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Gary Barwin

HAIKU

stuff is all over me
and inside me

HAIKU

the boring first line
the really great middle line
the killer last line

the snail in my head
slowly slowly
moving Mt Fuji

SONG

the sun has found its little bed
in an egg

the oxen dance on the horizon
but they don't really understand

Oh my heart is such a potato
I've forgotten to plough
everyone's smooth head

we'll have to wait until tomorrow
for furrows

FLOOD

A man may become an underground tree
A wife may begin to flower

Look: lost dog on the frying pan of clouds
'Turns around once
'Then twice

It's been a wet spring and now
There are branch-like cracks in the hang-dog
Face of summer

Fingers stick themselves up the nose of grief
Return only once with olives
OUTLAW REVOLUTION CAPTAIN

The day before Marco Polo discovered
the Miniature Doberman
here on Planet of the Tired Clown,
the conversational Creeps Race began
and I played jigsaw snapping football with
my lost woodman brother.

Now ask yourself: what kind of death satin sailor
sails the piping North Pole with nothing but
a random rabbi generator beneath his cap?
I'm an impossible planet circled by
the weepy noses of my dream detonators.

Mice wish themselves twenty legs
then begin a new life of scurrying
and we, we believe the incorrigible fur trade abdomen
left at the ceremony of evocation

we’re astonished by the luminous pork forest the sawdust of the bacon angel
he who conceals the apocalypse's incorrigible
bedhead from the braided kayak.

There is a cowlick at the centre of the radiant clown.
There is the instep of tomorrow.
O foreheads of loss!
We have the telephone.

RELIEVING

Daddy said
Son you have to make your own dog
if you have none

and I said
I have a fire hydrant
so I can just imagine

GANDHI IN MY EAR

I stand on my own shoulder wearing a Gandhi mask
tell myself: you are the frying pan upon the flame
the Dustbuster upon the speckled road

there may be skidmarks between
the two buttock-lobes of your brain
but with courage you continue

you are brave enough to sweep this floor
your hands on the ends of sticks
you persevere through infinite dust

Big Guy, one day you will arrive at the white wall
the smooth cool of the white wall
I have swept the floor you will say

I have swept the floor.
Louis Cabri

SCREWED WOOD

We pronounce the word skew.
We pronounce the wood screw.

We pronounce the wood screwed word.
We pronounce the word screwed, would

we pronounce the word screwed.
We pronounce the word screw.
John Cloutier

GROCERY LIST

The mind wanders, reflects
in on itself

and it is like nothing

looking at nothing

and words like sing
and sign

begin
to emerge

and suddenly
the mind is a name, a thing

and everything is given a name
and everything is so defined.

Like a grocery list
the names fail to remember

everything

and so something
is always

left out.
Michael Dennis

THE WRITING LIFE

listening to the Cure
on a Tuesday morning

woke up at four

got up and smoked a j

wanted to read a book
that hit me like a sunrise

made coffee for K
while she did her yoga

read the newspaper
did the crossword

chased a cat
out of our backyard

wrote a poem about boxing
without mentioning Mohammed Ali

thought of doing the dishes
put down poison for the ants

watched the clock
as it kept the universe in time

waited for the mail
for the next technical revolution
the next ice-age
peace on earth
end to war and hunger
etc.

EULOGY

for Riley Tent

he is from my tribe
and in my tribe we die young
younger than firemen
or policemen or lion tamers

we turn on ourselves
are our own worst enemies

we use bottles
to collect neglect
we use pills, powder and smoke
to create illusion

we save our fame for death
in our silent slumber
dance victorious
if they remember our name

silent, silent night
if they don’t
THE BIRTH OF THE COOL

why is it that the old jazz masters
knew everything all the time
and as far as I can tell
they never admitted any of it

you just have to listen
to Dexter Gordon play or say anything
to know he has the answers

Miles Davis, John Coltrane
answers in spades
truckloads of answers
more answers than they could hold
in their heads
hence
Kind of Blue, Love Supreme
One Flight UP

all of those old guys
so wised up
it's no wonder
they sound like
half drunk gods
singing into the early morning darkness
about what we've become

that knowledge
against the hopes
of what we might have been
blown through or banged out
on whatever instrument
the fates left close to hand

artist: Hayden Menzies
'Don't Rely on This' 36'x40' mixed media on canvas www.haydenmenzies.com
Adam Dickinson

OPERATIONS

To understand the operation, let an enemy represent the negative and a friend the positive.

If I have no friend, then I have no friend, but if I don’t have no friend, then I am speaking with my head already buried.

The friend of the friend is the friend.

The friend of the enemy is the enemy.

The enemy of the friend is the enemy.

The enemy of the enemy is the friend.

Make a table showing the relative frequency of falling in with the wrong crowd.

Is it possible to multiply like signs and still know who to trust?

Walking home alone at night squinting at the cellular streetlights; what is the outside of the outside?

What does it mean to have no sense at all, positively nothing?

SENTENCES

Little words are the most important.
Or not and if Sue is pretty, then she is also quaint.

If you don’t absorb the meanings you will have trouble going on.

If P is the set of pretty girls and Q is the set of quaint girls, then how do they get together?

There is the playground and there is the sun. Sue scraped her knee playing baseball so she limps.

Some girls are not studious; how will they prove themselves?

All knowledge is useful, some books are not useful. (Be careful: “useful” is not a little word.)

To say “It is false that Sue is either pretty or quaint” means the same as “Sue is not pretty and she is not quaint.” But maybe this is obvious, she can’t be in the outfield and at second! She wants the other girls to play too.

If you think about these a while they become clear, even in words. But what if?

The little word with no conclusion. A rainy day. The ball game was cancelled. Where did she go?
Rhonda Douglas

YOU AND YOUR NOTIONS OF LOVE

The pert blonde in the bar
wants to know: just between
us girls here tonight,
what is the most romantic thing
your husband has ever said to you?

Now I know I have lost, for you
were always a practical man, quick
with a lightbulb or a little to the left;
and after, lying in the bath of our
new sex, before you had learned to say
love, would say ‘O you are a fine, fine woman’.
I protested this blue-ribbon affirmation,
the feeling I had seduced you
with my recipe for molasses bread or jellied salad
with beets. Capable was what you unsaid:
fine, fine, fine. And me lying there then,
not knowing I had won first prize.

WHAT I CAN’T HAVE

O,
how I love the men
I’ve never slept with.
How perfectly
free of daily expectation:
take T., with his talk of bears
out back and his brown-eyed
grief for the buffalo; G.,
his tender knowing
of what violence does to
a woman, which bones
break so easily; and B.,
who says he would be three days
dead and still desiring me. Men
who’ve never disappointed – how
their wit burns the air a brighter colour
and leads me for no good reason
but my age-resistant heart to say
to my husband tonight,
Darling would you mind
if we didn’t?
Laura Farina

WHAT THE HIGHWAY SAID TO ME

We drove through Lansing, Michigan
the snow dashing
over the dotted line,
passing us without looking back.

Cars abandoned by the side of the road
were not husks or children –
nothing living, or once living –
cold a long time.

No hitchhikers that evening—
they were inside, smoking, telling
hitchhiking stories.

You turned to me. You said,
it doesn’t seem that slippery.
No, I said. It doesn’t. Although
I didn’t know for sure.

I thought I’d roll down the window
to remind us about cold.
Turned the handle
only once before a rush of snow

hit you and you asked me
what I did that for.

SLOW

Could a lizard coil always
around one finger like a ring worn –
some sort of marriage
to the sun
and long grain rice
and anything that boils
slowly anything
that takes time to get
moving in the morning
or has to be thought of
before it is done.

The smell of coffee is like that
and phoning certain people and
I think most arts and crafts
but it’s been a while since I tried
to make anything.

I went to the market
and felt the melons
and smelled the berries rotting –
this was in August.

The night before there was singing
and someone played harmonica
much better than I expected.
I stretched out on my bed
listened though it was
faint I suppose,
and far away.
Listened and fell asleep like that.
I was a house unlocked.
Andrew Faulkner

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIVING IN A LOGGING TOWN

This body limber;  
the loosened  
joints of a tree-fort collapsing;  
poorly built. Skinned a new  
knee. Learns to nail harder,  
get out fast.  

A construction: body as lumber  
bulging and belt-bound. Tied  
lugging a fair tug  
but only hard-wared for use at home. Signs  
contracts for help getting up stilts.  

Construction-site turned demolition:  
everything comes tumbling down.  
Clearcut  
retired at a flatline.  
Mimics a tree bowed down.  
Ratifies a commercial dispensing  
of anything worth climbing.

RAIN DELAY

for b.s.v.

The weather-man played umpire,  
called the game during his three-day forecast.  
Stole the maintained look  
of the ground screw, avoided the count  
of ticket sales. Under the tarp  
our lesser intentions contended:  
slid in, got tagged, and re-invented  
ourselves between innings. Bottom  
of the ninth and for once you come  
out on top. The final a relative blow  
out: four to one for aphorisms.  
The spread was understandably heartbroken.  

The box, once scored, never says  
how we came out swinging. Like a metaphor  
we mixed, applied to transfer  
leagues and were unusually self-deprecating about it all.  

Post-game highlights were terse but accurate.  
Literature, as always, was silent on the issue.
FRIDAY-NIGHT POST-DOM, OTTAWA

said ineluctable

got lucky; struck
loveless
like a prostitute,
dripping.

THE BREAKS

a triptych for Conrad Black

i. this place is the breaks
Broke as many rules of trade
as a collar could whitewash.
Caught laundering files
when pressed
assailed the public deyachters
and ended up jail-broke. Sheet-folded like a small town newspaper
through a recycling plant. Pulpy,
but at this point take what you can get.

Cigarettes smuggle postcards saying:
the grub is awful but for hir-ed
learning this place is the breaks.

ii. if the market keeps like this
Deducted tax for time spent serving
until returns got caught
up in the conjugative associations
of a proposition:
Yes, I'm sure you would
but if the market keeps like this,
I'm taking.
The money ran, and no one's interested
in a vested best-before. Had lord,
untravel-able. This mess is for history,
booked.

iii. I was tattooed once in Kingston
Bound
to break out with the conviction
of an op-ed. I was tattooed once in Kingston
and like any other pleat the ink'll
cost ya. It's all a question of shading
though once the skin breaks
you can't plead out or otherwise.
sudden storms. the tornado
they didn't hear coming.
terrorists. known histories
of airshow accidents, freak crashes.
unimportant moments plowed deep into memory
when a pilot, flying too far from the sun
broke the sound barrier into low boom,
reverse-Icarus falling off into a lake of sky.
how everyone who shared this with you
didn't understand you, moved away
before you did or you from them
with as much abandonment-guilt
as if you'd had a choice.
how everyone who understands
will never share this with you, sense
of the sun turned off as you burn,
summer days when friends go missing.
that sometimes without explanation
you clench stomach like a pilot
in tailspin, like dad said to try
on roller coasters, keep falling-sickness
under control. it never works.

Laurie Fuhr

from night flying: cold lake poems

NIGHT FLYING

not ready for the clear afternoon
sound at night, the inner clock
starts running backwards hands
sucked counterclockwise by overhead jets
turn so fast they break from the face,
get pulled through engines almost
downing a plane small birds fall
from their sky, feather-stripped
in G-force windsheer. F-18 roar

is short low rumble then sure long growl,
al all action no foreplay, rabid machine gone
cannibalistic, eating the sky it's made of,
ingestion, injection fast enough to become
what it consumes. houses shake,
their occupants take too far
their refusal to be stirred, grow
stagnant. playground bolts

knock loose, dooming children
to a fate not bad as bullies imitating daddy.
cumulus is vacuumed, spat clear
to Primrose Lake, raining on carcasses
of fish-turned-fishiles splashed
onshore by missile tests. golfers

watching tourneys in rec room dark
taste divot dirt and grip-sweaty fingers
at the first subsonic warning
before trained ears tune it into
concentrated silence.
a barrel roll overhead
wrings out, sprays the base
in all associations:
F-18 CYCLE

dad gives Department of Defense trading cards for death machinery
with missiles not hockey sticks, a glaring absence of pink gum

but when it sits in the book next to Koivu and Alfredsson
the hope / dream / hunger for future gets transferred ‘how ‘bout

them Hornets’ the little soldier marches off to school, brown-bag
rations in hand pent-up explosions for gym period floor hockey

SIX MONTH WINTER AS POISON GAS

north Alberta fall night is all made up
of migrating goosehonk and coyote yelp.
pain comes at me with the sound
of frozen leaves in wind, window open
no strength to up and close it pain
falls asleep
to its weird music, frozen leaves
rasping, summer amplified.
a blame for my hurting –
can’t stop the forest, bigger than body

where oaks, being louder
hurt more than pines

but pines send all sound down
raggedy branches
through a window to harm you.
small stomach full of crisp
papery foliage and needles
births it the night forest

stretching northern lights, crimson tinge
must be there on a night sounds so
clear, bell-peal clarity pain,
aurora jutting through eyes
up from my boreal
in a sneak attack of burrowing season
ZUCCHINI STAND

This reminds me of a mountain near here. We would hike there almost every winter. The locals built a cluster of plywood stalls at the foot of the trail to sell sweet corn, sugar snaps, beefsteak tomatoes and mounds of excess zucchini. A switchback path rose on a shallow incline through the evergreens right to the tree line, ending where the naked rock surged to the peak. There, the face shone black in the sun where ancient volcanic activity, according to the parks authority, turned ribbons of grey crag into polished glass. The same igneous vein steams the springs up the road.

It's a small mountain. Immense hulks tower all around it, shielding it from the sun in the morning and the late afternoon. Stunted by its antediluvian eruption, its glassy scars invoked my sympathy through similarity. Burn scars make these same patterns on human skin. Intense heat reduces a forest of tiny hairs to wisps of ash, smoothes rugged pores until only waves of shiny pink scar tissue remain, dead as weathered rock.

In winter, the noon sun reflects sallow off the snow-cap and the fresh falls dust deep into the branches of the trees. Sometimes, we would camp at its base and strike out for the back country, abandoning trails, our tracks constantly overlaid by new snow. We'd mull brandy over the Coleman stove, heat a block of frozen chilli and sleep on the growing apprehension that our few years of orienteering might not be enough to guide us through the shifting landscape of this silent, frozen forest.

Once, driving in, the craving for that white isolation prickling my skin, I missed the shimmer of a warning on the ground as we came in fast around the last turn into the parking lot, the moment when the angle between your eye and the light and the black ice warns you of what's ahead. My small car was back-heavy with gear. We spun, hit solid ground sideways and then flipped at sixty until friction brought us rest. I could not tell if anyone was hurt or identify the hiss of leaking propane, but something was tickling my arm and my nose was full of the strong smell of brandy. Through the clear spot in the shattered windshield I could see a gleam of black ice shiny as the volcanic glaze above, extremes of heat and cold making the same mark on the susceptible world. Beyond, in the ditch, I could see an abandoned zucchini stand, and all the zucchini they couldn't sell piled to rot. Only, it had only just begun to decay when the first winter storm came in fast and hard. Glazed by the cycle of melt and refreeze, they huddled together and waited for spring, reprieved, and shiny in the sun.
STILL LIFE WITHMANDRILLS

He dips a bare ass worthy of an empress
into a saucer of cream – hidden, hiding
she loses his pheromone by the blue cheese dip
where the water-buffalo drink and bathe blue skin.
They stick to the apron of candle light.
She catches a glimpse of his blue face
behind bright mangoes in a ceramic bowl.
She watches him watch her press
her breasts against the rose fringe,
raising her tail over the lacquered scene
where a hairless, monochrome apeling,
who never dipped his ass in cream
or took his love among the prosciutto,
lies prone by a shallow stream.

artist: Hayden Menzies
'Sketchbook 8' 9.5"x7.5" ink on paper www.haydenmenzies.com
No! DiMtri
ShostaKO-vitch! Oh,
I know, I know
I'm a disenchanter, a drone,
"Piper, piper,
fly me to my place?
via Cassiopeia?"
but christ you can see
the trees whirling on their trunks,
throwing off leaves like blue blazes.
I do, yes, break the ends off
my silences before smoking them,
sure, pharmacopious, ineffemeral,
with a penchant for overjoy
when I'd best just shut up,
but you can see
the streets dripping down the embankment,
the bird's wing snap off in mid-air,
you can see
the school buses, silent
lying on their backs,
the tires still spinning.

At times,
like the times
when the sky's flying solo,
when the hot water's not,
I like to listen to
Shostakovich.
"Shosta-who?"
Shostakovich.
"Who?"
Shostakovich.
"Not Shoskatovich the defenceman?"
No, Dimitri Shostakovitch.
"Would you meet me Shosvatovitch?"

No, what I mean

John Lavery

QUICKEYE

At times,
like the times
when the one room of my own
has a view of the mirror,
when the hot water's not,
my shadow, what there is of it's, damp,
my faces steamed off,
"Mirror, mirror,
whoose us two
is the most fogged up?"
the dishes? nay,
the coffee's boiled,
when the sky's flying solo
ducks are honking chimney,
and I'm white, ripe
for hello-, hello-,
for there-there-there-therapy,
"Doctor, doctor,
Quickeye needs
a seeya-panacea."
I mean, mcclennan can say he can't prove
he can't, within a reasonable doubt,
live without doubt,
but can I, me?
Nicholas Lea

BIG EMITTERS

When can we reveal its secret
feature? The basement floods once,
then calms for eons. Neon
signs flit an flicker back at the city.
The staunch are now-nameless, frittered,
still, convinced that maintenance is key.

Wasted, the presaged maple-drops drop
languidly down dated man-made veins.

The lilac bush emits, kids the wind.
Trees gesticulate a talking untranslatable,
like the brass sounds of dogs, far off.
In the sky, fields whish,
wish for fabulous wealth (in
stealth). Rebel rabbits snagged you
once when you were thought-lost, tossed
you fruitlessly, like flaming hay.

Branch through moon. Pool water
unstopable. Hose nose now powerless, yet
feared interminably.

It doesn't matter now.

The tired sleep. The frank craft
rabid judgments on the lawns that once
grew them.

Norman Drive, Moose Creek, Ontario, July 24, 2007

U

Unload your spacious soul
Whose chest full of killers is zoned
For the sun now in its feather blue building
— Fanny Howe

Tranced emphatic. Shackled
shack hoarder, hitting up
the Hive in the hopes of some un-
adulterated plaything, some Future
Beyond Synthetics.

Transgressive teller. Help. There
ain't much left to talk about: save this
ambient tweeting; —the Saved flirting
with leaves or lean liturgy.

Seller-vandal. Unleash your killer sandals.
Furnish with brick, silled-life thickness;
the instilled fictitude, a factitudnal
advantage, at best.

Danced chancre: had it with the
bored borne world, the TV-rayed stale
light; the controller, shadowy
in frames of transitive fits. The X-Mass
worth ten thousand chances.

Fashion-basher. Stacked princess of dimension
and spit fire. Have you enough quick-
ness to unburn the learned groves? Have you
the skill to vanish or be banished
if the need turns key or better, trivial?

Savage haver—packed-in with the veiled
whale fight—the singer in you,
a sinner-apropos. U, a spatter of light.
A killer amid badder killers.

Norman Drive, Moose Creek, Ontario, July 24, 2007
an interview with Nicholas Lea

This interview was conducted over email from March to July 2007
conducted by rob mclennan

rob mclennan: When did you first start writing?

Nicholas Lea: I discovered two books in high school that finally made it “okay” to read and ultimately try my hand at writing poetry: (of course) Ginsberg's *Howl*, but most notably, Gordon Downie's *Coke Machine Glow*. So, during my last year of high school (god, I'm dating myself) I mostly tried to emulate Gord's spare, chatty, confessional style (I still do, to a degree). Then, in my first year of university I picked up a copy of David O'Meara's first book, *Storm Still*. I loved it. It kind of opened up the “scene” to me and made poetry immediate, relevant. Then I got more immersed, started attending readings and met people who introduced me to other local poets' work, like you, Stephen Brockwell, etc. I started to send my own (now so, so regrettable) stuff to local and sometimes national journals. The first publication was a real confidence booster, it really kept me going. From then on, my life has been more or less an apprenticeship with poetry.

rm: How important is that sense of “scene” to you?

NL: The sense of community that comes with the ‘scene’ is nice for any writer. It's nice to feel like you're not the only one, to be able to compare notes with fellow poets, etc.

This is especially true for young poets who need lots of encouragement; it's that crucial period which takes poetry beyond the realm of hobby and into something more serious-ish. There's no sadder tragedy than seeing a poet with incredible talent and potential stop writing because they're too busy with their careers or whatever. I'm not saying that we should all be full-time poets (let's face it: there ain't many financial incentives) but it's that make or break point, early in a poets life that legitimizes poetry and thus prioritizes it for the person, you know?

Writing, however, for me, is an entirely selfish act; I do it for me, foremost, and not to impress (or depress) my peers. So, the ‘scene’ is definitely a positive thing in my mind but not what drives me to write poetry. The danger with any kind of community is that people inevitably begin to behave the same way. So too in the writing world; writers will forge a style of writing that begins to take on a life of its own and risks becoming stale and homogenous. This is a big fear of mine, so I like to make sure I'm doing my own thing, reading everything I can, always exploring. Of course, still drawing inspiration from, and riffing off my peers, but keeping perspective about the whole thing is key, I guess.

rm: You grew up in a pretty rural area about two miles away from where I grew up, as it turns out, in that eastern Ontario; was there anyone else that had a sense of literature around where you were, or in your house? Did you come from a family or even a high school interested in reading or writing or telling stories? Where do you think this all began for you?

NL: My uncle introduced me to all kinds of neat contemporary writers (mostly American) during my early high school years, like Vonnegut, Robbins, Pynchon; gave me a City Lights pocked edition of *Howl*. That's really what wet my appetite for, not only poetry, but contemporary stuff. In grade 10 I swiped a *15 Canadian Poets (times) 3*, from my school library (don't tell) and fell in love with Purdy, Birney, Cohen, et al. By grade 12, I was skipping classes to drive into Cornwall to used book stores, getting something new, then parking by the St. Lawrence and reading 'til it was safe to go home.

rm: Even with that, do you think coming from a rural background affects the kind of writing you're interested in?
NL: I think so...the rural will always be there, entrenched in my psyche. So, often when I write, those rural images from home will surface. However, I never ask myself: “what am I going to write about in this poem,” never think in terms of theme or even concept (though I'm more sympathetic to the latter). In fact, the majority of my poems are unmapped (at least the ones that I'm happiest with). I try to practice a kind of automatic method of writing, where each image or idea or even sound will metonymically, or better yet, arbitrarily give birth to the next. I mostly always steer clear of logic and reason on principle (and yes, I recognize the paradox in that statement). Logic and reason are where I believe, the best kind of imagination goes to die; it's rare that I write a kind of poem that calls for a linear-style approach. Also, I'm preoccupied with trying to write the ego out of my poems, by either adopting a voice or persona, or by fostering an automatic approach that promotes abstraction, or sometimes by privileging the language over the “sense.” All this to say, the rural comes through at times in my poems via these processes and not through planned thematics.

rm: I ask about rural partly because I know where you grew up, and knowing too your interest in the works of David O'Meara and Don McKay, who have both been called “pastoral” poets. Not that I consider you “pastoral,” but I've seen strains of such in some of your pieces. What is it you think you've learned from the works of O'Meara and McKay, and how do you see your approach being different? What attracts you to what they do?

NL: I certainly haven't ever consciously worked under the conventional constraints of pastoralism and if I did I think I would have to do something totally drastic in order to make it relevant or interesting (like Mouré’s Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person). I definitely lean towards a more traditional pastoral tradition. I think someone coined a new sub-genre called the ‘urban pastoral’, but maybe I dreamed that... if I didn’t though, O'Meara might fit into that category. Of course he's much more than that.

rm: What other writers have turned you on lately, whether as reader or writer or both?

NL: Lately? I've been reading the selected James Tate, he's turning me on. Not too long ago, I finished John Ashbery's Houseboat Days, which, to date, is the finest of him I've read and, in fact, one of the finest books of poetry I've read, ever. It inspired a lot. I also discovered Joe Rosenblatt, really digging his stuff. Dean Young, an American “neo-surrealist.” Mark Levine, another American. And of course always periodically re-reading Kevin Connolly’s Drift, which I think is wonderfully brilliant and funny and heartbreaking and weird, and is one of my favourites. I guess at this point in my career I'm trying to sop up as much as I can, read the kind of poetry I think I would like to write, discover other stuff and kinda forge my own “voice” or style from that. I never suffer from the “anxiety of influence.” Rather I use the poems I love as models or springboards for my own work. Not to say I don't ever try to innovate...well, really, I don't think much about it. I just read a lot and write, well...less.

rm: Stephen Brockwell might argue that in writing less, you are actually doing more for your poetry than if you wrote more. How strict are you on getting material written? Do you give yourself deadlines of any sort or do the poems simply come as they come, through the reading or through any other means?

NL: I suppose it's a matter of perspective. I'd say maybe, 70/30, reading/writing. Especially early in one's career. Sure, you'll never get better unless you write, but you also have to internalize “how” to write; and that's where voracious reading comes into play. I can see the danger in over-influencing oneself, of course. I think that although I tend to read first, write later, it doesn't prevent my own mind and experience from coming through in the work. I may borrow voices, tones, even a word or two or an image, but ultimately they're my word combinations (I'd like to think). Also, I tend to subscribe to the notion of “genre memory,” where what you read tends to assimilate your psyche and thus your own poetic experience, making those influences virtually inescapable, anyway. I've embraced the truth that I'm not unique as a poet—but I am too—in a paradoxical way.

As for deadlines and such, never. Unless I'm given one. In which case I'll probably be late. Writing isn't a discipline for me (maybe a craft, but not a discipline). To me, it's like drugs or sleep or Zen: you just have to let go. I'll never belabour the composition of a poem. I will spend some time revising, but never long enough to elevate the understated, which is something that very much participates in the pastoral tradition. I think someone coined a new sub-genre called the ‘urban pastoral’, but maybe I dreamed that... if I didn’t though, O'Meara might fit into that category. Of course he's much more than that.

rm: What else do you think you've learned from the works of David O'Meara and Don McKay, who have both been called “pastoral” poets. Not that I consider you “pastoral,” but I've seen strains of such in some of your pieces. What is it you think you've learned from the works of O'Meara and McKay, and how do you see your approach being different? What attracts you to what they do?

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You sound as though you find the poems that poems come from the outside, and that writers are merely funnels of a sort. The American poet Jack Spicer (and a few others since) suggested how do you apply this? Can I presume you simply mean in terms of writing being a long-term path? The ostensible or obvious. And work with that.

You're obviously not in a hurry, which I think in the long run could work to your benefit. I've also noticed, for someone who isn't ever in a hurry to send work out to journals or do public readings, you've used the word "career" a few times; where would you say your poems come from? I'm certainly in no hurry, and I do use the term "career" precisely as you described it: as something long-term, definitely not in terms of a "money career" (sadly our culture doesn't value poetry in that way, the best). I don't often send stuff out to big journals because I don't often read big journals—I think most people don't. I think being published in a big journal is more about being published in a big journal than anything else. But then again, maybe I'm saying that to rationalize why I get so many rejection letters.

I'm more interested in making a local mark, charming my immediate friends and colleagues, supporting and patronizing local presses, big or small. Most of those big journals are interested in one kind of poetry—the kind I mostly don't write! I really respect grassroots publishing because it's more democratic and way less politically restricted, which means more variety, innovation, etc. Sure they might not get the same kind of circulation, but I'd rather be a local hero than a nationally restricted, which means more variety, innovation, etc. Sure they might not get the same kind of circulation, but I'd rather be a local hero than a nationally restricted ghost, hee hee.

As for the second part of your question, I think there are myriad ways to approach the writing of a poem, and they're all fair game as far as I'm concerned. I do have to side with Spicer (whom I dig, by the way) with regards to my own approach. I try to literally write experience and not about experience, so yes, in a sense, the poems come from some extra-subjective space—which is just my poncey way of saying the unconscious landscape (wait, that was even ponceier!?). Still, I tend to think of it as internal as opposed to external: I don't think I channel some ghost Muse, but I do lose a big degree of rational control over the process.

My own poetic is quite the opposite: it's playful, excessive, IRRATIONAL, sometimes cinematic in terms of the language and the imagery. It's like Frank O'Hara said (and I might be paraphrasing): “poetry should be as interesting as the Pictures.”
It wasn't until I discovered the “surrealist” and abstract expressionist poets of the 60s and 70s New York school (via the poetry of Kevin Connolly) that I really found the style that most suited my poetic experience. Poets like John Ashbery, O'Hara, Kenneth Koch never apologized, and it seems, never held back, when it came to where the language of the mind would take them. Their poems aren't about anything, per se, they're about how the experience of imagination moves, and how it tugs language along with it.

I'm totally digressing. Workshops are good because they give you a venue to showcase your work to a critical audience, which is what every writer needs. Also, they expose you to other people and consequently other experiences and consequently other styles of writing, which gives you perspective. They can be bad because you're always at the mercy of your instructor's critical/poetical/political leanings (as much as he or she tries to balance it out), which may or may be favourable to you.

rm: How has having a trade collection come out changed your writing? To paraphrase Kate Greenstreet, “how has Everything is movies out in the world changed your life,” and where do you go now? I know you’ve been reading a lot of Fred Wah; I know you’ve been talking about the utanikki…

NL: I'm not sure having a trade collection has changed my writing in any significant way, but my life: it has. It's a whole other thing seeing a collection of your work (work you feel really good about) in book form: perfect-bound, all glossy like…. It's a pretty amazing feeling. I certainly don't feel like I can piss with the big boys yet, but my zipper is half-way down with this book, you know? (okay, bad analogy). At any rate, it's a pretty momentous thing in any writer's life.

As for Wah, I love his critical writing and his poetry, but don't ever see myself going fully in that direction. I'm pretty confident I’ve found my own “voice,” style, and don't foresee any new direction (any major one, at least) with respect to such. Now, I'm just focusing on sharpening, evolving my style. I've started to read and re-read “Everything…” not just in a critical way, but in a very exploratory way too; it's kind of akin to a psychoanalytic free-writing exercise.

As I said earlier. Content is un-premeditated with respect to my method: it's basically the literary end product of the what Kevin Connolly calls, “the event of thinking.” It's (ideally) a spontaneous, intuitive act of letting go of concrete ideas, letting your internal grammar and Experience grapple to see who goes first.

Therefore, it's useful for me to look at the content “after-the-act,” to see what was important to me at the time I was experiencing writing the poem. I haven't decided whether I'm doing this for poetic or therapeutic reasons (thin line, I guess). Also, it's useful in order to gather ammunition for justifying my poetic, which I'm finding is hard, given I haven't given it much thought; too busy writing….

rm: Do you feel you've been challenged in any way on your poetic? Is there something that has to be justified? And just what are you planning for an utanikki? What is your interest in the form?

NL: There have been a few occasions where I've had to explain or justify this or that in a poem. I have been finding it increasingly difficult to articulate my poetic exactly the way I feel abstractly about it. I suppose that's fitting, considering I write a kind of abstract poetry.

I suppose if something has to be justified it's the usual list of “don'ts” that generally put off the contemporary literary Elite, uh, I mean reader (sorry, Freudian slip), a few being: arbitrary imagery, ambiguous subject, disjunctiveness, non-linearity, “excessive” humour or weirdness in the content, wordplay, reckless imprecision (recklessness in general), any kind of formalistic transgression, the list goes on. Not meeting the quota of poems about cottages or travel or classical music. Just kidding.

Though I don't experiment much in the way of form, my offences tend to be in my treatment of content, which tends to be more abstract / surrealist. Also, I pay heavy attention to semantics. I love the fallibility of language, how it falls short or trips over itself. I love puns (which are definitely not en vogue, these days), ambiguity, that, alternately, describe language's infinite economy.

rm: I know your friend Jesse Ferguson is about a year ahead of you arriving in Fredericton from Ottawa, and is already involved in The Fiddlehead; then of course, there's Joe Blades. How do you see yourself and your writing interacting with the activity in and around Fredericton? How do you see any of your considerations altering during your tenure there?

NL: I'm very excited about F . It seems like there's a lot going on poetry-wise and I look forward to being a part of that. I don't expect my writing will change as a result of my moving to a new place; it'll change organically, according to all my complex experience: travel, socializing, reading (especially reading), etc. As you know I don't rely too heavily on Place for content.

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Anne Le Dressay

THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN: A MEDITATION ON SLOTH AND LUST

OK, I'm lazy, eh? I tell him in explanation of why I haven't yet written that huge novel, forever in flux, that some of us like to think we carry around inside us. That's a good line, he says. And he stops pushing. It is a good line. I use it often, and it always works. It always distracts people, puts an end to whatever pressure they are exerting on me. It deflects their criticism (and it is always criticism, even if only implied, against which I brandish this weapon). I am reminded of that well-used defense when I come across the statement (in a poem, no less) that, of the seven deadly sins, sloth (aka laziness) is the only unforgivable one. In my youth, I feared that the Unforgivable Sin was lust, and that I was doomed to hell for my inability to shake it. It is no comfort to be told now that the Unforgivable Sin is not lust, but laziness, in which I have indulged all my life. Sloth, this poet tells me, is a form of despair, and despair is a failure of trust in God, and that is why it's unforgivable. Might it not be, I think, that laziness is in fact a form of faith? In my sloth, I trust in a tomorrow that will permit me to do what I put off today. And sloth, surely, would never lead to suicide, that classic expression of despair. Not, in any case, the kind of sloth in which I mostly indulge, which could be, in a different light, a form of lust (after all)—pleasure in the sensual delights of half-sleep in the comfort of feather pillows and no alarm clock. Or in my other substitutes for hard work, like novels or movies or sitting back watching the sky. Still, I'm uneasy enough to google the seven deadly sins, and relieved to find, in the first several hits, nothing to confirm sloth—or indeed any of the seven—as unforgivable. Also relieved that in every ranking as far as I read, sloth is not the worst, but somewhere in the middle. (And, incidentally, that according to Dante, following the teaching of Gregory the Great, lust is the least deadly.) I even come upon the argument that sloth is necessary to artistic inspiration (though it's not a theologian who says so, but a writer). I come away from Google with my worst unease banished, for the time being. But I cannot banish the question of just where—in what footnote to what theologian and with what supporting argument—sloth is said to be unforgivable. Nor can I banish the astonishment that the question can still prod me so sharply, or the conviction that this entire meditation is really just a rationalization, and that I am, in fact, squirming.
WHAT ANGELS LOOK LIKE

The young server at one of my regular coffee shops is so lovely to look at that the first time I see him, I don’t at first notice that he is he. His features are tender as a girl’s under luxuriant dark curls held back by a kerchief. When he speaks, his deep voice startles, and I look again.

Later, from a table in the corner, I watch his tender perfect profile, every feature gently curved in harmony with the waves of his hair.

He is poised at a fragile middle place of perfect androgynous beauty so fine and fleeting it is almost inhuman—a middle place not everyone crosses.

Or perhaps for most of us it happens in our sleep, or in the gesture of a moment, or in a certain angle of light which may or may not be witnessed.

He inhabits a beauty so fragile, so fine it must be what angels look like when they take on body.

artist: Dan Martelock
Baseball, Acrylic on Canvas, 2007
writers ranging in age from about 6 to 19. I was an active member from ages 13 to 19, and I had about 100 publications with them during that time. Former members from the same time include Leona Gom and Judith Krause, among others.

I read constantly and indiscriminately, but very little was literary. What literary fiction or poetry I read was in school or by accident. Access to books was limited because the libraries in small country schools had few books and there was no public library. I didn’t learn much in the way of discrimination until university. I read “Tarzan” books and Zane Gray as well as classics. I encountered most of the classics in the classroom or else through Classics Illustrated, which provided my introduction to books like David Copperfield and Tom Sawyer.

As to poetry, I had access to school textbooks and little else. I read the textbooks cover to cover. I loved Shakespeare from the moment I encountered his writing, but I never admitted it until I moved away from the small town. Nobody there would admit to liking Shakespeare any more than they would admit to liking classical music. Most of the poetry in the school texts was rhyming poetry, most of it the classics. I wrote in rhyme for the first several years.

rm: Being from rural Manitoba, where did you end up going to University? And looking back on it now, how do you think growing up in rural Manitoba ended up affecting your writing, and affecting how/what you write?

ALD: I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Winnipeg, the downtown university. I chose it because it’s smaller than the University of Manitoba and quite simply because I knew where it was—right next to the bus depot. I did my graduate degrees in Ottawa, my M.A. at Carleton, and my Ph.D. at the University of Ottawa. I’m no longer sure why I chose Ottawa, except that it’s a comparatively small city and it’s not in western Canada. I felt a need for some distance from my family, and I have family in all four western provinces. I needed to know I could get along on my own.

Your other question is much harder to answer. The Manitoba landscape is the landscape of my psyche. Growing up rural shaped me so thoroughly that I can’t begin to define its impact on my life or my poetry. The rural background keeps coming up in the subject matter of my poetry, and even when it’s not explicitly there, it’s an underlying factor. It’s shaped my attitudes to almost everything in my life, including the very emphatic knowledge that I am an urban person by temperament. I didn’t know that so clearly if I hadn’t grown up in the country. This is not to say that I see the rural background as a negative. I’m very glad to have grown up in the country. But I never want to live there again (though, as the cliché goes, it’s a great place to visit).
rm: What time period would this have been? And how and when did you start sending poems to magazines, and who were you reading at the time? And how did you get a chapbook out with a relatively-new Turnstone Press in the late 1970s?

ALD: I first submitted poems to the University of Winnipeg annual literary publication, *Mandala*, in 1971, encouraged by my first-year English professor, to whom I had been showing poetry for a couple of years. I submitted to an anthology published by the Manitoba Dept. of Tourism, encouraged by another professor. I submitted to *Pierian Spring* at Brandon University, which had an ad in the Winnipeg papers. Dennis Cooley of Turnstone saw the poems published in two issues of *Pierian Spring* in 1976 and 1977. Turnstone Press was just starting up, and they were looking for Manitoba poets. Cooley contacted me and asked me to submit a manuscript. I gave him about 100 poems, from which he made the selection of 24 poems in the chapbook they eventually published in 1979, *This Body That I Live In*.

I started sending poetry to magazines semi-regularly after that. At first, it was usually at the recommendation of a friend or acquaintance—somebody who knew somebody who knew Livesay when she started *Contemporary Verse 2* at the University of Manitoba, for instance. It became more systematic at the end of the 70s.

My memories of who I was reading are fragmentary. There were the poets I studied at university. I remember that I liked Yeats, cummings, Millay. Sometime around then, I started borrowing poetry anthologies from the public library and discovered Australian poet Judith Wright, who became a favourite, so that when I found a collection of her poetry at a book sale in the late 70s, I felt I'd found a treasure.

I was also reading Canadian poets—Leonard Cohen, Dorothy Livesay. This was when I discovered some of the Canadian poets who remain my favourites—Lorna Crozier, Patrick Friesen, Patrick Lane. Turnstone published Friesen's first book in 1976, and I liked it enough that I watched for his books from then on. I was buying a few anthologies, and when I look through them now, I'm reminded (by little check marks) that I liked some poets then that I rediscovered later, like Denise Levertov, Anne Sexton, Anthony Hecht among the Americans. In the Canadian anthologies, E.J. Pratt, Alden Nowlan, Earle Birney, Dennis Lee, Raymond Souster, and a few Quebecois poets—Gilles Vigneault, Saint-Denys Garneau, Anne Hebert. I was reading a lot of varied poetry, and I was reading indiscriminately, figuring out what I liked.

Though all this may make it sound as if I was reading only the authorized canon, I was also reading my contemporaries from the time I joined the YC Club—first in the Club itself and then through anthologies like *Storm Warning I and II*, edited by Al Purdy and through various literary magazines over the years.

rm: Would there be anyone during that period whose work really did impact upon your own, whether in the short term or the long? And through all of this, there was a long period between your first chapbook and your first trade collection; you certainly have never seemed the sort of writer in any particular kind of hurry. Is this through circumstance, accident or something more deliberate? How fast or slow does a poem come?

ALD: I'm going to take "this period" to mean the time between my first chapbook and my first trade collection.

Yeats and Cohen had an impact on my poetry, though I can't pinpoint how. Later, Gerard Manley Hopkins, on whom I wrote my doctoral dissertation. I spent five years immersed in his writing, so I don't think I can escape some influence, though again I can't identify specifics. I never tried to imitate other poets, though I did try to learn from them, more in a general way than in specifics. If I was really taken with someone's poetry, I hoped and tried to achieve the same impact in my own poetry, though not necessarily in the same way they did.

There were other poets in whose work I was immersed either through studying them or through teaching them. Some of these no doubt had some influence, especially T.S. Eliot and Emily Dickinson. There were also prose influences: the Bible, specifically the King James and the Revised Standard versions; the Book of Common Prayer; mysteries, especially St. John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich. Over one summer, everything I wrote was imbued with St. John of the Cross, though it was more in the feel than in technique or even content, and it wasn't necessarily anything others could identify.

I loved (and love) the prose of the 17th Century: John Donne's *Devotions*, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Other prose writers have also had an impact either because of their style or because of the world they create in their writing: Patrick White (Australian fiction writer), Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor, Salman Rushdie, May Sarton (her journals more than her poetry), Chaim Potok, Doris Lessing, Margaret Laurence, Mark Helprin, Michael Ondaatje (in his case, both prose and poetry), Keri Hulme, Jane Urquhart, Louise Erdrich, Tim Winton.

Influence is not something I can easily identify (as you can tell).

As to your second question, about the long time between *This Body* and *Sleep*, I've never been any good at the business of poetry. I like being published, yes, but the work of it defeats me again and again. I'm also very ambivalent about attention. That comes partly from temperament (introversion, sometimes verging on reclusiveness), partly from experience. I grew up wanting to be invisible because attention was more likely to be negative than positive—school bullies, ostracism in the town we moved to when I was six. I never recovered from that move.
I've also had dry periods, notably during the three years I was writing my dissertation. I completed only one poem in that time. And I've had periods when I wrote very little because I was too busy with other things.

I didn't try to publish with any consistency until the late 80s, and that was because university professors are required to publish, usually scholarly books and articles. The two colleges in Alberta where I taught from 1988-1998 accepted poetry as legitimate publication, so there was actual pressure to publish. Without that, I doubt that Sleep would ever have happened.

When I stopped teaching, I stopped trying to publish for a few years as well. I wasn't crazy about most of what I was writing, and I needed a break to reconsider and just get away from the pressure. I began publishing again about 3 years ago. I reread Sleep and realized that it was no longer representative of what I was writing. I didn't want it to be my last word, and that gave me the incentive to take up that reread and just get away from the pressure. I began publishing again about 3 years ago. I didn't want it to be my last word, and that gave me the incentive to take up that business I dislike so very much—getting the stuff out there.

(By the way, you really helped with that by inviting me again and again to submit business I dislike so very much—getting the stuff out there.)

It usually takes me a long time to finish a poem to my satisfaction, sometimes years. My draft folder still has poems I began over 10 years ago. I get more demanding of myself all the time. Most years, I have maybe 2 or 3 poems I'm really happy with.

rm: You mentioned a series of religious and mystic texts. How has spirituality and/or mysticism affected your writing, or are you taking them simply as texts?

ALD: I'll answer the last part of your question first. I'm not sure what you mean by “simply as texts.” If you mean, do I see the Bible as the word of God to be taken literally, no. The Bible has a different status from most texts in my life because I read it every day for over 20 years. I read it cover to cover several times. A text you read in that way and which you hear discussed and explained over and over becomes a part of your thinking the way most texts don't. Sometimes I use a biblical phrase or allusion without even realizing it. For instance, the title of my poem "A perfect hatred" (from Sleep, Decalogue, Chaudiere Books.)

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The Book of Common Prayer is similar and different. It's part of a liturgy in which I took part every week and sometimes more often, again for years, a liturgy very much like the Catholic liturgy I grew up with. That too is part of my psyche in a way most texts aren't.

The simple answer is that my English language skills far exceed my French language skills. I spoke French first, but from the time I started school, I lived in an English-dominated world, even in Lorette, which is a Franco-Manitoban village. By the time I was 10, English was the language of choice in my family, and most of my relatives don't speak French at all any more.

I've made an effort to keep and improve my French because I love the language and I think it's valuable to have two languages. Even in Ottawa, I speak French mostly at work. Most of my friends speak French as a second language, if at all.

rm: If you have two languages, why do you focus your attention on writing in English? Or do you?

ALD: The simple answer is that my English language skills far exceed my French language skills. I spoke French first, but from the time I started school, I lived in an English-dominated world, even in Lorette, which is a Franco-Manitoban village. By the time I was 10, English was the language of choice in my family, and most of my relatives don't speak French at all any more.

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rm: What originally brought you to Ottawa, and how has the city altered your consideration of writing?

ALD: I was accepted in the Master's program in English at four different Ontario universities. I chose Carleton, though I don't remember why. I remember only that when I left Winnipeg I wanted to move east, not west.

If the city has altered my consideration of my writing, it's circumstantial rather than anything specific about the city. When This Body finally came out, well over a year later than originally projected, I had been living in Ottawa for about two months. That wasn't long enough to have a community of any kind with whom to celebrate. So I took the book around to my professors at Carleton. Christopher Levenson organized a reading and CKCU interviewed me, as did another radio station. Carleton invited me to do a couple of other readings over the years. What Ottawa did is bring me my first visibility as a poet.

In that sense, those books are not texts with the same status as most texts, but they still affect me as poetry because of the very poetic rhythm of the language.

Spirituality has always been central to my life, though the expression of that spirituality has changed (and changes) over time. A fair proportion of my poetry from 1970 to 2000 has overtly spiritual content. What I write now generally doesn't, but that just means that the way I live my spirituality has changed.

Mystical literature appeals to me because it's like poetry in attempting to express what is essentially inexpressible. Growing up with two languages made me aware of the limitations of language. It fascinated me from a very young age that some things can be said in French and not in English, or vice versa. No language is able to express all human experience. Poetry is one way of capturing what falls between the words. Mysticism attempts to do the same thing with spiritual experience.

rm: If you have two languages, why do you focus your attention on writing in English? Or do you?
Moving to a new city also made me realize the importance of context in a poem, ie the importance of providing enough grounding details for the reader not to be reading in a vacuum (if you know what I mean). I see that as an important step in my maturing process as a poet, but it would have happened in any new city.

**rm:** After all that time had passed since your first chapbook appeared, how did your first trade collection finally coming out change your consideration of what you were doing with your writing?

**ALD:** The manuscript I originally sent to Harbinger was very disorganized, very messy, and much too long. Harbinger asked me to cut it to about half the length, and then they completely reorganized the sequencing of the poems. I made very few changes to what they suggested because I really had no idea how to organize a book. I don't write books. I write individual poems, so the task of putting them into a collection that makes some sense is a daunting one. I was grateful to Harbinger for doing that for me.

That they did it, though, and not me, means that I had no real sense of the book as a whole unit until it came out, and I read it straight through, cover to cover. I realized then that it is a very introspective book, as well as, in some ways, quite dark. I have always written some poems that were not so introspective, but after *Sleep*, I became much more interested in finding accurate words for the details of the world around me than in pursuing metaphors for aspects of the world inside me.

Changes in my personal life contributed to changes in the writing. *Sleep* came out in 1997. In 1998, I lost my teaching position at Augustana University College in Camrose through budget cuts. I needed a break from teaching and from writing poetry. I never stopped writing entirely, but I wrote less and I thought about it more. I had been teaching Creative Writing every year and doing all the assignments with the students. I was always thinking about how to teach some aspect or other of poetry. I needed to spend time thinking about what I really wanted to be writing as opposed to writing to assignment.

I moved back to Edmonton (joyfully! Camrose confirmed me in my love of urban life, as opposed to life in smaller centres). That move made a difference too because I looked at the city differently after living in a smaller place. I saw it more intensely, and I tried to get some of that into my poetry. Within a few months of leaving Camrose, I was working for the government, and in 1999, I moved back to Ottawa, where I had lived from 1979-1988.

**rm:** Do you think your first collection would have been a different book had you gone through the order as opposed to your publisher? What did it teach you about approaching your second manuscript? Also, how does your second poetry collection feel different than your first? What does it mean for you to have a second book out?

**ALD:** Yes, my first collection would have been different, but I don't know how, and I doubt that it would have been better. My sharpest memory from putting the manuscript together is of despair at finding any organizing principle, so I was very grateful to Harbinger (meaning Nadine McInnis, who edited the book) for doing that for me.

I'm not sure the first collection taught me much about approaching the second one, except that it was necessary, or at least desirable, to find some organizing principle. (Ted Blodgett once said that his poems in *Apostrophe II* were in the order in which they were written, and that stays with me as a valid organizing principle.) I approached *Old Winter* with a clearer mind, perhaps, but that has as much to do with the 10-year interval as with *Sleep*. I was/am much happier generally, much more at peace with myself and the world, and I had a clearer sense of what I wanted my poetry to do. Much of *Sleep* was therapeutic, and far darker than most of what I've written since. I didn't want it to be my last word. That as much as anything lies behind *Old Winter*.

*Old Winter* feels to me much more positive than *Sleep*. I see it as a celebration of the ordinary. To some degree, it's a conscious response to all the threats we hear about in the news every day: terrorism, the next pandemic, global warming, etc. I've never felt capable of writing about anything that big. My response is to be more and more aware of ordinary things, to pay attention, to be glad. Though obviously not everything in *Old Winter* is positive or glad.

With *Old Winter* I also had much more say in the book itself than I had with *Sleep*. Your initial general comments on the manuscript and suggestions for change were very helpful. The revision of individual poems and of the collection as a whole—in the light of your suggestions—was fun. The sequencing is entirely mine. That's not saying it's good, but I feel a much greater sense of ownership of this book than I did of *Sleep*.

What does it mean to me to have a second book out? First, that *Sleep* is not my last word. Second, now I can relax for another ten years.
artist: Christina Riley
Coney, Taken: Coney Island, New York, 2007

artist: Christina Riley
Untitled, Taken: Nova Scotia, 2007
Rob Manery

A HOLE IN MY THINKING

persists as only it is
whispered in its perceiver
listen, this is only a supposition
an insisted instinct
no not not
as you say
in the sink
down the hole
bunged but good
I grasp the wrench
as tight as the next guy
but living off someone
living off me
well it's a bit like
sticking your finger
in the dyke or
holding a mouthful of
ocean in the wake of
a WTO motion
I'm all
choked up.

BE LABOR ANY

(for Robyn Laba)

any banal labor
born nor bray
a barbed yarn
narry a boor
nor a roar
any boon
all arbor, no
nor by a loan
an oral balloon
or barred array

FORCED LABOUR’S RUINS

forced labour’s ruins
insistent lesson
scorned nor lost
our lessened fervor
our sisters rue
the ardent orations
of hope-swept
maneuvers mouth
the method-ruse

MY ERRANT ROBE

Errant tremor
bore treatment
nor turn to
name yet narry
a monied bore
not bore nor bone
on bone an error
a remnant
to retreat
yet obey
a tart manner
not mane nor mean
to barter an earned
abatement
ANTICIPATION CANNOT BE INSIGNIFICANT

it is only
as it is
insofar as it
has been it
is no longer
is it

not that it is
the mere is nothing
is the question is
can it be left
suspended
as it is certain
as such things
are

are we forced to rest
with assumption?
Karen Massey

REACH

I’m almost afraid to look, 
see what happens when you reach, 
peel back a corner of the sky

perhaps a cloud will pull away 
so you can wring it out over your garden 
or a little breeze will puff out—
or fire a gust of starlight, its music alive and completely available 
or is death always back there, waiting, 
radioactive under cover of night and the glistening of—

so full of its rare, strange beauty 
there’s no room for anything but absence 
and the brittle husk of love 
gone now, what once bloomed

CREASE

tonight, the night is so small 
you can fold it into quarters 
and tuck it in your pocket

of course, in the morning 
your pocket will be empty 
and the fabric will be shot through, 
burnt by starlight and the power 
of dreams, of the undreamt

you will remember the folding, 
creasing it smooth, 
running a damp fingertip along the edge

Night Kitchen, 
or Nocturne for One Who is Gone

In your night kitchen 
light reflects from heat-hued walls 
rich in tone and warmth;
they cradle your body, the onlooker’s eye, 
though you are oblivious, looking down to your hands 
busy at something, thinking, off-thoughts glinting off 
to something your spirit values

All of these years later, I imagine you 
peeling a ripe pear into a hand-thrown bowl, 
the sweetness slow-dripping, licking down your palm 
as you work the expert blade, as if by rote; 
fluid, in one soft motion honed by years of cutting fruit

while insects dazzle in undisclosed locales 
dash themselves against the window screen, 
craving release from their darkness

you can hear their song in my sigh, 
feel their shy sadness in mine

Reach

I’m almost afraid to look, 
see what happens when you reach, 
peel back a corner of the sky

perhaps a cloud will pull away 
so you can wring it out over your garden 
or a little breeze will puff out—
or fire a gust of starlight, its music alive and completely available 
or is death always back there, waiting, 
radioactive under cover of night and the glistening of—

so full of its rare, strange beauty 
there’s no room for anything but absence 
and the brittle husk of love 
gone now, what once bloomed
VIEW FROM RALPH'S DECK

Lake Louisa, PQ

It's just some sky, some trees,
dawn mist over morning water, broad vista too great for the sky
you need turn and turn your head to drink it in

such greenery, freshness, greenery, odd angle of tree against
every-coloured water stirred to deep reflection of
heron cutting low arc rising above flashing surface

and everything you cannot see:
great wedge of awe that swings down with a crack,
splinters through sunlight and that clear wide-open cedarscent
that is the fir-pillared universe of
out-of-doors

everything you cannot have described to you to understand
but must have once witnessed in yourself

that solitude, that humility before nature

just some craggy rock left behind by glaciers
slow-sliding into deep clean water
far off from any shadow of its destructive power

and the beauty that is the simultaneity
Seymour Mayne

AS GOOD

As
good
as
one's
word—
take
the
birds
right
out
of
the
Muse's
mouth!

STREET

Heard
the
bird
spread
the
word
in
whistling
chirp
up
and
down
the
street.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

Birds
can
not
live
by
bread
alone;
they
need
seeds,
flies,
mites
and
grubs.

COMMENTARY

Bird
song
can
also
accompany
a
gob
of
droppings
underlining
the
devil-may-care
avian
commentary.
Marcus McCann

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, USING THE TWELVE-TONE METHOD

Johnny’s jabby gabber (in the language of liquor: licorice. Enjoy its ish-ness), the exstasis of estrus,

(did you say ish-nish? what does that mean?)
idiot, would you read a book with this discription? [sic]

A cocksure gawker, mmm, dance, perineum, h estitation, joni saying she’ll be in the bar.

Christmas, the coldest book, the spit-shined clock
(on another octave, the crux)

or another way to say vigil, using
a canary corpse, ear studs, an Octoberman pincer.

FOOTMAN, BRIDEGROOM

on the opening of the Somerset footbridge

Chaste tale:
ever laid a brick.
Made up hums,
darned ho hymns.

Weighted.

Night turned zero.
Winded foot
-man bridge
-groom, buzzy
lyre, a horseyly

of a horse (loved
blood, hubbub, self
expressed) crocheted
winterthin
-gs, show- and home-y.

Grabbed a cap,
a pack. C
-amped, dugwood,
listened for change.
Tapped in. Tr

-aced it.

Bagged freight,
frittered it, bagged
off. Tailed the canal
to the otherlode.

Tugged his collar, c
-overt, operative,
played sour doctor
-pus, conned us,
bakesold railmix,
ALEXIAL

for the photographer Alex Eady

, meaning wordblind, meaning
unhooked from sense. Had I meant
untethered or

unhatched when I said thatched chest?
is a puzzle that doesn't absorb
a picture taker.

Tempted to say
while this is a zippering,
a hiss as dour as clouding,
his is snaps.

How would he say you
got your period—
would I hope myself
dashing

as leverage, no, deverage?

To call a print
interrogative, let alone declarative,

let alone imperative—well

(Can I ask what makes
apt
portraiture, or is it
a trap, shark-tipped?

He'd be
bratty
to suggest aperture.)

a photo goes on
a long time, if flatly.

PATTERNS

a poem to be read on the CBC

The way you spiral off (cell phone, phonebook, book-
-length, lengthwise, wise men)
depends on how you react to the story where she
bit someone, was thrown out of the hotel, got took away in a cop car.


It's no accident afghans have
patterns. In porn: divestiture,
blow jobs in sequence, union.
The fairer cums
while getting fucked, the bigger pulls out
and cums on his chest or face.


Hedged if he said it was
too hot or rotten;
a game we won
by making Mr Clark blush.


Repeated himself a million times
an ounce. That he asked to wear
a hockey helmet bounced

notions of pattern to theme: basketballs.

A hockey helmet bounced.
An ounce that he asked to wear
repeated himself a million times.
BEAT THE VIAL TILL IT BREAKS DO US BARTER

a disintegrating multiple choice marriage vow

a. Nutty-eyed dodge a quarter coon. The lunge and quick a Jessica to. If to stitch a fish quilt the weather. To skip pages to jump several stories. With a pipe slow mo blood piston kits and matrix. And stool joust wallop leap. Picture tut tut tut of hanging nail wall the sweets. No exegetical.

b. And the marriage talk extremely a convalescent home. Him tired of the laying lime. Kabuki banana sauce to spliff and splice compliant k. A bored mirror of. Rid the what the work. To the tee to settle, earn. Polish. Check. Any the romance of decided already.

c. There's that that gives a cause a camera. Ex snip a Kodak coda twice fade. With a cough a flower derangement. To lay out the three dollar bills the bone china to collect the. And has a fear from abroad a posted crock pot. Having sallied the loopy pen a masterful say or typing.

d. Wet heart psychotically typical unwind. A basket of barbecue cherries a mental trick a. Railroad mouthed the clutch of sidewalk bicycle horn to go to get. Pick from the weaving the weeping celery. Princess Diana my grandfather your cousin's clip and kept. Built a bypass had a bypass done.

e. Beat the vial till it breaks do us barter. Nubbed up. The hull in fat panels apart to hurtle forward till. Onto a turtle a crocodile skip. An Alka-Seltzer in wine. Or an idea scarf trick less the shamed magician misses. The mark cowing he misses the mark if he misses.

NORMAL

(Begin with description forty marks)

Floating Aloha Ken's blouses over a plastic crucifix choker. L'Orealed. Yeah, queeny, and aging irregularly. Face like a dish rack – unevenly tinted, rubbery. Man-made fibre pants bracing dropped convexes. The thin sign of a sling panty line. A snow globe snowman in a squeeze box. Like a feeble portion leaning on presentation. But not at all a feeble portion, he'd drank every cocktail to the coaster, put his tongue in every ass east of Brockville, a tongue that'd grind the edge off a rat bone. Dodged a Puritan regiment and axing bread. Andre was bored before

(Move to anecdote twenty marks)

I hit the waist, bent his head to the table, listening for better banter, as if the mod table's metal spokes picked up CBC, and looked into his glassy gingham. I thought the sex'd get him. The miscalculation put me off kilter, and I blundered into some political doggerel, hoping to bolt the conversation onto something salvageable

(Incorporate abstractions, preferably obliquely (or at least in italics) twenty marks.)

with don't confuse “we should be treated the same” with “we are the same” or the master’s tools will never dismantle the master's house but Andre had his own designs
(Slightly subvert text to avoid guilt of previous declaratives ten marks)

    on frivolity—as-escape—houndstooth?—a healthy cream
    for creamy skin and he screwed up his peachy face
    at my contentedness with this picture of a possible outcome.

I said swell. He said swollen. I pulled the what
    -are-you-afraid-of card from the polemical
    tarot. He said cheque please. He said

(Sum up, ambiguously
    ten marks)

    Did you know John Ashbery was a government-registered homosexual? (He never said this last. Will one
day a man ask me this?)
Christian McPherson

MARK MY WORDS

scratch them with a penny
  on the cell wall
    of the broken dream prison

smudge them with lipstick
  on the bathroom mirror
    of the dead movie star

draw them with crayons
  on the sketchpad
    provided by the psychiatrist

paint them with blood
  on the inside
    of Egyptian tombs

carve them with the butterfly knife
  deep into the flesh
    of the lover's tree

tattoo them with the buzzing needle
  on the skin of the circus freak
    under the nomad big top

brand them with the rubber stamp
  on the cereal box
    of an instant life

vomit them with the orange finger
  alphagetti on the white bowl
    of the toilet

mark them with the quivering pen
  in the little black book
    you keep under your bed.

artist: Hayden Menzies
'spread the news' 30"x36" mixed media on canvas from the collection of Karen Ellison
Colin Morton

WE MADE A WRECK OF MACK THE KNIFE

On one of the most famous jazz recordings in history, a 1960 nightclub performance by Ella Fitzgerald in Berlin, someone in the audience asks Ella to sing a current hit parade tune, “Mack the Knife.” The Kurt Weill song isn’t in Ella’s playbook, but she knows the first verse, and the quartet behind her is really in the groove. Although she forgets the rest of the words, Ella ad libs four more verses, swinging it loose, and the intimate audience swings with her. Ella’s groping for words and the band’s improvising the tune and arrangement on the spot, moment by moment, are what make the recording so great. It’s when the musicians break away from the familiar, when they’re out there surviving on their wits that they really cook, charged with danger and adrenalin.

Mack’s what they call the teenaged graffiti artist, commissioned to paint murals on the walls of deserted warehouses in his neighborhood, who says he’d be dead or in jail like his friends by now if not for the shard of glass that blinded him in one eye when he crashed the only car he ever stole. That ended his life of crime right quick. “The spray can’s the only piece I carry,” he proudly says, as he tags his latest wall.

“Bobby Darrin has a hit now,” Ella wails. “We tried to sing it. We made a wreck of Mack the Knife.”

INVITATION À VOYAGE

And the lady returned to her husband’s chamber saying We’re not safe here.

He only wanted me and now he knows he can’t have me let’s take French leave.

That’s how the old stories begin — in mid-thread, with a teaser of intrigue. Later the sword will split the stone, we’ll dispose of the Puce Knight, the whole dramatis personae — directly or by indirection, that’s what we’re about to find out — but hang on, soie calme.

Let the gaze linger awhile longer on the figure of the Lady, silvery in the moonlight but flushed with indignation.

The end will be bloody and soon enough.

Why rush to judgment day?
All but one knight will fail we know from the start and only in dreams do you go adventuring a year and a day and return to the home you left.
Pearl Pirie

WALK OUT WHERE WE CAN TALK

there are birdies to overhear
animals have too many survival concerns
to care about our palate slaps

the ice melts upward
sharp condensed shelf
thins the ceiling of voles
it becomes a ballroom coffered
over the brunette sop of grass

EVERY SENTENCE IS WETTER SNOW GRAVITY

cracks cave in with our missteps
clod hands innocented "a joke"
each shrugs back into fur-backed
cloth, silence

the black of earth with its drain holes
of last year’s groundhog village exhales
what heat it can, gives itself
more airspace

see horizon lower itself
past treeline smudges, inheritable houses
we talk around, a shallow gradient of hill
obscures the far

a split log footbridge over pastures
one of us, second of us (could be either
first) makes a Billy Goat gruff
snort of fog. by our stiff age we admit
neither of us are trolls anymore
maybe even never were.

But Jacob to Esau, “No, please -- do me a favor,
take this gift because seeing your face
is like seeing the face of God.”

Disconsolate clammy foot trek
words and settlement fallow,
arms hold each own torso.
no exchange, no gift, this.
AGAIN MAKES SAME ROUNDS

dawn, snakeskin snagged
in baseboards, nailheads wink
under bold paint

hold the buddy-gambit
of penny. stop flipping it
to thought audit.

1 p.m: did he hurt himself
when he fell off her face
off earth’s smile.

party him new
move each am ful
cradled

show of under
  expialadocious
whereby disnumber time

before sorry er
don’t can’t
  words dry sunshine

FURNIVALL, F.J.

for the philologist, one of the founders of OED

a fluvial funfair, rainrun,

naïf luv
frail ulna ruin
in a jiff

anil vair
ruffian
infall luff

full lunar flair
fuji flan all air
liar fall

viral flu

final nail
ill jarful,
an anvil urinal
FLASHERS

…a bleak wasted place./And a lake below my knees...Bridges of iron lace./A suddenness of trees...I wake in every nerve
Theodore Roethke, Night Journey

a boy blurts: grizzly forest!
teacher told me bears live –

after side of tree tunnels
the watershed, a sun preserve

mister, do you have a cat?
Is yours black? Does your cat have a name –

ears pingpong
noise has child curves

one never need explain: look,
he’s got an average nose.

adults only look less excitable
perm lady is jittery for smokes

elm branches are echoed
in veins through sun and lids.

lips rest against fist but no kiss
pensive in mobile hotel room

used to green then spring washout cuts
easement’s muddy gully thru grass

smaller rain slashes the glass
for no visible gain

muscles: one momentum with steel
I forget either is underneath

drowsing vibrations coddle
heavy with hum

artist: Rebecca Mason
Sounding, 8" x 8", watercolour
www.redcanoes.ca
Craig Poile

WHEN WE SAY

Say green, meaning grass, tending to
a gist that thrives to exclusion:
age-old fresh patch slides under sneakers,
the reach of imagined fairway.

But at grass level, little land of grass,
more likely things are spotty, or blackened,
or watery with shine: stopped short or frayed
from holding out, the delicate ribbing gone dun.

Hear the whispers crowding when you say green:
The fielding of the ground you walk on.

YOUTH

The last time I ever, or remember I ever
Sat drinking the whole afternoon
Was in a Montreal bar, settled over
A red-and-white cloth ringed with stains,

Giving face to arguments induced by
Low wattage, no service, and bottled draft.
My friend had brought me there mostly
For the privilege of saying we’d been.

Him I most remember dancing in the yard
With flowers, like a rock star he’d read about.
He was mutinous and dreamy, had
A mild fixation with the female anus.

As chat turned to the sexual, the tone
Wound up, got self-conscious, tense.
The summer’s doings still made a hot topic
Thanks to one blistering night in a tent.

The beer was good (the brand, I think, Black Label),
My helpings neatly fitting one or more of
The myriad tabletop ´O´s: So many
Glasses filled, that wasted afternoon.
ROOM FOR MORE

A second child adds nothing new
To days spent wiping at crusted glue
And glitter, to sorting, hanging to be dried
What’s pulled from the hamper’s high tide.

A second child, like a life past halfway,
Spare the heat of high hopes, gratifies delay.
Spooning out to the first, number two heard
Thudding on your lap, you talk of a third.
Peter Richardson

RUE WISEMAN

Like a Chinese box whose lever has been found under a sliding section of lacquered wood, you go from lying beside me on your back to curling with your back towards me.

A figure has been arrived at that exceeds expenses and output. Production is unhappy and will soon be calling back its salesmen from the silk-curtained suites of jade merchants.

BREAKAGE

Whenever I find myself coasting down train trestles specially modified for metal treads or tires, I always pull a steam whistle to warn of my juggernaut passage through a sleepy village or mining camp.

Sometimes my drilling foreman waves a torch and screeches: “Whoa, don’t shift down now!” as I go chuffing by him into the middle of a frozen swamp which would be fine if an angry mob from a nearby bunkhouse wasn’t approaching.

Either that or the dream cancels out with me waking up panting but otherwise relieved as my half-track with bald front tires careens off a precipice—its final ka-boom muffled by ten feet of snow and the snapping trusses of cottage roofs.

TEN TERCETS FOR LINKED HORDS

“I’d almost rather have horns,” she says in the dark bedroom, rubbing her head against mine.

“There would be that hawling call from the rest of the herd hailing us from a stonewall.

With just the right pressure we could lessen the itching brought on by all the flies.”

“Mud would help that too,” I say as I lower my head to the specter of bluebottles forming a cloud around us and run my furrowed brow along the length of her ribs.

I’m willing to consider this anatomical alteration: horns to graze against doorways in the wee hours when I teeter to the bathroom or hobble downstairs at 3 AM. Let her rub her forehead against me. We’ll be two head of cattle sashaying down a fence line, a day’s batch of roughage awaiting our grinding teeth, companionability present in a series of clicks—the rub of her hard flat forehead against my mud-flecked ribs.
KITCHEN SONG

(After an oral description of itinerant butchers from the Po river valley.)

Grab your biggest pot,
set up the tripod,
throw in an onion,
the noccini are coming.

Invite your uncles,
lug out an accordian,
pass the sweetbreads,
the noccini are coming.

On the rickety bicycles,
in the dead of winter
with their black capes
over the white fields,

the noccini are pedalling
from Parma this morning.
Go out and meet them.
Set out the meat hooks.

The old sow can smell them,
can sniff out the lung blade
before they approach her
in the muddy paddock.

Let's not have a replay
of last year's fiasco
when one boar bolted
and trampled Pietro.

Go wake up Granpa,
who still misses opera.
Set him up in the parlor
with grappa and a victrola.

The noccini are coming
with their cleavers and dirks
and abattoir savoir-faire
in the blade-wielding wind.

artist: Jennifer Kwong
Untitled Illustration, 2007
Brockwell: That's an interesting answer. It suggests that poetry was drawn out, if I may say that, by your cultural milieu, not by the landscape. That shouldn't be surprising. But I think many Canadian readers have grown up with a tradition of poetry rooted in physical, not human geography. The bucolic lyrics of Lampman and the landscapes of early prairie poetry intersect with a tradition that goes back further than Theocritus.

You've traveled widely and taught English in Korea. How has travel impacted or influenced your work?

O'Meara: Environment and people are a canvass on which your own personal obsessions appear, perhaps. So in that regard, home and travel are very important and have an impact. But I've never travelled to generate material, though there are several poems situated in foreign landscapes, in my previous and upcoming books. Travel is a particular psychological locus in itself, and I imagine it has teased out some concerns of mine because of that. Actually, I've recognized that I have many poems set in taxis, airports, on buses and trains. I wonder if I'm interested in being between places, or should I say Being between places, unplaced, as it were, as emotional/psychological crisis. Our identities and relationships are challenged, often subtly, between destinations, just as much as the foreignness of other cultures challenges us. I'm particularly attracted to situations where we are forced to look inward, and investigate our lives. Places where our normal props of distraction have been disturbed. Jose Ortega y Gasset once wrote that he was only interested in the thoughts of the shipwrecked, since their thoughts were essential thoughts. They have lost everything and must rebuild. Ontologically, this reconstruction is through meditation. “Meditation,” he wrote, “is the mechanism by which we abandon the surfaces, as if they were shores of the mainland, with a feeling of being thrust into a more tenuous element in which there are no material supports.” That more tenuous element is what I've always been interested in. It's particularly in the wasteland scenarios of the Desert Sonnets, or the historical Magellan and Darwin poems of my first book, or “The War Against Television.” And it appears, I suppose, in more subtle forms in the recent travel poems, whether Canadian or elsewhere.

I'm thinking also of a more domestic travel poem, like “From a Dawn Taxi,” from my book “The Vicinity.” Here we have the speaker caught momentarily in a non-place, literally between two days. I like that the cab driver is inside the next day already, while the speaker is still back in the night before. Surrounded by the news on the short-wave radio, he is preparing to enter history once again, though reluctantly. I'm happy I found the image, “the car slips through amber,” which suggests both the yellow traffic light, and the resin he's not yet been fossilized in. But I need to be clear that I don't set out to write toward themes. I'm trying to capture experience in the best language I can. Only afterwards, my own particular obsessions form a continuum.

Brockwell: Dave, I'd like to begin by asking the age-old question of poetic origins. You grew up in Pembroke. A handful of the poems in your first book, Storm Still, have a peculiar Canadian perspective on the land (“Field Crossing” for example, recalls Lampman's sonnet “In November”). Can you talk about how the people from and the place where you were raised helped shape your desire to write?

O’Meara: Not to sound all mystical, but I think some of that desire is a product of fate. You pick up a book, you look at a painting, you overhear a comment, and something in one of those experiences points us toward the urge and medium that seems a workable method for articulating ourselves. I always seemed to have some creative urge. At an early age it was manifested in drawing, which I did a lot of. There was also theatre for several years, and writing came into the equation somehow. But how or why it happened, I have no clue. I just know at some point I became fascinated with how a phrase works. I recall trawling very meticulously through a collection of famous quotations from speeches, and discovering something satisfying about how the words were arranged for the greatest effect. And there were rock lyrics too. And a school-enforced discovery of contemporary poets, like Purdy. And my friendship with Ken Babstock, which I can't say enough about.
Brockwell: I have two follow up questions, Dave. First, can you give me an idea of what you mean by “best language”? And can you comment on the importance of Western European form in your work. Let me give you a few examples that I found interesting. The poem “Powerboat” from your upcoming collection is written in terza-rima, evoking, perhaps, the near-purgatorial experience of the speaker. The couplets in both “Arriving Early” and “All-Inclusive” rhyme with inventive and surprising precision. Why fuss over such formal constraints?

O’Meara: I’m in the dark most of the time, and envy those writers who seem confident of one aesthetic or another. But I just don’t think there are any hard and fast rules. Colleridge famously defined poetry as “the best words in the best order,” and that still stands as possibly the most appropriate definition there is. This might not seem entirely illuminating, but it works for me because, when you get down to the nitty-gritty of writing poems, it’s the only way you can look at it. I’m interested in what is called literary decorum. Another word is appropriateness. Context is an important element. The idea goes back to Aristotle, Horace and Cicero. You must suit the language (or form) to the situation. You must find the most effective words to suit a mood or sentiment. This, when it works, is the result of a process of “search and find” that I don’t think you can really teach people. You can only point out when it isn’t working, and why. Tone and clarity. You have to mix the ingredients of your cocktail until it tastes good.

As far as Western Europe, and that formal tradition, I can say that it’s served as a model to the process of how a poem is built. As a means of investigation toward the most fitting phrase. I only mean that once you attempt to write a sestina, or a sonnet, it forces you to look at phrasing and the structure of a poem's argument in a new way. It informs you. Working with form eliminates the idea that a poem is an amorphous blur of emotional words strung together. Poetry is art. It stops and starts and moves forward with an intended affect. There are always methods of doing this better. I’m not a natural. I have to work hard. Which is why I continue to be interested in those constraints. That said, I’m non-partisan. There are lots of wonderful poets writing in only free verse. In editing some of the poems in my new book, I’m actually taking some rhymed ones and breaking the rhyme out of them. It's a process of trying to find the essential, direct voice.

Brockwell: Dave, do you think there are any risks in taking that high-road to the poetry hotel? Isn’t that kind of approach anachronistic in the waning days of the postmodern? What about models of literary production? What about reader-response theory? What about the arbitrary nature of signs? How can Horace still help us find a path to poetry?

O’Meara: Yesses and Nos and I-Don’t-Knows all round. Where to start. I don’t know if lyric poetry is necessarily the high-road; it's just one way of going. I stress that the good stuff IS as experimental as the self-styled “avant-garde.” You have to exercise an aggression towards language. You have to stretch forward, transgress the limits of your imagination, flex your voice, make awkward mistakes, and then pull back and ask questions about what worked, what didn’t, and why. Then start again. The best poets do that, without breaching the integrity of their own voice. What I mean by this last is that you have to remain honest, in my opinion, to your concerns. You have to write about what you care about. Any form of fabrication or pretension stinks on the page. When a poem's worked up to suit a theme, or a clever idea sans the author's real concern, it rings hollow to me. Whether it's lyrical poems on home life, love, or death, or if you are engaged in some theory-driven experiment. If you're just going through the motions, it will have no conviction behind it, and will stale very soon. As far as all that other stuff—all that Lacan, Kristeva and Derrida stuff—well, theory is interesting to read, it's contributed to how we see literature, as a thought process certainly, but when I'm writing a poem, at least the poem that I try to write, I can't be looking back over my shoulder and second-guessing whether the meaning I am generating is or isn't determinate. Otherwise, what am I doing? Getting nowhere, that's what. We have exhausted irony, I think, at least as the central tone of creative acts. For now, anyway. In the future, we'll have to be ironic in a different way. George Steiner has much to say on this subject, in probably my favourite book on theory and meaning: “Real Presences.” The argument is huge and can't possibly be paraphrased here, but he believes we must make what he calls “a wager on transcendence;” that against the indeterminate, the arbitrary nature of signs, “there is in the art-act and its reception…in the experience of meaningful form, a presumption of presence.” Each time we create, we are engaged in that wager. The sense that creation contributes to something outside of ourselves. We are wagering on what is called meaning. I imagine this idea is essential to where we go next, if we are to create engaging literature in the post-post-post-modern. But that's theory, and I'm writing lyric poetry. Theory-driven poetry lacks, almost always, what I think is essential to literature: an emotional risk. Anachronistic? Sure, okay. Other than that, I'm just interested in recording, in the best language I can summon and manipulate, the various events and obsessions of my own society, life and memory. Which is also, in the end, what Homer or Chaucer or Wordsworth or Bishop were doing. If I can at least claim similarity to them in only that one regard.

Brockwell: One of the things I found interesting about your new work is what I might call a refinement of perception. So that details, which were always important in your work, seem to have become even more important. When you’re in the process of composition, how does detail evolve into the poem? There are flashes of specific things, such as the dog in the yard in the power outage in Korea. These are not simply images, they are precisely detailed images. What's your mental process like when you think about those things; how do they make it to the page?
O’Meara: You’re trying to record experience. Whether you’re an experimental poet or a lyrical or narrative poet, your mind is working back through certain events and you’re choosing the details that pop up. And they are a way of moving the poem forward obviously. They’re guideposts that lead you through the narrative or non-narrative that you’re doing. And maybe they’re just successive images in a lyrical poem, or a series of events in a narrative poem. I think it’s part of the process of editing through your mind. You’re saying, “OK, I was at this certain place and there was a campfire going and there was a beach” and so you shuffle through those images and you think of which ones were the most present in the picture you have in your mind, but you’re also looking at those images for openings for metaphor and for structure. If you have an image that allows you to leap further into the poem, it’s another stepping stone as you’re working along. It’s a way of building the poem toward some sort of crux for that particular piece. I don’t know if I do it any differently than anyone else. I think everybody has their priorities about how they build those images. And I think it’s also very particular to the type of poem you’re writing. Within either different genres, or within a poet who writes a certain way.

Brockwell: I do think your work is quite different in this respect. The difficulty when you’re in some kind of cinéma vérité mode, which is a mode I think you’re in, is the need to avoid uncritical clichés of all kinds at every moment. If you’re going to deal with experience, authenticity has to be the prime directive; otherwise it’s going to come across phoney. I think that you’re not giving monophonic translations of experience. They move out, they open up rather than close down. You’re not simply taking an experience and making an allegory or ripping meaning out of it; you’re opening up the experience and making it more visible than it would otherwise have been if you were simply experiencing it. That’s one of the things about detail that I like. It gives a reader a sign posts, but because they are not the reader’s sign posts, they open up the reader’s experience to how experience itself is built up in the brain.

The idea of details opening up opportunities for structure is interesting. When you think about structure, what are the different ways you think about it? What kinds of structure do you think about when you’re working with a poem?

O’Meara: I think it depends on what kind of poem you’re writing. Often, you move forward into a poem. I think a lot of poets and short story writers have a method that starts with an idea for something, and you work with it for a while, and then you say, maybe ten lines in, “This is where the poem should start.” And then you backtrack, a two steps forward, two steps back sort of thing. Or you come across an image and you say, “this is the central image of the poem.” And that informs where you might start or end. Or you might realize that the first few lines are where the poem should end. So your mind is always leaping forward and jumping back while you’re working the lyrical or narrative poem you’re working on. You’re always assessing the importance of the images and the descriptions that you’re writing while you’re writing, and then when the poem is finished, every phrase, image and line changes in context to all the other phrases, images and lines, so you might need another re-write with that consideration in mind. Structure is very important to me, maybe even more important than formal methods. It’s the big formal method; the organizing principle. It’s like the architecture of a house. You can’t have the second floor of a house without having the first floor. You can’t introduce an image without thinking about how it will resonate, according to an echo earlier or later in the poem. Will this echo lessen the images impact? Considerations. The point is to be aware of those things. As a writer, I’m always looking for effect. You want the experience that you’re relating to the reader to affect them in some way. You can’t just be lazy about that. You have to decide how it leads toward and builds upon the drama of the piece.

I think formality can help some writers earlier on because they might be lacking in structure. Using formality makes you more aware of how a poem is organized. Like writing a pantoum, for example. It’s a very good tool. To think about repetition, accumulation, argument. At some point you may decide it doesn’t work for the poem, but it can be a tool to help you understand how a poem moves forward.

As I mentioned, there are poems in my new book that started out as very formal poems. Metrical rhymers. But, with the urging of my editor, I saw that in some cases the form was giving the pieces too much of a stiffness. So there are a few that I then worked hard at de-rhyming, de-stanza-ing, to sort of shuffle the artfulness out of them.

Brockwell: Another aspect of structure that I’ve liked in all of your books is a momentary or dominant apostrophic mode. You address the month of November in one of your recent poems. And I see that as a kind of structure too in the sense that it’s a way of structuring the conventions between the poem and the reader. The poem “Letter to Auden,” for example, is that address. It defines the stance between the two parties and sets up expectations about how the language and the voice will proceed. Have you thought about why you do that?

O’Meara: It has everything to do with the tone of the poem. That’s something that I really think about more and more. And it’s something that poets don’t talk about enough. They talk about form and imagery and metaphor and language, you know. But tone is such an important part of writing a poem. If you start off with the wrong tone, if it’s lacking decorum, really, then it will not succeed. If you’re writing a satirical poem, you have to adopt a certain tone. And in the same way, an elegiac poem has to have a certain tone. It’s a kind of constraint. I think some people would fight against that notion, that whole idea of literary decorum: suiting the poem to the subject matter. You see the opposite in slapstick comedy,
or Monty Python sketches. Lack of decorum is how comedy works, isn’t it? When the tone of the sketch does not match the subject matter. Like Christ’s birth in Life of Brian.

How you get the tone is trial and error in that regard. Certainly the Auden poem was very specifically an address. It was a version of “Letter to Lord Byron” and “New Year Letter.” I was playing with that. So I had to create a tone, of someone speaking personally, but to a public figure. The apostrophic mode underlies, or is a fundamental impulse of poetry, I think naturally. We address what is absent as a form of corrective. Because there is something important or troubling due to this absence.

The section of walking poems in my last book were very conscious attempts to write against narrative. To write more purely lyrical, a succession of images rather than events. I wanted to capture images and allow the process of walking and the various stimuli that you encounter on a stroll as a way of actually building the poem. That it’s purely meandering. As you go for a walk, you set out and you’re usually thinking about something—so there’s your continuum, there’s your organizing preoccupation through the meditative moment—and while you’re walking a dog runs past, or a car turns the corner, or you see a sign, or you walk by a café that you used to meet a now-absent friend at—and all these emotional and visual stimuli affect you. And I thought that was an interesting way to build a poem. To have an underlying emotion, but allow these other things to occur in the poem while the emotion was going on. The emotion doesn’t have to be stated—it just flavours the tone or the voice. In that way, it’s purely lyrical. There are no events happening in the direction of some ultimate event or a conclusion—no narrative; it’s really more about feeling.

Brockwell: Tone is incredibly interesting to me. There don’t seem to be too many poets in Canada for whom tone is a dominant aspect. I think it is for, say, David McGimpsey and Stuart Ross. In the U.S., Ashbery and Mark Strand have a strong emphasis on tone. Sometimes I find Ashbery exhausting. There are unnamable emotions that get indirect, intangible labels out of the process of reading the poem. It’s almost all pure tone. Not a lot really happens—it’s the attitude in the emotions that get indirect, intangible labels out of the process of reading the poem. It’s really all pure tone. Not a lot really happens—it’s the attitude in the emotions that nudge him around, carry him, lead him, and his love of language compels him to record it.

I think there are certainly Canadian poets who have a characteristic tone. I’m thinking of somebody like Karen Solie. Throughout her poems, there’s a prevailing tone that’s happening that’s very specific to her and very interesting. There’s a mix of aggression and fatalism in her work. It’s important to her work in a very essential way, I think.

Brockwell: I think the Karen Solie observation is really interesting. For some reason, maybe just because my ear is tuned more to some of these American writers, I didn’t pick up that tone in her work. I guess I was kind of stuck on the tone of irony and wit, so that when it’s a different kind of tone coming from a different kind of sensibility, maybe I don’t hear it. But those are absolutely the two words I would have used to describe her work.

O’Meara: In my own work, I don’t know if it’s a bit of a weakness. Because I’m so attracted to different kinds of writing, whether it’s formal or not, or elegiac or a bit more smart-alecky. I love all that stuff that’s done well. Because I’m attracted to various tones, I sometimes feel that my own collections are fragmented. These different tones appear. I hope that my voice comes through all those different tones in a singular way, but I’m aware of it. I’ll write a poem in rhyming tercets and the next page there’s a free verse piece. I sometimes worry that the collections themselves suffer from that because there are very different things happening in the same space. I don’t know. It’s a question. It’s always a question.

Brockwell: I think there’s definitely a singular voice there. Part of it is tone. But part of it is also what I might call receptivity. It’s having a kind of Keatsian negative capability somehow, you know, “When I see a sparrow, I peck about the gravel.” I think a lot of people like that aspect of your work. I can’t think of a single poem of yours that verges on overdetermining experience with meaning. It is the experience; it’s not a kind meaning-invested version of experience. It is really the experience.

O’Meara: The best kind of writing is that which presents images and experience in a very—not a reportage way—but just through observation. The reader can bring their own concerns into them. I think the only poem where it sounds like I’m getting preachy is likely the Auden poem but it’s in a satirical way. The
underlying voice in that poem is somebody who’s not that smart. Who’s a little bit of a loudmouth, a bit flippant. Perhaps the speaker is not up to the task. One of the lines is “these things we’ve thunk up since you died.”

Brockwell: The other singular aspect of what I hear in your work might be diction. For the most part, you’re balancing on this pendulum of decorum, and a local way of speaking. So there’s a voice there that actually has speech and the words that that voice chooses are, you know, definitely chosen for sound and everything like that, but no compromises are made to take it away from the patterns of normal speech. I don’t know if that’s a conscious thing that you work on or not.

O’Meara: O yeah, sure. Again, it’s a thing where I build up the language to a certain point and then I try to pull back. I am trying to keep to a natural voice. I want it to be readable. I’m a big fan of clarity. I do think that poetry has to be accessible. That doesn’t mean it has to be simplistic. It comes down to effect again. If you’re going to create an image, it will be most effective if the image makes sense.

Brockwell: So the penultimate question and I’ve hinted at it earlier. I think it’s an old question in a way, and I’m personally ambivalent about it. In the post-modern, in what people theorize about it, I’m always interested in how it is re-enacted in writing. I see liberating qualities in the destruction of certain ideas of authority, in questioning ideas of power, in moving away from pure narrative and going toward the way that narrative gets made. But you avoid it, as I see it, most of the time. Do you resist it? Is it not in your nature?

O’Meara: Why don’t I join a camp?

Brockwell: No, not to join a camp. I’m not trying to say that you resist experimentation. To me, it’s not limited to simple typographic conventions. A typographic convention in and of itself is not an experiment. People have used typographical convention for interesting experiments – Mounré does; Cooley does; b.p. Nichol certainly did; Charles Olson did – but it was seldom typographical experiment for interesting experiments – Mouré does; Cooley does; b.p. Nichol certainly did; Charles Olson did – but it was seldom typographical convention in and of itself. Core values or categories. You know when you’ve fucked up a sonnet. The rhymes are bad, there’s too many lines, the metre’s off, for example. In a recognizably experimental piece, there are less guidelines there to make critical judgements. Which is part of the argument of experimental writing, of course. How do you have a criteria? Is criteria itself a traditional idea? Do you need a criteria to know whether something is good or not? Many “experimentalists” would say that’s the point. But I think the answer to that last question is “yes.” I guess, for the most part, with my writing, I’m trying to enact something I would also want to read. It’s what attracts me, that’s all. It’s not a critical choice in the sense that this is what I want to do against that. It’s just the thing that I find most interesting about reading and writing.

Brockwell: Now, Harold Bloom – who may be unfashionable now, but I love his love of writing – has a central idea around poetic ancestry and belatedness. The idea that everyone after Shakespeare is a latecomer, say. In some of your most recent work, I sense an overtone of darkness, an almost in-your-face presentation of decay, roots, underground things and death. And I’m just wondering if that’s something that’s present in mind when you’re writing lately. The line that I thought was gorgeous in one of your newer poems was “giddily with the look of death.” Is that Dave now looking back at the 15 year-old Dave who was, then, not giddy with the look of death?

O’Meara: Bloom’s belatedness is interesting. And George Steiner writes about that in “Real Presences.” He talks about postmodernism and how high modernism, with people like Joyce and Woolf, their hyper use of language was announcing that we had reached a point where we’ve done everything in language that we can. And that in some ways “Ulysses” was the sort of final step of language burning itself out by choosing a very particular and mundane thing, which is a day in the life of this man, paired with this gyring fever of language. Everything after that is just repetition, unless we make that wager. I think because experience always continues to happen – it doesn’t stop – we always have to rearticulate it. Even though Hardy may have poetically captured a sentiment on death in a perfect way, it doesn’t mean we stop writing about death. You have to re-encounter it through contemporary life. It doesn’t mean that you stop appreciating what Hardy wrote, but you have to readdress how you’re living now. And through that language re-invents itself. Hardy never lived with e-mail, or photocopiers, or quantum physics – you can list them off – or any of the language and experience generated from these things. So experience is always being re-invented to some degree. Core values or angle, I think you’re an experimental writer. I don’t think it has to be computer-generated to be experimental. What is the difference between something generated in that way, and say, a sonnet? They both have parameters, challenges, constraints. There’s some incredibly interesting writing that pushes convention on both sides. I think also, though, that with both lyrical and experimental writing, there’s a lot of lazy writing. Which actually seems to be forgiven a lot more easily with experimental categories. You know when you’ve fucked up a sonnet. The rhymes are bad, there’s too many lines, the metre’s off, for example. In a recognizably experimental piece, there are less guidelines there to make critical judgements. Which is part of the argument of experimental writing, of course. How do you have a criteria? Is criteria itself a traditional idea? Do you need a criteria to know whether something is good or not? Many “experimentalists” would say that’s the point. But I think the answer to that last question is “yes.” I guess, for the most part, with my writing, I’m trying to enact something I would also want to read. It’s what attracts me, that’s all. It’s not a critical choice in the sense that this is what I want to do against that. It’s just the thing that I find most interesting about reading and writing.
basically presenting the reader with the window that you were looking through rather than giving them Dave's feeling about the content of that window. I wonder if there is any gloominess that you're feeling because of the milieu we're living in, or is it related to your sensibility?

O'Meara: It's not just me. I think a lot of writers focus on those moments because they are really a locus for all the other emotions that we go through. Whether it's a near death experience or a great love moment, they're a way of evaluating the more nebulous emotions you go through every day. In the same way, and I think I mentioned this earlier, the subject matter of this new book, there's a lot of places of travel. Stations. Airports. I didn't consciously set out to do that. I deliberately did not set out to have a theme for this book. I wanted to just write a bunch of poems. But then I realized after I had written a bunch that I had these themes because those psychological, emotional spaces are rife with reassessment. When you are leaving somewhere, or you are between two destinations – you see this in spiritual writing or myth: imagery of the desert, the ladder, the road to Damascus – you are simultaneously in the future and in the past. For example, "Dawn Taxi", the driver being in tomorrow and me being in today. I just like that nexus. I think that happens traveling. I think that happens when you have near death experience. Or any time you say goodbye to someone. You're half in the past and half in the future. I don't consciously think that when I sit down for a poem, but I think I'm drawn to that idea quite often.

Brockwell: The darkness of the mood, the colours, the idea of being giddy with the look of death. I've been reading, just this morning, for the nth time, Georges Batailles, Erotism which is a book about death, violence, eroticism, and the idea of transgression.

O'Meara: I know what you mean by the dark tone, the almost despair-like tone. I think that if you are concerned about something, there's two ways to go about it. And I'll use the example of The Vicinity, my last book. If you are concerned or if you want to criticize a subject, and in that case city life as a subject, there are two ways of doing it. One is to praise the opposite. So if I really thought that city life was a terrible destructive thing, then I might write nature poetry and praise nature. And that would be an indirect comment on urbanism. Or, you can try to look directly at the thing you're scrutinizing. For me writing The Vicinity is not unlike, say, Don McKay writing about rock strata and birds. It's a way of looking closely at the world and describing it. And in that way commenting on it. But in The Vicinity I'm not just shitting all over urbanism. There's a lot of great things about cities – they're a locus for human interaction, art, culture, innovation. It's an exploration of a love-hate relationship.

But in the sense of darkness, if you're trying to avoid it, you're not doing yourself or the subject matter any favours. In looking at the more intense emotional moments, like love and death—as ninety-nine percent of poets or writers are—the things that disturb and haunt you change your life in some way. You can't dance around them; you must look at those things with a very careful eye. To do them service, to exorcise them.

Brockwell: I think I heard the words, or sensed the tones black and autumnal in your new work. There's the duck blood soup that is given to unwanted suitors of Polish daughters. There's an almost macabre quality at times. I like it. One of the things about detail, especially uncommented detail, is that it reveals. You're
artist: Stefan Thompson
Sandra Ridley

THE 1A

i.
Cutting the skin of the mountain,
a spill granite and fallen trees:

October poplar.
They're not called aspen, they're poplar.

This is how you want it,
all geography defined by grassland.

There is no denying it.
There is no denial.

ii.
Closed in on all sides by Rocky Mountains,
variations of panic, and peaks claw at horizon.

It's sundown.

You don't have what you want.
No periphery of light.

And the road goes.

TWO A.M.

You touch the foot of your bed;
put your head here.

You think I should sleep that way for a change,
that I should understand, but don't.
This is typical.

You un-tuck foreign corners.
I crawl in
and find your sheets still cool.

We need to sleep, sometimes,
on things differently.
SPLIT

The night he left was a city night –
a sky empty except for the most insistent stars
asserting their distance.
His words sounded more the same
the more she repeated them.

This is enough.

Her response was to mix brown sugar with eggs
with butter,
bake his favourite cookies.

His was a note left on the table.
She found it first. Then a closet without clothes,
a desk without a computer.

What is unintended is easily left,
but that is a digression. He needs convincing,
she thought.
Black strap molasses out of the box.
She liked her fingers sticky.
**Priscila Uppal**

**A DEFINITION OF TORTURE**

Particles of light
converge on laptops and wide screens. The electrician recognizes
the boy.

Not for the puzzle he has become, nor the party line
he will come to represent, but for his eyes
which are blacked out

and reentered under orders from the sky. The boy is forty,
now seventy, stripped of pants and panting like the dog
leashed to the grate behind him.

Give him a noun and it might be Mother.
Give him a verb and it might be Vanish.

A convocation of guns types out a new English dictionary,
and the boy calls out
for Freedom

while his brothers and sisters hit Mute
and wonder when they'll show more captured clips.
Particles of light: a dirge.

**THE MAN ON THE MOON**

is giving up pizza, pie, ice cream.
If not his weight, he must watch his waist.
It's all about the audience.
No one likes a fat rock star.

**HER OLD SHOES MARCH TO THE AIRPORT**

The trip began with a declaration of independence.
*We hold these truths to be self-evident:*
  - freedom of press
  - right to assembly
  - pursuit of happiness.

The last time the heels clicked at attention
it had been 1992. Love had returned from the Gulf;
pink and fresh-faced.

Then back in the closet.
Suppress with the knotted sweaters, scarves
of the last regime. Memory
like a scuff:
*who owned us last time?*
*We promised then not to forget.*

Tongue-tied, out of the trenches of laces,
the track is set. Shoes take their vows:
*Life never promised us straight lines.*
*Life never promised us pairs.*

Three miles to go. Three miles to go.
The woman brews coffee, offers
her new lover a remote:
*Don't push the red button.*
*It doesn't work.* She won't notice
their absence until spring.

Stowed in the overhead, close quarters
arouse blush. *These soles need work,*
they say to the man with a knife
crouched underneath.

*Not to worry,* he whispers.
*I have an idea.*
On the day global warming sent us all packing, the Tycoon
died three times (a planetary record)
and by the toll bells his will was read three times,
(for each time it was different).

The first authorized revamping
the heavens so we could hear its tormented turning
once again. The Tycoon played flute
in high school band. He missed
the sounds that once made sense to him.

The second left every last dime and pretty penny
to the dinosaurs. Yes; museum curators
were aghast with joy. ROM publicists
spent the hour writing out detailed grant
reports of historical breakthroughs
verifiable through bones.

The third time the will was read, the general population
grew skeptical. The Tycoon was always changing
his mind. The money might very well be imaginary,
for all the good it was doing them.

So, who inherited that continent-load of cash?

Why, you. Didn’t you know?
The Tycoon made a promise once, in his youth,
that he’d make all your dreams come true.

Sit down. It’s alight. The lawyers will tell you how
to proceed, what language to use. The funeral director,
Rosa, she knew your father well.
She’ll bring you pills, a box of Kleenex,
and a very heavy pen.
Andy Weaver

FROM GANGSON

1. The cradle

first of terrorized New York a frequent
town and present theatrical district

a howling wilderness in which the savage
expeditions penetrated wilderness

accounts of riot in
time of gangs and underworld nothing with outbreaks

venturesome journeys to settlements in Harlem
drain the area and throw it open to settlement

a canal from pond to Hudson but dug so
later when the earth had sufficiently

been laid out extended site of
merchants Broadway and City Hall and

revel in the gardens of the commoners flock
the means of artificial dancing was free

the customer bought an occasional glass
of ale porter or

custom for a hero with a loathing send his

young and handsome wife
into the street each night
carrying

Whitechapel districts of London

the Ward comprised eighty-six
pieces of glass and colored paper

some taste for decoration and seamen
every obscure grave giving up its dead
dogs howl to lie men women and boys slink off
the fear that you have to rescue
crazy loved dens of death down headlong down filthy
wide on the southern of irregular width

prints show three stories but writers say
there were five

1.a

gradually tapering to a point
miscegenation fact not

uncommon there was much sexual house
once women of consequence

the dives sank to level inhabitants
crime not combated successfully

conditions removed this end
education erected in street and old tenements

purchased and demolished to make way for larger
none was found but many holes were dug

tapping and plumbing of hidden spaces
in thee is found a home
2. Early Points

original genesis the tenement
murderers and Forty Thieves
appears to have been the first New York a
enormous plug hat stuffed with wool and leather
ears to serve as helmets they went in
In the slang rabbit rowdy and a dead rabbit very
gradually declined amusement center
weathering many storms named Thalia
still the shadows of the avenue railroad
filled with respectable
German Ward drank pink and yellow
degradation the gallery of a Bowery theater
a few years the erection
brasses and dices and sometimes rifles for
Everything was free except
interest shoot the
common joined fights with roaring
screech battle rushed biting and clawing
midst of a mass most stouthearted
metropolis formation
a paid fighting force of great event
pantaloons full as the modern Oxford
heavy boots on the back of his head
grave immortalized by writing Moses
The Bowery performed clamorous
a car off the tracks and a few blocks on
shoulders uproariously bumping passengers

the barrel For dessert and very fond
the cherry trees of Cherry Hill and the mulberry
 gained an enormous following of voters
Native Americans took the place of the Whigs
an Englishman named the police the rioters
from the playhouse they roared down Rose street
stripped and parcelled out the gangsters shamefully
mistreated St. Philip’s Negro Church
recovered the police a week later in the hovels of
A few blocks of story origin the name colonial
trysting place the townspeople called From
houses and stores on fire
barrels of flour and a thousand bushels of wheat
a large body of police supported by
powerful control of the absolute
frequently appealed to the police to quell riots
The excitement was intense
a great crowd stood in front
and never returned his country
3. along the front

before the Revolution for years thereafter inaugurated President Hancock

who conceived the present plan of America inspiration for the Sunshine of Paradise

a little side street such as often street over cobble stones rolled the carriages

aristocrats filled with sheltered members gangsters who haunted place otherwise

a snatch a member of the Slaughterhouse corner of Dover run by One Armed Charley

trusted lieutenants Gallus and Gallus push him to infirinted Slobery

promptly seized the prominent nose to the Point on important forays

Sailors frequently murdered as they slept in bartender at the Glass for more than a year

sent to prison for life after he had killed harlots bartenders and musicians in the barroom at noon

expounded a passage from the Scriptures meetings whenever drunk enough to give her

consent and at length they prevailed upon to abandon Cherry resort gin mill in Water

overrun by preachers services the public need be deceived in the matter

of his reformation His motive clubbed a fellow they had never seen

I must be damned good looking to have so many fine fellows declare it was all a put up job

4. River rat

the early Bowery more than a match for the Dead

a Plug Ugly Bowery Boy considerably enlarged the field of operation They stole

excellent sailing qualities with the Jolly Roger flying abject surrender of erstwhile rival

returned one female ear to its owner the most celebrated leader of Daybreak

membership included many notes drinking heavily as always when great events

portend a man of small courage later the scaffold shook hands with the condemned

Slobbery assumed the leadership citizens among them went to London

an exhaustive study of the police returned opportunities for theft and murder

along Brooklyn dock principal places in excitement and loot a night having imbibed

Water street dance hall sought evasive answers when asked where obtained

night packed his household goods boys asleep in the cabin The other on look

at the bow the devil took possession of me start the sloop out to sea

conviction subsequent confession caused the Reverend Father entered the cell

condemned man remained til eleven o'clock placed in the back seat between
5. The Killing Butcher

most brazen of elements infested existence and active operation of houses

more than two hundred first-class constitute the Wall street of despicable characters

Herald larger business in spread and gold costly ware

exquisite cut and embrace of the season commonly held the champion eye

gouger of time and the ferocious mayhem of the Butcher boasted he intended to attack

place and destroy the ballot boxes the honest associate companion of notorious

Baker and Yankee the last cape or cloak named after French actor

seized by the nape of the neck and dragged him miles to see sportsmen made every
effort However they fought One hurled onto the bar inviting choice

politely declined as when any man of the Tammany would cover money

not worth fighting For a moment no jamb fled Everyone in the Hall surrendered to police within hours but audience expressed its thunderous applause

retired from the professional prize ring active connection ceased after his fight with Heenan

Father and Sheriff In the second carriage lips in prayer hands crossed on breast

as feet touched the soil he knelt the Civil War among them

in marble sudden end of company

a small boat from the foot of Garden ancient hall where sang

commander and owner had purchased one last voyage

after the attack arrested a schooner attempted single handed to over

power of six Hookers and mad occasional forays

Manhattans interests a chieftain of note more or less quiescent
Note on the text

“Gangson” is an examination of New York’s distant and not-so-distant history of violence. The poem is a cut-up of Herbert Asbury’s 1927 book, *The Gangs of New York*. I took the first and last line of each page and typed them out as a series of couplets. The first poem contains the couplets from the first chapter (following the book’s order), the second poem contains those couplets from the second chapter, etc. Once the couplets were compiled, I removed words until each couplet started to make its own sense. In some instances, due to short lines or lines consisting only of names or something equally uninteresting to me, I expanded the couplet to include the line directly after the top or directly before the bottom of the page.

I had no specific, preconceived message to convey; I was interested in the themes of violence and corruption that presented themselves to me from Asbury’s text. However, in my mind, at least, these themes are relevant to the current political situation, given New York City’s position as the imaginary ground zero of hostilities in the so-called War on Terror.
Ian Whistle

FROM IMAGO MUNDI

bounced off the floors
they had to comply
dark brandishing
clarinet and took
the critics
gingerly bucking
Meanwhile
arm and head

particularly blatant
foreshortened lie
honoured to address
Not Exactly.

hardwood stage

There's a phrase

*  
See the man who
beating in the sunset
with his own experiences
can talk
spike is driven into
the heart begins
of better terminology
in consequence
in a leopard frenzy
in the guise of parody
won without missing
ready to classify
and international (  

*  

essentially exposition
actually divines
men adrift
media tradition
it refines itself
You may have heard
she had been drawn
If Radio is vacant light
assembled and exhibited
in tender excess
Everywhere I went

performance art
downright demonstrates

*  

could only be spent
She neglects to
entry one
The quote above
piece on
suddenly thrust
that plague us all
which contains
in a wide range
depth
The labour is dedicated
screaming for the tree
in an alienated
influence
is an idea that
with a few hundred
all rather pleased
urban anachronism
but one that begins

Like stamps.
writers seen to be living
has indeed changed
destined set of smug hopes
the workings of the body
merely, linguistically
heavy in the syntax
- as this,
presentation,
are both clear
you, fill out,
tumble from this cunt
takes its place
footnote at the end

*
Once, on the way
most of the women here
(and I agree)
would be either
should be at least
too large at last
self-indulgence
that a comparison volume to
anywhere from I
talking a raunchy
a little out of style
stories from women
and by every male
important enough

to purify
as much a part of
without intellect
that he does not use
and like
to impure a carrion
are would apply

No phony mannerism
Have I told you
but what the fuck
'bed' in this genre
because Fiction is real.
you utter failure
planning a separate
in which his
A clue to his intention
is to address itself
a little woodenly
So much for literary
appeared in the early
doesn't hold water
is to drop it

have said more than
we are trying hardest
'moved by great forces'
and music
political exhortation
entranced mouthpieces
as much a part of
to purify
without intellect
that he does not use
and like
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are would apply
In *Muybridge's Horse: a poem in three phases* (Nightwood Editions, 2007), Mr. Winger sets himself the challenge of taking a true story with a compelling plot of murder, betrayal, hard work and miracles, and transforming it into a poem. The natural tendency of readers is to search for and expect coherent narrative flow and logical order in any piece of writing. In his long poem in three parts, Winger plays with these expectations. Like many writers who have gone before him (See rob mclennan's review on robmclennan.blogspot.com), he plays with the notions of genre and truth by means of form, structure, voice and language. Through this book, readers become witness to an era that has seen its records and its people destroyed by earthquakes and fire. We become part of the on-going conversation of history, adding our own interpretations and knowledge to the mix and thereby helping to preserve history on the one hand and distort it on the other.

In his *Northern Poetry Review* interview with Alex Boyd (http://www.northernpoetryreview.com), Winger talks about truth as a constraint in writing and how and why he chooses to manipulate Muybridge's history:

> “The choice to manipulate a historical situation — as I do, say, by moving the episode when Eadweard first photographs horses six years into the future — or to embellish it — as I do by basing a character like Coppinger on hearsay, or one like Harry or Flora on just a few brief newspaper articles filled with gossip — are both ways to work within the limit of public history. So, being “faithful” to an era, for me, is less interesting as some exercise in verisimilitude than as a way to access and understand the whole undertaking of writing about history at all, of trying to mask an invented story as an actual one, and trying to sort out what the difference really is between saying something actually happened and admitting that you just made it up.”
We are told in the front matter disclaimer that the work contains elements of biography and invention, and quotations from historical and scholarly sources in order to involve it in an ongoing conversation. There has been some alteration of the truth in order to “spin the right kind of yarn” such as changing the date when something takes place or adding a character “out of hearsay.” This is important to remember when reading through the book.

Winger uses actual photographs taken by Eadweard Muybridge, verbatim dialog and descriptions from newspapers and books documenting Muybridge’s life and times. Throughout the book, Winger throws in a massive amount of biographical information about Muybridge and specific details about his photographic techniques. The poems play around with line length, juxtaposing short lines with long accumulative list like lines. In prose paragraphs he interrupts narrative flow by means of asides and other techniques, such as giving us two different descriptions of the same photo. Winger creates a complex structure to render Muybridge’s life as variations of the truth. There is a prologue, three albums, poems with titles, without titles, poems that are numbered into sections and subsections, paragraphs, lists of photographs, an epilogue and sources at the back. There are italics referenced and sometimes it is not. This is all part of playing with and using the truth, of working with and exploring truth as a poetic constraint.

Details mentioned at the beginning of the book are returned to at the end: the lemons Muybridge eats, characters from his life turn up again at the end, such as the journalist Coppinger. There are also metatexual references to elements of poetry and plot, the writer writing about writing. This structure is one aspect of the multi-layering and blending of fact and hearsay or even fiction, at times.

Many voices serve to provide perspective; we have third person omniscient in the form of the main narrator of the book. This voice plays with truth alternating between giving us intimate details about Muybridge that only he would know and hypothesizing about what he might have or would have experienced and thought.

“What’s essential here is that we don’t really know what he’s thinking.”

That his personal movement, the things that made his heart collapse or double, was so veiled that we only get versions of him, partial translations, fragmentary.” (p. 136)

Interesting that we have other people’s words about Muybridge; he himself never speaks directly except through reports of his speech in real newspaper articles, journals, and his trial.

We have the first person, or the shifting eye, in several characters. There is Flora, Muybridge’s wife, who talks about her experiences after she is dead; there is Harry, Flora’s lover and the author himself, who through is narrator, uses the I to compare some of Muybridge’s experiences and personality to himself. This I is reading and going through Muybridge’s books and tells us so, so that at one point we are reading about an author who is reading about the character we are reading about.

“If I’d have been there, I’d be able to give you their details, take you into their complete hearts//Instead in absence, we need to rely on likelihood, put faith into the science of logic.” (p. 113)

Throughout the book, the language is stunning and threaded with recurring images and themes, such as Muybridge without language, his abstract and logical nature, rendered by means of references to maps and angles. We see that there is an intimate connection between Muybridge and his photos; he is described using terms from photography and his photos are described in anthropomorphic terms. He and his photos are one. Flora is associated with flowers first alive, then dying, then left to spill their brown water on Muybridge’s shoes. Powder and pollen represent her presence and the metaphor of life’s intangibility, the difficulty to control it, something Muybridge refuses to accept. The colour yellow comes up again and again, mirroring the idea of the flash of light in photography, but also shedding light “interrupting darkness/in a yellow avenue of details” (p. 149).

“the shuttles rattle into life/their sites crossing in front of lenses/zapping plates with yellow bursts...” (p. 154)

There is also the juxtaposition of the abstract with the concrete throughout the book, in the titles and in the meat of the book: “The drying sulphur is a complex mathematical proof” (p. 136). This serves to help us understand Muybridge’s character as an abstract and removed man who is faced with tangible and rarely pleasant truths in the form of proof. Proof is an important theme throughout the book.

Winger manages to sustain an intense lyricism throughout the text. The language is at times so stunning that even the most hard hearted reader who might be tempted to read this book for its exciting plot must pause and linger.

The key theme threaded throughout the text is the notion of the time in between. Just as Muybridge is able to finally capture a racehorse suspended above the ground through the use of quick shutter chronophotography, Winger is able to capture the moments in between the actual facts of Muybridge’s life. It is these moments that hover in the air for this reader, causing them to transcend time.
PROLOGUE

*Maybridge's Horse* begins with a one page list poem concerning the moments in between. The poem appeals to the senses and is highly sensual and lyrical. At first glance it is hard to understand what relevance this opening poem will have to the subject, but when one considers how a camera works and that photos capture moments, there is a relevance. Going through the book, this relevance becomes clearer.

The next section of the prologue is a narrative description of Eadweard Muybridge in prose paragraph form. Some of the standard techniques of fiction are used to provide the setting and introduce readers to the main character. Muybridge’s palm is “weathered by collodion,” a chemical used in photography and the date 1873 is mentioned.

The details are so specific that the reader wonders whether the writer is basing the text on facts, extrapolation or pure invention.

The text includes personal references to link the narrator with the subject: “He doesn’t take a good photograph until he’s thirty years old. Like me.” (p. 12)

Place is established in the second paragraph as San Francisco. Muybridge’s precision is noted. Poetic language and devices are featured within the prose, such as the use of metaphor:

“his beard...still a velvet shock of black against the suit collars.” (p. 12)

Each detail tells us more about the nature and temperament of the subject, very much as one would find in the opening of a novel. There is physical description: “slate-grey eyes” (p. 13), and a paragraph that explains Muybridge’s claim to fame, his discovery that led to the motion picture.

At the end of the prose there is one final isolated line that seems out of context and unrelated. It serves to link the prose to the subsequent poetry: “versions of a coast line” (p. 13) and to the epilogue where it is echoed by the line “three versions of a coast line” (p. 189).

The final piece in the prologue is a poem called “Pockets.” Unusual details about the subject are assembled in list form:

“He ate raw lemons,
kept in the enormous inside pockets of suit jackets,
bitten to stay alert,
composed.” (p. 14)
“six seconds of light before ripping the pictures free.” (p. 18) and the lines are stunning in places:

“when its photosensitivity is discovered, 
its disinserts hospitals 
to dress glass negatives with blood memories” (p. 18)

This is a poem to be read aloud. There are playful near rhymes: “he pours pyrogallic acid over latency/lets cyanide neutralize pregnancy” (p. 19). This could have gone so very wrong, but Winger is a master of control in these poems. He is very daring to use items like “pyrogallic acid” in a poem and skilful to be able to create a cadence satisfying to the reader’s ear.

Winger is able to create extraordinary descriptions out of what could have been very dull and ordinary. “the way Eadweard ends every image with dryness/trusts liquid in the present tense and then/eliminates it” (p. 19).

“Fixing The River” deals with Muybridge’s ancestry. Winger has a talent for making biographical details fascinating. He also makes use of verbatim quotes from Muybridge, which adds to the realism of the piece, but are used so delicately and sparingly that they don’t overburden the poetic nature of the text.

The members of Muybridge’s family are eccentric: his mother crowds the house with clocks that go off at the same time to scare away burglars.

The poem ends with two isolated lines, left justified after an indented list describing Muybridge’s famous photo shoots:

“all stopped rivers 
in the camera's fluid frames” (p. 22).

“Overland Express, or, the Birth of Helios” contains four sections, each one subtly controlled through line length variation, crammed with factual details and poetic imagery. Is it too much? At times yes, but I think that’s part of the challenge and part of how Winger is experimenting with the lines between poetry and prose, narrative and lyric:

“how responsible versions name his first horses as the mustangs 
shouldering the Butterfield mail coach through a sliver of desert” (p. 23)

If that was how the whole poem was written, the text would be a cumbersome read, but Winger knows when to pull in the reins through the use of line length alternation and enjambment. The poem does at times read like a Homeric epic:

“This is how the driver loses control, 
cabin’s pitch and roll, 
passengers clutching embroidered ropes 
with each swell of hooves 
how 
one rider, delirious, leaps into air 
his skull leaking into the blackfly sand where he lands” (p. 23)

The language alternates too, between very literal prose, poetic form and devices, using couplets and near rhyme, repetition and metaphor.

Winger’s writing is part of the on-going conversation about what defines a poem. He pushes the format and at the same time uses traditional technique to fashion something contemporary that belongs side by side with experimental language poetry. Winger is also experimenting and dealing with the constraints of contemporary language to render history.

“Overland Express” refers back to the first poem in the prologue: “he memorizes the space between realities.” (p. 24). This space between realities is a theme that threads throughout the book.

“San Francisco Camera” mentions a minor persona named Silas Selleck. Winger’s editor is Silas White. I thought that was an interesting coincidence.

There are metafictional references in the poem, “we need a chronology” that help to place the work within a contemporary context and also to remind us of the authoritative voice of the nineteenth century omniscient narrator. There are also references to poetry with the ink in photography representing a poem.

Another thread that weaves its way throughout the long poem is the anthropomorphic connection between Muybridge and his photography. The dangerous chemicals weather his palm; he is soaked in San Francisco iodide” (p. 27). “He scratches ‘Helios’ into his first stills/wanting that identity felt,/blood scooped from his back” (p. 27). “the chain, umbilical/hull to throat, /its oxygen circulating through/the truth in negatives// body a blood clot in the metal's flow” (p. 29). Muybridge is referred to as a “logical negative” (p. 28).

In “Photograph of Eadweard Pretending to Slip from a Yosemite Valley Mountain” we have once again the juxtaposition of fact with hypotheses. Winger uses phrases
We learn little details of Flora's life mixed in with poignant figurative language;
The voice is melancholy.

4. There are places where Flora describes Muybridge and even though it is from a
different perspective, some of the description in the first album is echoed in her
words. She describes him as careful and considered.

We're learning about Muybridge from many different perspectives, there are
multiple layers not just in structure of the poem but also in content.

Recurring image relating Muybridge to maps and geography/geometry:

“I entered his photos as though stepping into maps.” (p. 41)

5. a logical bouquet of roses -. 42
Repetition of blood and palms
Stunning lines: “follows the sierra flames of my hair/to the November lips/that
taste his digits there”

The visual descriptions for Muybridge's character are strong and mixed with figu-

“when I orbit him,
he stays wooden,
placed.” (p. 42)

6. Space on the page conveys a tone of tenderness or melancholy.

“his body roped to the bed
anchor line
hull
heart” (p. 43)

7. Facts and figurative language are skilfully melded

“he channels four solitary decades
into my twenty two grounded years
and I love the water in him” (p. 44)
Album III: Harry

This album is in the form of both prose and poetry with many of the pieces divided into subsections.

In “Self-Portrait as a Sea Bird, we switch to the voice of Harry Larkyns, which is quite different. He’s a womanizer and a con artist. He also speaks French and Spanish as part of his character as man of the world. The vocabulary is much more sexual, much more grandiose, with lots of bragging. Like a novel we learn about his nefarious activities and the details of his involvement with the Muybridges bit by bit. The plot is a compelling one. The title is interesting here too because we see that he is a “sea bird” looking down on his situation. The perspective is not objective however. There are little asides in the form of parenthetical elements that give this poem another layer and insight into his character.

Eadweard is painted so vividly that one could imagine him as a character in a Shakespearean play; in fact the language in this poem is very much the language of play and its descriptions like costumes:

“I targeted the epicentres of Yankee socials and stopped dances with my footwork punctured crowds, smelled their energies, inhaled audiences saw themselves in my soliloquies, and loved me for it I gave them my versions of India-France-England, and they paid me in women” (p. 51, # 2)

In the poem “Cuspidor Coppinger,” Coppinger is a journalist who helps to show the viciousness of Larkyn who uses Coppinger in a scheme to ghost write reviews of plays for him. This is a character Winger says he created out of hearsay. Is there a difference between his rendering of hearsay characters and historical figures who actually lived? I didn't think so. These small vignettes of various characters show Winger's versatility and skill with character creation, extrapolation and adaptation of the real into poetic form.

“In Flora (Larkyns)” Flora also has her own perspective of Larkyn and she compares him to her husband, who is shown to be lacking:

“his hands collapsing on themselves, perform everything Eadweard is unwilling to consider” (p. 64)
What impresses me about this long poem is its use of both fiction and poetic devices. In this case there is foreshadowing of the affair Flora will have with Harry.

In this section she compares the two men more than once:

"the pivot of Eadweard's lenses / Harry's tectonic arms" (p. 66)
Eadweard is “robotlike” (p. 67)

In this poem, Flora is omniscient; she is able to know that

“Eadweard watches our backs
slowly swallowed by the Saturday crowd” (p. 68, #6)

Flora is both participant and onlooker in her own story. This play with narrative is one of the poetic elements of the poem.

“Newspaper” begins rather dryly with a comment in parentheses:

“(plot, plot, plot, plot: why do these chronologies insist so much?)” (p. 69)

That's the readers’ question too. The plot of this story is very compelling; sometimes the sequence of events overwhelms the sheer beauty of the poem, which is the danger. You have to stop yourself from reading through too quickly to find out what happens; the real life of the poem like a serial melodrama.

The pace changes as we read the climax of the plot, turning to short punchy stanzas, each one conveying a plot like detail or moving it forward chronologically, while at the same time rendering the mesmerizing image of the dead man, demonstrating Winger's stylistic versatility.

“Harry on the floor
surrounded by paper
half-folded bird
still
between his doughy
fingertips" (p. 72)

Winger uses all the tools of the writer's arsenal to create an original work: the spacing, line breaks and figurative language of poetry, the sentence variation, plot devices such as foreshadowing, characterization and pacing of fiction to put together a work that transcends genre labelling.

“Plot and Melodrama” is another poem in the third person. This poem repeats the thread linking Muybridge with maps, geography and geometry. He is described as “running in unrelieved lines/ninety degree turns at corners.”

“Leaving San Francisco” contains prose-like paragraphs representative of the dead feeling Muybridge has when he discovers that his wife cheated on him and had a baby with another man.

Once more the flowers are mentioned, symbolizing Flora. This time they are dead and their brown water drips into Eudweard's shoes. (p. 77)

“Arriving at Vallejo” contains very minute and specific details, cold-blooded and beautiful description of Muybridge pulling the trigger and killing Larkyn. Here we return to poem form with alternations in line length variation once more.

Association of Muybridge with geography again: “slips behind geography”

References to geometry and to yellow: the windows of the mining cabin/paint yellow polygons onto the clearing” (p. 81)

Muybridge's life is exact; he has a map of how it should be; the events that unfold do make him slip off the map, or perhaps “behind geography.”

In “Suits” the final poem of the album, we return to Coppinger. In Sources, the author tells us that descriptions of Larykyns are taken from his real eulogy. Here we see a disparity between public fact and what we are given as accounts from someone that knew him, Coppinger. Except that Coppinger isn't a real person, once again making us ask the question, what is true?

Album IV: Branch/ Lines contains five titled pieces divided into sections.

“The Napa County Jail Cell” is third person omniscient description of Muybridge's incarceration. References again to blood/desert/wing/yellow; this section is less factual and uses more figurative, contemplative language.

“Contemplation Rock” is a description of Muybridge's trial; we see how the details of Muybridge's life are used against him; again we are reminded of the earlier part of the book in which we are given descriptions of Muybridge's photography at the edge of a cliff. This is used here to demonstrate that he isn't sane. More circles and more distortion of facts. We even hear from doctors who return us to the accident he had that is mentioned early on in the book, used here as a reason for unsound decisions, to allude to insanity. His wife and his friends and colleagues betray him.

“Verdict” is the dramatic ending to the trial with Muybridge collapsing as he's found not guilty. Recurring imagery continues to thread its way through all of these poems, in practically each one some mention of yellow, of metal, of
The most exciting bits to me are the descriptions of Muybridge's photography, which are still present in part two:

“He tours towns to record ruins. Burns blurred citizens into glass...Holds a child’s outline in his hands to shape it with light.” (p. 105)

Here we also see the thread of preservation through photos.

There’s a symbiotic relationship between Muybridge and his photos. He’s very much one with his work:

“He melts into the landscape and recreates himself.” (p. 105)

Stunning language: “Each clear face is a stopped ghost, permanently doomed in the present tense” (p. 106.)

“Volcan Quetzaltenango” takes us back to the author’s I, looking at Muybridge’s book of photos, contributing to the multi-layering effect.

“Eadweard had positioned himself so that all the shapes in the picture are abstract” (p. 107)

Constant references to Muybridge as abstract.

Photo techniques:

“When he finds the lava flow, Eadweard makes another picture of the limits of things. Inserts ocean into the stubbornness of rock.” (p. 107)

Winger puts us inside Muybridge’s thoughts “The scar later reminds him that movement exists.” (p. 107)

A Roadside Scene, San Isidro

More intimate knowledge of Muybridge:

“The colour that surrounds him is the deepest he’s every seen.” (p. 108)

There’s a description of the photo set up.

Theme of in between: “stream capturing time between bodies.” (p. 109)

Muybridge’s thoughts: “that even the smallest action changes the whole slope of a map’s future.” (p. 109)
"Ancient Sacrificial Stone, Naranjo" features strong sound play. 
#1, (p. 110): what Muybridge thinks, what he imagines.

4. "Another bean history" is another example of the filtering of fact; here the dialogue of Willie Nelson, coffee guy not country music guy, is in italics and is the real thing based on existing dialog records of another person who was real. This is how Winger plays with fiction and fact. He informs us at the beginning of the book, in the small print that some of the information has been "altered or embellished to spin the right kind of yarn." This technique allows Winger to provide many different voices.

4. "peaberry"

Even chewing on a coffee bean is related back to his photography: “Every surface Eadweard breaks ends up coated in silver.” (p. 119)

7. "Canadian Silverskin"

i. the I reads Muybridge's books
ii. describes 5 years of research–the process of researching incorporated into the poem adds another layer (p 123).

8. "Bringing in the day's coffee picking"

Another reference to collodion from the beginning. An example of Winger's ability to sustain ideas, themes and tone throughout the book.

The end of this section refers back to the murder, back to triangles and the mines. references to talcum powder, Flora

Album II Las Nubes

1 “20(4) photographs”

The theme of preservation and loss–people he’s photographed are killed in the quake. Or his photos are destroyed.

Winger's I narrator comes in now and again and reminds us that some of the text presented as fact is extrapolation: (I have no proof of this) (p. 113).

The sections of this poem are further divided into subsections with roman numerals. There are gruesome stories that make up the legend of Muybridge's life and the times in which he lived, the brutality of the places he visited and the way he accepted the violence and just documented it through his lens.

The bits on Guatemalan coffee production are fascinating and are informed in part by a reference. Winger is able to blend fact with extrapolation.

2. “Another bean history” is another example of the filtering of fact; here the dialogue of Willie Nelson, coffee guy not country music guy, is in italics and is the real thing based on existing dialog records of another person who was real. This is how Winger plays with fiction and fact. He informs us at the beginning of the book, in the small print that some of the information has been “altered or embellished to spin the right kind of yarn.” This technique allows Winger to provide many different voices.

4. “peaberry”

(...)
“Evening” is a dramatic account of Muybridge’s setting fire to his work. At times the facts of this man’s life are so unbelievable, one questions whether they actually happened, especially given that the book plays with truth. How much is Winger trying to get away with and how much is just plain fact? If it wasn’t for the fact that Muybridge is easily googleable, I would have almost believed our author invented him completely out of his own fine imagination.

PART THREE: FAUNA is a very short section, divided into four albums. A clever riposte – Flora and Fauna. Albums are much shorter in this part, more time is passing quicker in less space. It is the smallest section of the book yet it contains the essential element of what Muybridge is known for: photographing a horse in mid air. This is what fact tells us, this is what we know of if we read history, yet the whole book concentrates on so much more, gives us so much more than if we restrict our explorations of this man to what public history tells us.

Album I Palo Alto
In this album we return to the horse that is the title of the poem, we return to standard poem shapes. We learn about the specific technique used: quick shutter chronophotography and just how important this is:

“Every equestrian painting disproved within half an hour of machinery” (p. 157)

We also learn the biographical details of the people who are part of this moment in history. Each person is described in a rich vocabulary and the voice for each changes.

Winger doubles the content yet again: writing about Muybridge’s need for focus but also about the book and what is important when we read it:

“That here finally was a landscape where/ focus and detail were as important as narrative.” (p. 146)

“Panorama of San Francisco” contains italics to quote Muybridge’s actual words.

Floredo, his son:
“powder lifting from the child’s overalls”; like reference to Flora – pollen or powder

Muybridge is without judgement of San Francisco and its violence.

His photos exist but their subjects destroyed by earthquakes (p. 135)
4. Muybridge carries a rectangular mirror inside, parallel with beginning when he carried a photo of Flora cornered in his left pocket. (pp 149/14)

7. Another reference to yellow:

8. The omniscient voice of the third person omniscient is used for analysis and judgement. Yet even here much has been extracted from another book, Rebecca Solnit's River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West, which came out as he was writing "Muybridge's Horse." Once again we see a multi-layering of sources and how they can be blended in a creative work. All that has been added by Winger here is a line to gives us a context.

   "this is how, at forty-eight, Eadweard becomes
   the man who seems retrospect
   like a bullet shot through a book;

   His trajectory ripped through
   all the central stories of his time...

   the man who split
   the second,
   as dramatic
   and far reaching
   at the splitting
   of the atom."

   (p. 156)

Album II Proof

Again we have a reference that seems to imply not just to Muybridge, but also to the process of writing this book:

   "How to ground your theories,
   to figure ground,
   to find common ground
   in your selection of images

   Each stanza,
   naming

   (there are details here. Be patient. / Meander if you want to get to town)"

   (pp. 162-163)

Album III Three Countries

Muybridge goes back to his birthplace, England where he is "surrounded by so many borders/that maps no longer matter" (p. 166); he has spent his entire life trying to make things fit into maps, into frames, categorizing and trying to understand the limits of things. Isn't that what readers are trying to do with this book? Trying to understand the limits?

Album IV Pennsylvania: Man Ascending An Incline

Winger lists and describes plates Muybridge uses to create moving pictures. This is yet another type of poem, the list, something Winger started the book off with in the Prologue.

"he slips from first to third person with unconscious electricity. The eye is shifted" (p. 174). Direct reference to narration adds another level.

"Epilogue" is one poem and it revisits a poem in album three of part two: Boarding An Exit, November 1875. While that poem dealt with Muybridge's return from Guatemala to San Francisco, this poem "Boarding An Exit 1906" describes the earthquake and subsequent that destroyed much of the city. "Every address Eadweard had in San Francisco burns" (p. 188.)

The colour yellow is once again referenced:

   "the city's crumpled geometry,
   blistered by yellow tongues" (p. 189)

"(three versions of a coastline)" the final words of the book before the sources, takes us back to the idea of versions as we've seen at the start of the book. History is nothing but various versions filtered through the shifting I/eye: hearsay, records, the media, testimonials, creative works and the reader's own eye and mind.
artist: Meaghan Haughian
Mother (me). Mixed media on wallpaper. 10" x 8". $345 (framed). Available at La Petite Mort Gallery. www.meaghanhaughian.com

artist: Meaghan Haughian
Mother’s home. Mixed media on wallpaper. 25" x 17". (Sold) www.meaghanhaughian.com
He presents a raw, uncooked version of the Canadian landscape by way of particular instances that demonstrate his aversion to the stereotypical poetic fare, staging a quiet rebellion. The candour and honesty comes to the fore in such moments as when he admits the revolution's failure in how the energy to prevail was confused with hypocritical self-aggrandizement and brazen disregard: “It was too late. My eyes/were closed. Freedom, summer/never seemed to be what we wanted.” (The Cities We Longed For) – In this way, there is a connotative cut between dissatisfaction with the buoyancy of the ideal and the grim outcome of the real.

But to label Newlove a poetic realist is to commit a treasonous blunder – rather, he could more appropriately called a clever lyricist with strong realist tendencies. Despite his occasional lapses into incendiary and anguished subjects that border upon polemic, Newlove's remarkable gift is in the scrupulous generosity he brings to bear in his playfully punning lines, stripped of the overbearing sentimentality and rigid structures of poetic form. Behind his playfully mendacious cynic's sneer there is the burbling undertow of a fleeting litany (pronounced in “Notes From and Among the Wars”) that runs through his more vitriolic asides, but his primary target for attack does not spare the poet himself, and it is the involved rather than the high voice that does not posture as the objective outsider looking in.

The modesty in his approach would decline any claim to his poems standing as generational anthems, but are instead carefully elusive in not being fixed as being the rallying cry of any group or ideologically myopic plan. Newlove's work is an implied testament against vertiginous utopian strategies and the overbearing largesse of poetry manifestoism. It is not so much that he is averse to theory or disinclined to take an ideological stance, but that it can too easily interfere with and impede upon allowing the work to speak itself, such a practice being the domain proper of the documentation- and process-obsessed conceptualists. In place of nesting such conceptual prejudices within the works themselves, Newlove presents us with a kind of désordre d’établi replete with teasing margins, loose ends, vignettes, and cul de sacs. There is an uncanny kinship here with bpNichol's epistolary fragments insofar as Newlove illuminates all the personal effects of candour into verse-form, veering from the 60s poetic predilection of couching concrete vision in impenetrable obscurity. Perhaps Newlove would even shy away from such a lofty term like "vision" since that would suggest a unified project, limited in its particulars by the demands of an inflexible form from which all is to be derived.

Newlove has but traces of a poetic inheritance, and what makes the work still so relevant and fresh today is that there seems to be no firm historical precedent installed that would otherwise lead to the etiolation and reduction of his work to crude literary canonization. These traces may betray his reading influences, but


Kane X. Faucher

Chaudiere Books has released a new selection of poems by John Newlove which includes all of the poems appearing in the 1993 Porcupine's Quill edition (*Apology for Absence: Selected Poems 1962-1992*) with 37 additional poems to better give the reader a more compelling and intimate portrait of a frank observer and modest poetic innovator. What is particularly striking about this collection is the nearly palpable trajectory of development, closely indexed to the fragmented events of his life. Beyond following the same chronology as the 1993 collection, the Chaudiere Books edition appends a handful of other poems during that period as well as Newlove's post-1993 work.
never do they actually come to dominate his work and make him culpable as an
emulator by any stretch. However, neither do his poetic innovations have the flashy,
visceral pizzazz of his contemporaries that tried to reflect the social turbulence of
their times through shocking phonetic or overtly concrete visual matrices. Instead,
Newlove opted for a marked subtlety in his inventions, making modest appeals to
how the poem can be re-envisioned and disseminated. He handles the ageless
Canadian leitmotifs with a deft, playful, and unique manner, not relying on the
stale tropes of his poetic forbearers. There are moments of lubricious potency in
his imagery, but this trades blows with an earthy realism with all the blemishes.

Just a step behind the imagery resides the paradox of Newlove and his “doubles”.
There is crouching behind each poem the high-stakes interplay between product-
persona and person-producer, but this carries off well in a kind of self-deprecatory
way that nuances the poems with a jesting similitude, giving them the characteristic
raw beat with a snap to its tempo readers of Newlove have come to recognize and
admire. The collection is quite aptly named “A Long Continual Argument”, for
although an informative editor’s preface by Robert McTavish and an afterword
by Jeff Derksen bracket the works, even then the fisticuffs of Newlove’s solo
argument breaks out of these confines to be renewed again in their sanguineous
strife. With a sort of Borgesian flourish, he makes even of his own life an inset
fiction, blurring the line between work and life, highlighting the absurdity of uniting
the bios and the graphein with complicity: “I can remember very little of my life.
What I do remember I am suspicious of. I may have invented it” (Being Caught,
Author’s Preface to Apology for Absence). Newlove shared the keen insight through
his many capsule “autobiographies” that a life is always double or more, eternally
irreducible with an infinite remainder. Although we may all be a “sack of wet shit”
(Death of the Hired Man), in the end we “make the world” (The Cat). It is these
stark contradictions of misery and joy, lies and half-truths, that populate the
terrain of the poet and the person, and these are the contentious issues of
Newlove’s continual argument with himself.

For those discovering Newlove’s poetry for the first time, readers will delight in
his trademark parting shot nested in the pithy last line and the unapologetic poetic
reportage, as in “The Fat Man”, that does not hide behind a wall of whimsy or
false sympathies. Stylistically, Newlove’s poetry has always remained approachable
and never prohibitive or exclusive.
Gary Barwin was born in northern Ireland and moved to the Ottawa westend, specifically near Nepean and Hadencourt Park, when he was nine. He stayed until university in York. Since then he has lived in Hamilton in corn supplementing this with serifs in nottingham and garybarwin.com. He’s the author and collaborator of books including *Fragments from the Frag Pool* (with Derek Beaulieu) and *Doctor Weep and Other Strange Teeth* both with The Mercury Press.


Louis Cabri and Susan Holbrook’s *Lax*, with music composed by Brent Lee, premiered at the Windsor international music festival this year. He is author of *The Mood Embosser* (Coach House), and teaches at the University of Windsor from where he coordinates The Transparency Machine Talks Series, gradually editing its audio files for online distribution at http://web4.uwindsor.ca/english (series co-founder Rob Manery also runs the series from Vancouver).

John Cloutier is from Ottawa and grateful to be a long time resident of one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Michael Dennis is an Ottawa poet. His most recent poetry collection is *Arrows of Desire* (Renfew ON: General Store Publishing House, 2006), and a volume of his selected poems came out a few years ago with Broken Jaw Press / cauldron books, edited by rob mclennan.
Adam Dickinson's second and most recent book *Kingdom, Phylum* was a finalist for the 2007 Trillium Book Award for Poetry. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in anthologies and literary journals in Canada, the UK, the USA, and more recently (through translation) in China. He teaches poetry and poetics at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. He once lived in Ottawa where he would often skate on the canal very late at night.

Rhonda Douglas lives in Ottawa. Her work has been published in literary journals across Canada and overseas. In 2006, she won both the Malahat Review's Far Horizons Award for Poetry and *Arc* Magazine's Diana Brebner Award. Rhonda is a graduate of the Humber School for Writers and is a student in the Optional-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing at UBC. She is currently working on a book-length manuscript of poetry and a collection of short fiction, and her poetry chapbook *Time, If it Exists. The Cassandra Poems* appeared in May 2007 with above/ground press.

Amanda Earl's poems appear most recently in ottawater.com 3.0, listenlight.net, and the Ottawa Arts Review. Amanda is the managing editor of Byzords.ca and the Byzords Quarterly Journal. She blogs about literary stuff on amandaearl.blogspot.com and ottawapoetry.blogspot.com. She also writes fiction and has been published in anthologies with the word sex in them. above/ground press published her poetry chapbook *Eleanor* in August 2007.

Laura Farina grew up in Ottawa and attended the Literary Arts program at Canterbury High School. She is the author of *This Woman Alphabetical* (Pedlar Press) which won the Archibald Lampman award in 2006. Be one of the plethora to own Urdoxa, by Kane X. Faucher, available at Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble. Punk dash from relatives or babbling mouthwash-swilling mountebanks if needed.

Andrew Faulkner is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of Ottawa Arts Review (review.artsottawa.ca). He is also the fiction/poetry editor of AND Magazine (andismagazine.com), and once saw Nicholas Lea wrestle a bobcat.

Laurie Fuhr, now in Calgary, has previously been active in Ottawa and Winnipeg. She is General Editor for filling Station Magazine and puts together charity-supportive variety events as Calgary MultiArts; July saw *Holy Beep!*, a benefit for jwcurry's book on bpNichol. Laurie writes about local music for BeatRoute and is a member, with her husband Gareth, of indie pop band Lonely Hunters. Their campus-radio-charting first album *The Chaste are Chased* can be purchased at myspace.com/garethsband; FOR THE LOVE OF GOD PLEASE BUY A COPY!!!!!!

Chris Jennings' name crops up in Canadian magazines and journals with modest regularity, usually attached to a poem, essay, or review. He teaches at the University of Ottawa. There's a good story about the poem "Zucchini Stand" and the artist and poet Andy Patton that Chris will tell in the right pub.

John Lavery grew up in Montreal. Lavery, in Irish, means a spokes-person which is not quite the same as a sticks-figure, although skinny he's. Also he's the proud author of *Very Good Butter* and *You, Kwazienski, You Piss Me Off*; both ECW Press, and is currently dilly-dallying with a new utterling ententatively titled, *Crutches*. A short story of his appeared in the anthology *Decalogue 2: ten Ottawa fiction writers* (Chaudiere Books, 2007).

Nicholas Lea was born in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory and grew up in and around the Ottawa area. He is the author of a chapbook entitled *light years* (above/ground press, Ottawa, Ontario) and his first collection of poetry, *Everything is movie* was released in April of 2007 with Chaudiere Books. He left Ottawa with his partner in August, 2007, and returned from Fredericton, New Brunswick in December. His work has been described as "realistically Surrealist," by no one. To learn more about the author, visit: www.chaudierebooks.com

Anne Le Dressay has published two trade poetry collections, *Sleep Is a Country* (Ottawa ON: Carleton University Press / Harbinger Poetry Series, 1998) and *Old Winter* (Ottawa ON: Chaudiere Books, 2007) as well as two chapbooks, *This Body That I Live In* (Winnipeg MB: Turnstone Press, 1979) and *Woman Dreams* (Ottawa ON: above/ground press). She has poems recently published or forthcoming in *Prairie Fire, Contemporary Verse 2, The New Quarterly*, event and Byzords.ca, and was included in the anthology *Decalogue: ten Ottawa poets* (Ottawa ON: Chaudiere Books, 2006). She is a civil servant in Ottawa.

Rob Manery lives, works, and studies in Vancouver. He lived in Ottawa until 1996 where he, along with Louis Cabri, formed ewg to organize literary events. Together, they also published *hole magazine* and a subsequent chapbook series, *hole books*. A volume of his poetry, *It's Not As If It Hasn't Been Said Before*, was published by Tsunami Editions in 2001.

Poet and artisan Karen Massey’s work has appeared in ottawater, numerous publications and anthologies, and most recently in *Decalogue: ten Ottawa poets* (Chaudiere Books, 2006) and the international collection, *Not What I Expected: The Unpredictable Road from Womanhood to Motherhood* (Paycock Press, 2007). She lives and writes in Ottawa, and currently works as a technician wearing a lab coat disguise buttoned over her wild heart.
Seymour Mayne is the author, editor or translator of more than fifty books. His most recent collections of poetry include Ricocket: Wórd Sonnets, September Rain, and the bilingual Spanish Hail/Granizo: Wórd Sonnets/Sonetos de Una Palabra.

Marcus McCann is a full-time reporter for Capital Xtra. His poetry debuted in the *The Antigonish Review* at age 18. He is the editor of *themonionunion.com*, a selector for *Bywords* and a former selector for *Yapp*. As winner of the 2003 University of Ottawa 48-Hour Novella Writing Contest, his *So Long, Derrida* was published in the spring of 2006. 2007 saw the appearance of the chapbook *Basement Tapes* (*The Onion Union*), featuring poems by McCann, along with Nicholas Lea and Andrew Faulkner, and McCann’s own poetry chapbook *Heteroskeptical* (*above/ground press)*.

Christian McPherson’s first collection of short stories, *Six Ways to Sunday* (Nightwood Editions) came out April 2007. His poetry has appeared in several journals and anthologies, including *Misunderstandings Magazine*, *Queen’s Quarterly*, *Jones AV*, and *On Spec*. He lives in Ottawa with his beautiful wife and two kids.


David O’Meara was born and raised in Pembroke, Ontario. He has lived, for varying periods, in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Montreal, as well as Japan and South Korea, working as a bartender, maintenance worker, and English-language instructor.

He is the author of two collections of poetry, *Storm still* (*McGill/Queens Press*), short-listed for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award (best first book of poems in Canada), and *The Vicinity* (*Brick Books*, 2003), which was shortlisted for The Ottawa Book Award, the national Re-Lit Prize, Ontario’s Trillium Award and winner of the 2004 Archibald Lampman Award. He has been published in a number of literary magazines and has appeared opposite Michael Ondaatje in *Where the Words Come From: Canadian Poets in Conversation* (*Nightwood Editions*), *The New: Canon* (*Signal Editions*), an anthology of contemporary Canadian poetry, and in *The Echoing Years*, a co-Irish and Canadian poetry anthology.

His biography will be included in 2008 Edition of the Canadian Who’s Who (University of Toronto Press). In 2008 a new poetry collection will appear with Brick Books, and his stage play, *Disaster*, will be produced.

Pearl Pirie is an itinerant blogger. She has recently put out “Better Ways to Go than by Aspartame,” is a reader for *Bywords Quarterly Journal*, has been published in *Womb, Iceni, The Times Online*, and Best of Cafe Cafe Summer 2007, *Listentight*, broadsheets of Pooka Press, the *Collected Iron Works* chapbook, issues of *The Gristmill*, issues of *Bywords*, and in the chapbook *Moments Not Monuments*. She is working on a few manuscripts.

Craig Poile’s poems have appeared in *The Malahat Review* and *Arc*. His book, *First Crack*, was published by Carleton University Press in 1999. He lives in Ottawa where he works as a technical writer and is the co-owner of Collected Works Bookstore.


Sandra Ridley was a Fringe Reader at the 2006 Eden Mills Writers’ Festival, and received an Honourable Mention for Arc’s 2006 Diana Brebner Prize. Her recent work can be found in *Carousel, Grain, Queen’s Feminist Review, ottawater* and *Taddle Creek*. She is currently completing her first manuscript, *Downwinders*, of which this broadside poem is a part.

Priscila Uppal is a poet and fiction writer born and raised in Ottawa, where she attended Immaculata and Hillcrest high schools. Upon high school graduation, she moved to Toronto for her studies and completed her PhD in English Literature in 2004. Among her publications are five collections of poetry: *How to Draw Blood From a Stone* (1998), *Confessions of a Fertility Expert* (1999) *Pretending to Die* (2001) *Live Coverage* (2003) and *Ontological Necessities* (2006); all with Exile Editions; and the novel *The Divine Economy of Salvation* (2002), set in Ottawa and published to critical acclaim by Doubleday Canada and Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill and translated into Dutch and Greek. Her forthcoming novel, *To Whom It May Concern*, is also set in Ottawa. Her poetry has been translated into Korean, Croatian, Latvian, and Italian, and *Ontological Necessity* was short-listed for the prestigious Griffin Prize for Excellence in Poetry. She is a professor of Humanities and English at York University.
Andy Weaver was born in Saint John, New Brunswick, and grew up there, Ottawa, Ontario, and in small towns outside of Edmonton, Alberta. During his MA, he served on the poetry editorial board of *The Fiddlehead*, and was co-founder and poetry editor of *Qwerty magazine*. Weaver's poetry has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies, and his first book, *were the bees*, came out with NeWest Press in 2005. Co-founder of Edmonton’s *The Olive Reading and Zine Series*, he currently teaches in Toronto at York University. *Gångsôn* will appear as a whole any day now in an issue of *STANZAS* magazine, produced by *above/ground press*.

Born in Winnipeg, Ian Whistle divides his time between there and Nepean, Ontario. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Lost & Found Times, Van, (orange), filling Station, The Unicorn Reader, STANZAS, ottawater 2.0*, the chapbooks *apostrophe* (first&books) and *resemblances* (above/ground press) and the anthology *Shadowy Technicians: New Ottawa Poets* (Broken Jaw Press). He is currently carting around two poetry manuscripts, looking for a home. He has a blog but doesn’t pay much attention to it.

**Contributing Artists:**

Don Monet  
Christina Riley  
Stefan Thompson  
Hayden Menzies  
Gail Bourgeois  
Rebecca Mason  
Reid McLachlan  
Jennifer Kwong  
Meaghan Haughian  
Dan Martelock  
Ryan King