To this end we maintain a vibrant listserv (which is free to join), and twice annually edit and publish the electronic publication called The Goose. We held our first conference in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, August 19-21, 2010.

For more information about ALECC, and to read The Goose, please visit http://alecc.ca. For information about our recent conference, please visit http://www.cbu.ca/alecc.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover image: "Urban wildlife viewing," Lisa Szabo-Jones

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Parting Glance

by Pamela Banting

Robert Kroetsch:
A Story, a Memory, a Reminiscence

Prairie, Lisa Szabo-Jones

I am so lucky to have had Robert Kroetsch as my professor, my literary mentor, my Master's thesis supervisor and intellectual mentor, my friend. He was at the centre of the literary community of Western Canada, a centre that he forcefully resisted becoming. He was the centre he himself eluded at every turn. Let me say then that he was the heart of things. More than a breath of fresh air, he was a chinook. He was, simply, an in-spiration to us all.

The second literary reading I ever attended was a reading by Robert Kroetsch at the University of Manitoba. He read from *Seed Catalogue*. He wore a plum-coloured blazer. I had never read or heard anything like *Seed Catalogue* before, and I may not have seen a man in a plum blazer before either. To say I left the reading abuzz understates everything. I was so abuzz I could have been a bee.

In about 1980 or 1981, when he was writer-in-residence at the University of Calgary and I was working at a law publishing company, editing judges' reasons for judgement and orally proof reading The Income Tax Act, I went to him for a consultation and he read my entire oeuvre of poetry (all eight poems) in front of my eyes, advised me that the poems did have enough merit that I could indeed apply to a poetry writing workshop, and directed me to the advanced poetry writing seminar with Patrick Lane at Fort San. And when I returned from there, Bob talked me into moving back to Winnipeg (I had just moved from Winnipeg to Calgary) to do graduate work with him. At the University of Manitoba, I took at least three graduate courses from him, which along with my other courses was far more than I needed for the degree, but his were just too enticing not to take.

Bob Kroetsch was the best professor imaginable. His classes were legendary. To him, a classroom was not a static enclosure where an expert or a great man or a Gradgrindian pedant holds forth. For him, a classroom was a space where you made things *happen*—where you sparked bright and novel ideas, conversations, projects, collaborations, and lifelong friendships. The classroom was a barn-raising, a quilting bee, a community dance, a game of scrub. When I was working on my Master's thesis with him, every two weeks we would meet at his office and I would present him with a new chapter. He read each, asked a probing question or two or three and said "OK, yes, go on," and released me like a trout back into the stream of the writing. His exemplary method of graduate supervision was catch-and-release.

I am currently a professor of Canadian literature, literary theory, and western North American nature writing and environmental literature at the University of Calgary. I would **not** be a professor today were it not for the idea that Robert Kroetsch—along with his compañeros David Arnason and Dennis Cooley—gave me that even a young and naïve woman from Birch River, Manitoba, a place way the hell and gone, an utterly bookless place, could actually dare to become a professor, maybe even a writer. Could gain entrance to, not just be entranced by, the world of books. I could enter the dialogue, I could join the dance, and eventually I could make a contribution in some way. I could become part of the literary and intellectual communities of Canada.

Kroetsch didn't teach me community per se. My dad was a wonderful maker and nurturer of the rural small town community, and I learned that from him. What Robert taught me was that even if you come from a rural place, and later go to live in the city, you can nevertheless create community there too. He showed me that the city is not only a place where one can, at long last, buy a book or 4,000 of them. It isn't just a place where the cement hurts your feet and the

billboards and cars flicking constantly past your eyes strain them. The city too could be a genuine place, a place in which to build, fabricate or even confabulate a life. You didn't have to merely perch there at an address, buying things and following rules.

He also made it acceptable to be proud of the place you come from. A local pride, as William Carlos Williams had said, and as Robert taught in his graduate courses on the long poem. He taught us a sense of place and how not just "high culture" but both the wild and the tame are part of a sense of belonging. In terms of some of the things of particular interest to eco-critics, he championed places and the literature of place, local knowledge, the west and the north, the rural and the urban, the mountains and the rivers and the river valleys, aboriginal and non-aboriginal stories, the wild and the tame, vernacular and poststructuralist uses of language, the tall tale and the scholarly essay, the comic and the tragic, and so very much more. He was an early proponent of the mysteries and delights of bees.

His "Stone Hammer Poem" became our stone hammer.

Over the past five or so years, together with others of you who, like him, also understand the importance and pleasures of community, I set in motion the creation of the Association for Literature, the Environment and Culture in Canada. ALECC is a community, a place of belonging. In 2010 we had our first conference, which we called The Ecological Community. ALECC and our first conference are just two manifestations of Kroetsch's legacy as I inherited it.

Robert Kroetsch has given me so many gifts and affected my life in so many profound ways I cannot begin to count them. Here is just a small illustration. I am trying, against all odds, to grow a garden again this year on the western shoulder of the big hill at Cochrane, Alberta, a windy place where the Bow River water comes out of the hose so cold it can send plants into root shock and prevent them from growing. An unlikely garden. At one moment this spring, as I was planting my seeds, I suddenly noticed that I was whispering to myself: "the exact placing of the explosive seed, the exact placing of the explosive seed," a line from *Seed Catalogue*. "Bring me the radish seeds," I wanted to call out to anyone within earshot.

Robert Kroetsch gave us permission to set down roots and send out shoots. He inspirited us, freeing us into our own unique gardens and wild places.

PAMELA BANTING served as the inaugural President of ALECC. Four chapters of her book *Body Inc.: A Theory of Translation Poetics* are about the poetry of Robert Kroetsch.