

PHOTO

Ottawater: O.I

edited by rob mclennan : January 2005

design by tanya sprowl



CONTENTS:



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

Balancing Acts: An Interview with John Barton

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

ANXIETY

Before I broke the window I was always on the inside looking out
—words excised from a notebook and ignored till now, till I look out

a window at this time of year, cracked panes jangling in the frame
the frame itself jarred by the first cold wind to lift from the river

winter oppressing me on schedule as it always does, these words
flags snapping at the Turkish embassy two doors down, twigs

fragmenting in the cold, the first shattered crimson leaves already
below my window, my shadow from this lit room anticipating

war, in Kurdistan perhaps, darkness cast across the premature snow.
Before I broke the window I was always on the inside looking out

thinking I had inside knowledge, thinking I had something special
or nothing much to say about what would change how things were

words cutting my wrist as I broke through the pane with my fist
doubt lodging instant shards below the skin, and numbness.

Every window that window. The anxiety. The severed nerve.
The river below exposed as a throat, its argentine integument

taut as a sail resonant with storm, dark clouds of algae flying
to the surface, mottled imperfections swirling into whatever ripens

and gets reflected back, my eyes never once clear and undisturbed.
A child face down in snow in Kurdistan, blood pouring from his mouth.

Before I broke the window I was always on the inside looking out
nothing let in until the airless seasonal rage of the unloved

lacerates destiny with sudden subconscious force, the numb
reality of wind. If I could, in my arms I would gather up that child

and run for cover across every artificial border, these words
I cannot forget, impossible bandages for his mortal wounds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JB: It is very hard to say, largely because your question seems to assume I have some sense of how far off or how nearby "far" is. What I can say is that I

They find the combination of
justification and comma-splice
sentences opaque to comprehension,
and even wonder if they are prose
poems or simply passages of prose.

have found the frustration of my "normal"—as you call it—line most liberating, so I suppose once that ceases to engage me, I will move onto some new obsession—or wait till one materializes to distract me and take me somewhere else. I believe the "frustration of my normal line" has allowed me to move the focus of my atten-

tion—and the reader's—away from the line-ending to the line itself, foregrounding its expansiveness and inclusiveness. I am thinking especially of the long-lined couplets rather than the singlets, though the singlets—which, through their cumulative effect, remind of watching a straight-sided glass filling with deliciously cool water—have an ability to hold a great amount of experience, being absorbent as sponges (to continue with the water metaphor). The structure forces the reader to pay heed to what's going on within the line and between lines unmediated by the break. I am very preoccupied with density, compressing as much into the poem as possible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JB: Foregrounding gay experience in my work has long been a focus for me, but not to attract attention to that experience or to fetishize it—or to make it seem exotic. Nor have I written from a gay perspective to stand out from my straight writing peers. I merely wish to share my imaginative, not necessarily autobiographical, experience—anecdotally and aesthetically—as any other writer might wish to, though writing from a so-called minority

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

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

I merely wish to share my
imaginative, not necessarily
autobiographical, experience
—anecdotally and aesthetically—
as any other writer might wish to...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Malahat Review is an icon of Canadian literary publishing that was founded by Robin Skelton, my teacher at the University of Victoria from 1978 to 1981. As you may know, he died in 1997. The example he set as a magazine editor essentially shaped how I approached my responsibilities at *Arc*. Robin was a shrewd visionary, and through *The Malahat*, he helped shape Canadian literature in ways large and small. It was very important to me that *Arc* aspire to make a similar contribution.

I am sure that its emphasis on the publication of book reviews, for example, stems from Robin's own tireless reviewing in the pages of *The Malahat*. *Arc* may or may not be our “national poetry magazine”; I don't really care if it is. But who can seriously deny it is not

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

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

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



Chase

The pudgy boy dodges the tear-traps of the rubber mats
squeaks his sneakers against the black floor
of the mildewed aisles, flings
his weighed-down body around the corner shelf,
tinned corn tottering precarious
before settling back in the heavy dust
between the canned peaches, beans,
soft packs of confectioner's sugar

Not far behind, a pig-tailed girl caroms off the chips display,
digs a heel against the freezer's base
to brace a launch toward the door,
her hands lead, spread to her escape,
she pictures the flight over the stoop and jumps.

Long gone, they miss the grocer's call, half-hearted, in accent,
to "Stop, stop that; you kids, you brats,
for 32 years I tell you;
just once, just once, you might stop, you bastards."

The economist

Sits, patient behind desk, piled books outnumbering;
 knows I'm not from here, not even, we've established,
 from this part of the brain, but is kind,
 as if I'm exotic, have been misplaced by my handler.

Normatively speaking, he says, and I try
 to picture it, to remember the last rule I made:
 maybe for the cat — not on the table at dinner; but the cat not understanding.
 And, of course, I don't either; am prepared to be swatted down
 for my failure to comprehend.

Think of your taxes, he says,
 and, oh god, I'd rather not.
 my receipts travel three provinces each
 spring, so they can be as far from me as possible
 when stripped to their numbers,
 their key-stroked nudity too obscene for me to bear.

His office has a view, which I am watching, and a blackboard,
 which hangs over; long blackness covered with measured art:
 chalked spirals, prostituted letters, numbers
 climbing each other across geometric scars, mechanical gestures of lines building
 towards Answer. Like words, I think,
 he fragments the world in small insights.

Authored, he says. A book with graphs and tables. And I am lost again.
 His paper scratching, number raking is genius
 to others. Creative intensity. Analysis and theory.
 Same desires, I think. His language cutting the world
 into meaning, precise poems of explanation.
 But not the same, I think, leaving. Can't be
 so sure I'm right.

Sidewalk

Friday's beautiful teenager older than his body,
sweatshirt hooded, piercings tarnished;
not the first way he thought
to cash in in this city.

Sunday sits transgendered on a doorstep
never actually asks,
just a ceramic dish at his/her feet,
running shoes, dirty jeans,
strangers stopping to ask how much the operation;
a problem of priority,
though it doesn't seem P.C. to say.

Saturday the fat lady
teaches her boy to beg by the churchyard
pandering guilt riddance
to cultural parishioners
come to hear the choirs sing:
Mozart, Mendelssohn and spare some change
I'm only 12 and the rent is due.

And

 every day
bearded drunks and schizophrenics, abandoned
but good with the gimmick, their kerchiefed dogs adding credence,
tug on maternal purse-strings, soft-shoed women who'll fish for change,
the alkies trading forever on *"How sad, how sad, a man without a woman is
 always
lost."*

Tamara FAIRCHILD

This is the heart of the financial district

An exploration of

City of Toronto Property Mapping Data Set 50g123.dgn

Level Features

This is the heart of Class

the financial Code

district Text

This is Level I the heart of the financial monuments

/district sewers

Level 2

This bridge is the heart of the financial walk

district way

This is Level 3 the heart of empty

Level the financial district

4 This is the empty heart of the financial district

This is Level 5

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

This is Level 6 sidewalks

Level 7 the stoplines/ heart of intersections/

the financial traffic

district lights

This is Level 8 the heart of the financial road

segments along the district edge

Level 9 some lines where there are islands

This is Level 10

the empty heart of the financial district

This is Level 11 the heart of squares

/the financial district patios

/steps

Level 12

This empty is the heart of the financial district

Level 13

This is the empty heart of the financial district

Level 14

This is the heart empty of the financial district

*This is Level 15 the heart of empty
the Level financial district*

*This is 16 the heart of no
the financial district elements visible*

Level 17

*This is the no heart
of the financial elements district
This is visible
the Level heart of 18
the empty financial district*

*This is Level 19
the empty heart of the financial district
This is Level 20
the heart empty of the financial district
This is the heart of Level 21
the financial district ellipses utilities*

Level 22 *This text: is the bridge
heart of the financial house
district lane*

*This parking is the heart of etc.
the financial district text*

*This is Level 23
the heart of property
/the financial district survey
This is the heart of the financial monuments
district code 130 Level 24*

*This text: is the heart of RIGHT
OF the financial district WAY*

*This is Level 25
the heart of buildings
the financial district footprints
This outline is the heart of the financial district code
This 120 is the heart of the financial district
This code 10 is the heart of none*

Level *the financial district*

This is 26 the heart of street

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

Level 27 text:
names of *district streets*

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

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

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

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

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

Level *the financial district*

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

*This is Level 44
the heart empty of*

Level the financial district

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

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

Level the financial district

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is Level 63

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





Gwendolyn GUTH

Revenge

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

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

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

