Cameron Anstee
Other Surfaces 2
Anterior Cruciate Ligament 3
Open Between 4
from Down Staircases 5

Michael Blouin
by the Moulins de Provence 10
Once again 11
no one listens to poets anymore / or / ever should 12
I’m not who I was, but I remember 13

Stephen Brockwell
Notes toward an Alternate World 15
From The Love Poems of _____ Serial Killer 16

Monique Desnoyers
ilongtosee 18
leasing 18
merely mouse sized 19
ohmywhyyyy 20

Amanda Earl
poetics statement 22
these words say invisible 25

Jesse Ferguson
Spin Out 31

Warren Dean Fulton
1) – 13) 32

Adrienne Ho
Flat Fifth 35
We speak of many things at once 36

Sean Johnston
They Meet Each Other in Airports 37
Still Life, Fixing the Mazda Pickup 38
Spectacular 41
The Complicated Awkwardness of My Daily Walk Home 42

Ben Ladouceur
Nausikaa 44
all I need 45
The mathematician and me 46

Laina Lane
odometer testing: five methods 48

Marcus McCann
two poetics statements 54
Creative cyborg anxiety monologue 60

rob mclennan
from variations: plunder verse 62
Barry McKinnon’s “Low Fancy,” variation one 62
Barry McKinnon’s “pages from a prairie journal,” variation two 63
BARRY MCKINNON’S “pages from a prairie journal,” variation three 64
Catriona Strang’s “Low Fancy,” variation two 65
Stephanie Bolster’s “The Japanese Pavilion,” variation five 66
bpbNichols’ “talking about strawberries all of the time,” variation three 67
Catriona Strang’s “Low Fancy,” variation three 68

Christine McNair
Moon at 3:00 am, reflected matter 70
London 73
the house 74
Canadian Air Force 75

Colin Morton
Play Goes Right On – Notes on Poetics 76

Jennifer Mulligan
theatre of the (exact) moment (or, dylan sings greta garbo) 80
madness 82
vancouver etc summer 2008 83

Pearl Pirie
poetics statement: Weighing Maps: Traveling Poetry 84

K.I. Press
Turning to glass 88
Let us not compare tragedies 89
Dick and Jane and Android 90
The Land of Stress 91

Roland Prevost
With Apologies to Charcoal Witch 92
Suicides Packed 93
There’s always 94
Outside the CINEplex 95
Zenith Scraper 96
hew halogen grins 97
hew halogen grins 98
Appositive Thumbs 99
if pressed 100
Clam Offensive 101

Monty Reid
Construction Site 102

Shane Rhodes
from End Notes 104

Suzannah Showler
Testimony 106

Sandra Ridley
poetics statement: 5 Statements : 5 Discarded Notes 108

Mike Spry
Boggle Pickle Feline 110

Gillian Wallace
How do I go on 117

Zack Wells
1st SATIRE 118
2ND SATIRE 121
PETTY HARBOUR CODPIECE 123

Rob Winger
Re/Reading Submissions 125
Re/Ports that Know the Sea 126

Rachel Zolf
From The Book of Comparisons 128
an interview with Nina Berkhout by rob mclennan 133

cover art by: Daniel Martelock
Cameron Anstee

OTHER SURFACES

leaves turned out
before the gathering sky
and the window edge
in flames
the sun, a stone
glimping the surface's
other side,
finally
(how water bends before overflowing
lips)
becomes a corner
and raw colours
a hinge if the earth was flat

ANTEIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT

for Mark C. Sokolowski

the scar tissue on my left knee
seems already lesser than other years
skin sure now of its once definition
but I've needed, before,
fingers to remember
left
(where a pin breaks hard
bone to hold soft parts tight)
our shape accumulated
we inherit our movements;
I'll answer yet
OPEN BETWEEN
“leave behind the air I moved through,
still pretending flow”
Stephanie Bolster, “Stop Motion”

I’ve begun reading books from last poem to first
turning out others’ returns
youngest at your fingers but worse now without you
and I do what I can I know where poems stutter
yours are good hands, older than here
but here
a book held open between two fingers and thumb
even if the universe is still
air will move to follow after hands
my first word I don’t remember

from DOWN STAIRCASES
“I am trying to write a poem”
Phyllis Webb, Naked Poems

I fill this room
with water and
books elemental
and remain aboveground
fluid air cutting
a movement onto paper
light bent
showing its parts
and the ways back to origins
a glass to catch the rain in
quick sunlight
as the clouds move
(I am trying to write a poem)
different bodies, a new
startling nakedness
(how skin speaks)
I hold you, and carefully
trace your fingers out in pencil
(a letter, and resolve)
bones
and parts of bones
and parts of parts of bones

apart, flat on my back
with old things to see newly

(the dactyl is so named for fingerbones)

your fingers shift the world sideways

a friction of quick detail
against spinning walls

and I’m awful when I learn nothing
from your body


what do you really want?
I want the thing after the coastline
want under and before, want to
see right through to where
all at once is now and now
and now and here
and now
if I have known beauty
understand
that beauty found me

light spilling down staircases
toward the already subterranean parts
Michael Blouin

BY THE MOULINS DE PROVENCE

when the woman walked by
and there was the sudden smash of broken glass
we all looked up
and we all thought
she's dropped a decoration she's bought
or a crystal vase
or something like that
and that's too bad
and that's a shame
but she can buy another
there's money in those clothes
and most of us looked away
but then she kept walking
after looking down briefly
she kept right on going
faster in fact
and the shattered glass was surrounded by a liquid
and some of us thought coffee
no
and the man from the bakery looked down the street after her
then leaned over the stain
and the brown paper
and dipped a finger and lifted it to his nose
and by then all of us knew
and oh,
we thought,

Oh.

ONCE. AGAIN

we drank too much
we stopped the drinking
the sky was blue again overhead
a beautiful offshore breeze

we wandered
and your amber skin
warm still from the sunburn

we never saw our answer
Oh I said that. I said that.
NO ONE LISTENS TO POETS ANYMORE
OR
EVER SHOULD

Spanish girls are pretty when they play the guitar
French girls
are pretty all the time

so this is the way that it is;
a woman takes off her clothes
I think of the saviour
I think of death

somewhere, something
opens.

I'M NOT WHO I WAS, BUT I REMEMBER

if I had a heart like yours
I obviously wouldn't be tormenting it
like I do my own
but, well,
I don't

although...
it's a gorgeous October afternoon
I'm at the Roof Lounge
of the Park Hyatt
the sun is beating
I could easily live here
on martinis
and olives
if I had a welding torch
I could fashion some of these chairs
into a bed
I would just need you then
and nothing else

and if I had a heart
like yours
I obviously wouldn't be
 tormenting it
like I do
my own.
Stephen Brockwell

NOTES TOWARD AN ALTERNATE WORLD

John said that every sentence everywhere ends with a period but I know that not to be true because my wife tells me that on the planet Harnn, that most perfumed of planets, the lives of sentient beings are so short that no sentence is ever completed—the males live 22 minutes—one minute for birth, 20 minutes for exquisite sex, and one minute to regret and die. As with us, the women live longer—nearly twice as long as the men—one minute for birth, twenty minutes for forgettable sex, one minute to bear children and to learn to read and write, twenty minutes for exquisite sex with a younger man, [and] one minute to teach a daughter to read, and to regret and die[]. Sentences are passed between generations along maternal lines[]. Men are never taught to read[,] no period ends a sentence[]. I trust the truth of what my wife has said, but I would have to wait for death to know for sure.[]
FROM THE LOVE POEMS OF ____, SERIAL KILLER

They will tell you
a man who can kill cats
and women with surgical
precision is incapable of love.
A lie. I loved –
what was her name? –
Anne. I loved her.
It is after all a word,
the tongue on the teeth,

the open mouth,
the teeth biting the lips

until they bleed.
I loved Anne.

Stuart Swimming

There are underwater poems
in Stuart’s body.
Inside the bubbles
rising from his lungs,
fish songs full of hope,
all vowels, little breaths
burst as they break on the surface,
sighing, “A little closer to
the hot tub, Stuart; Mme.
Prevost’s been eating onions
and we need hotter water.”

artist: Stefan Thompson
wulfturner
Monique Desnoyers

Monique Desnoyers

ilongtoseetheseabut icannotseesaidthema
nblindandspottingth
clockheremarkedits
twoandsigninghisnam
elabelledhimeye
amendlessyetcontain
edwithinandsight

merely mouse sized
mouse sized merely
sized merely mouse
me mo si
mo si me
si me mo
mo me si
me si mo
si mo me
mouse merely sized
merely sized mouse
sized mouse merely
merely sized mouse
sized mouse merely
mouse merely sized
me si mo
si mo me
mo me si
mo si me
si me mo
me mo si
si mo me
me si mo
si me mo
sized merely mouse
merely mouse sized
mouse sized merely

leasingleasingleasingleasinglea
singleasingleasingleasingleasingle
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ottawater: 5.0
ohmywhyisitth
iswayonandoni
tgoesrelentles
sslyandunheed
ingeyinourri
chfeatherswer
umbleandquake

opleasedonotl
oseitorstumbl
leveryyourownf
etpleasekeep
thefragmentsi
nnordonotspli
ttheseamsplea
sedonotletthe
floodsweepthe
seafromwithin

ifevertherewe
retimewhenwew
ereonotcryingi
nsideitwouldb
ecauseofourin
abilitytohear

linesonfriday
thethirteenth

artist: Daniel Martelock
www.danielmartelock.com
Amanda Earl

POETICS STATEMENT

AE: So what made you decide to start a new literary movement?

AE: I thought it might be a good way to establish myself as an obscure cult leader who passes without notice in the media.

AE: What is pellmellism exactly?

AE: Exactly it isn’t anything. Not to be confused with Robin Blaser’s *Pell Mell* (Coach House Press, 1988); although much in the spirit of it, pellmellism is a random, non-judgmental, undisciplined meandering influenced and not by any form of what excites you creatively that has or has not existed, exists now and doesn’t and will exist or won’t. If a pellmellist wants to make a sandwich out of a formal sonnet, that’s ok. If a pellmellist wants to paint a sound poet with ancient hieroglyphics, I say hear, hear.

AE: What made this movement necessary?

AE: Way back in May, 2008, while attending the University of Ottawa Canadian Literary Symposium: “Re: Reading the Postmodern,” I was making up a postmodernist drinking game while creating comic book postmodernist superheroes, and listening to everyone talk about what the next literary movement should be. For his keynote address, FrankDavey dropped his unpaginated papers and read pell mell and I said ah.

AE: How do you incorporate pellmellism into your own writing?

AE: I read everything that manages to lure me, despite my short attention span and I write whatever I feel like without caring about what ism or asm it is. I feel a distance from other isms and asms. Although sometimes I blend isms with asms for a tasty fizzy drink akin to orange crush and alka seltzer.

My own version of pellmellism at this particular moment is cormorant-and-lichen-avoidant and poorly attempts to be ego free. Despite being a creator of a literary movement, I am no prophet and would rather roll in dirt than stand at the foot of mount whatever and sigh over its transcendent beauty. I prefer questioning and irreverence, but then irreverence is a form of distance too, so wide eyed and jaw slackening gaping may be a more realistic appraisal of my writing philosophy. I find it hard to use the word “poet” to describe myself, and “poetry” to describe what I write because poetry feels like a scary big deal to me, something chanted or mumbled by men and women with long white beards and reading glasses in front of a lectern to dozing scholars and encyclopaedia salesmen.

AE: But where’s the wonder in pellmellism?

AE: I think there’s a great deal of wonder in inspiration, ideas and discovery. But the wonder is intimate, it comes from within, from our relationship with ourselves and the world real or imagined. No distance, no god on high, no Charlton Heston playing the role of Poet and offering ten prescriptive rules about what can and cannot be done in Poetry or any other form of literature or creativity.

AE: What influences you?

AE: Paint chips, asbestos, formaldehyde, mercury, cracker-jack, iron filings, antibacterial soap, pop art, pop tarts and pop-o-matic trouble...sometimes I work within these influences and sometimes I feel trapped by them, as if my mind has been taken over by old coca cola jingles that want me to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. It’s a frightening, unsettling thing, not unlike that movie Alien unmet with Sigourney Weaver or the discovery of velcro.

AE: What excites you right now?

AE: I’m excited by troubled writing and anything that contours and plays with imagination, language and art from whatever era: Baudelaire’s *les Fleurs du Mal*, brooding existentialists, Christian Bök’s sound and vision, the writing and psychedelic art of Steve Venright, the visual poetry of Jim Andrews and Derek Beaulieu, Emma Goldman’s manifesto on free love, the collage novels of Max Ernst, Dan Waber’s free idea factory, the fiction of Robert Kroetsch and still his poetry of which I am enamoured, everything Nicole Brossard does, the photographs of Man Ray, silent films featuring Kiki of Montparnasse, Bookthug, Montreal, especially the Montreal Botanical Gardens and its hotel lobby bars from the 1950s, quarrelling with brooding existentialists, Rob Winger’s long poem *Maybridge’s Horse*, Lisa Robertson’s *The Weather, the Men and the Office for Soft Architecture*, Monty Reid’s *Luskville Reductions*, avant-lyric, Erin Mouré, Matthew Firth’s short stories and his magazine, Front and Centre, the possibility of a train trip to New York City once George Shrub is finally vanquished like the villain he is, the life of Oscar Wilde, the syanesthesiactic sympathies of Rimbaud, sleeping with brooding existentialists, the films of Guy Madden and Tim Burton, the essays of Fred Wah and Dennis Cooley and especially Cooley’s poetry, the *Story of O*, the entre genre writing of Nathalie Stephens, the smut of my fellow erotica writer pals Remittance Girl and Mike Kimera, the fiction of Emily Falvey, and Spencer Gordon, the poetry of Pearl Pirie, Roland Prevost, Nicholas Lea and Marcus McCann, the essays, fiction, poetry and mischief of a Mr. Rob McLaren, falling for brooding existentialists, Christine Stewart—a writer I just heard for the first time recently, Stephen Cain, labyrinths, pachinko, Andy Weaver, Nathaniel G. Moore, Alan Moore and so many more. The music of Jeff Buckley, Emm Gryner, Nina Simone, Bob...
Dylan, Lou Reed, Smog, Gogol Bordello, Ron Sexsmith. Prince and *Le Petit Prince*, Almond Rocha. *Wonderfull* by William Neil Scott, the colour red still fires me up and right now i enjoy the shandies at Darcy McGees because they use real ginger beer

**AE:** Why troubled writing?

**AE:** because it's the end of the world as we know it, even if that's not my own song: order, flawlessness, smoothness and objectivity, distance and perfection scare the beejeezus out of me. i can offer only randomness, love without conditions, intimacy, turbulence, variability, failure and confusion. i have no answers, only questions, compassion and empathy. i am wingless, nothing i can do will cure AIDS in Africa, lower the cost of rice, turn water into water, stop global warming, lure soldiers from Afghanistan, cure drug addictions, loneliness or anorexia. it doesn't mean i've stopped hoping or lost my humanity, but rather the opposite. i'm hoping that understanding might come at a slant rather than attacking it head on

**AE:** How do you intend to introduce pellmellism into the literary canon?

**AE:** by means of a canonless cannon, scattered shots...pell mell

*disclaimer: any association or disassociation with evening, the Canadian head of government and a well-known literary movement is uNiNtended. the ism, like the interrobang, is an unfortunate coincidence*

---

**THESE WORDS SAY INVISIBLE**

you have the beautiful eyes

you have some beautiful eyes

oh how beautiful your eyes

you speak only auxiliary verbs

layering another voice while you read

something about birds and materials

to build a house

isn't planned

situated in time a choice

places clean

the odour of turning

sweet at the bottom, dark

yellow from the corner

a sliver crescent on paper

curl the engine initiate page sequence

language buries beneath pre-positional fate

the glass jar unwalled
tarnished pools of turquoise phosphorescent earth quietly rising on wing of vapour trail foam to un dersand dusty lace light through mist wander frozen bladed swift & still concrete without water to castle caked and flaking in the dirt

white marbled madonna blood of climbing rose rusts memory oxidizes forsake n shadow across the floor

halo within halo of pollen sings lake into knowing yellow sugar white wedding slipped on silver service perpetual metal tap against window

orange for red urge cabbage kindred blue ceramic friendship p experimentation turmeric black impulse mustard creative cay

bonsai regret orchid grief lute desolation taiko drum remorse kabuki heart ache green tea anguish geish a melancholy cherry blossom pang haiku ache

orchestral smooth hush whale splash in oceanic tundra of tidal swept imaginary beast churning to the bottom of infinite storm wedged in an hourglass harbour in luminous syncopate bas relief
ghost navigates lilies breathes sincere as if longevity knife handles ivory carved narwhal teeth of a unicorn

baskful of facts bleached gossamer attempts to sew into resistance squared

there are no redwoods here the trees don’t move familiar words the moon glided and symphony

moon’s grammar a crater phrases for crest and wave alphabets of distance etched

dsnow crushes crab apples ice fermented hallucination juiced up city vinegar from streetlights, gasoline, mulched cardboard is how we fail

artist: Stefan Grambart

"Ghostwood"
Acrylic & Marker on Canvas
Sight defined by high beam’s arc—
solipsism pooled—we cast,
hoping our four black-ice prayer wheels
find purchase.
On through the crude oil night,
radio punched, clutchgunned,
dodging ditched wrecks gutterballed
by sleet that washes
blacktop and windshield, sludging
surfaces to lucent unity.
In the grey-yellow bulb light
Leviathan Co. tow trucks loom,
then dwindle in the rear-view’s inches.

I scan the perfidious penumbra
gauged by the odd blinker
of iridescent buck eyes
and the brake lights of upturned bumpers.
Laura folds a crane from the map,
watches it glide to its glovebox grotto.
Next, she nixes the radio to accentuate
the slush splatter, now audible
in the wheel wells.

Somewhere in that potential forest
an atrium pumps to fill a ventricle.
A snowmobile quiets, snow
no longer melting on its hood.
Water finds equilibrium,
an axe is forgotten, a feather
takes a long time to fall.
Warren Dean Fulton

1) this poem has received no financial assistance from; the National Endowment for the Arts, The Canada Council for the Arts, or any arts granting agency whatsoever

2) this poem has no poetical allegiances

3) this poem went out drinking & staggered home the next morning

4) this poem thinks it can save the world

5) this poem doesn’t read “How to Write Poetry” books

6) this poem acknowledges you (even if you ignore it)

7) this poem is bigger than Jesus (& John Lennon too)

8) this poem is available for a limited time only

10) this poem is the Zapruder film of short poems view it again & again to get to the truth of the matter

11) this poem is a lullaby cranked up past 10!

12) this poem is jealous of other poems

13) this poem has made every effort to ensure that all information contained within is accurate
Adrienne Ho

FLAT FIFTH

Diminished fifth, siren song
scuzzy ambulant wail
I played taunt on the keys like Tchaikovsky's kid brother
rising mid-cadence
Pyotr's teeth tightened in his duvet, gnashing tonic.
Sashay of tassels and taffeta
sashay of softest skin against sashay.
Chasséd, they say of your tumbling away,
half-made, rapt, turning.
I want your jettisoned Tonic! your tonic: you, still.
Bedsprings, headboards, blenders, bocce balls, laugh tracks.
Either the neighbour is noisy or the neighbour is crazy.
WE SPEAK OF MANY THINGS AT ONCE

We speak of many things at once.
Memory is a cheater.

The frog in the silt settled there long ago
and just now cultivates mixed feelings.

Buds lick their lips.
How like them. (Pink-
tasting.)
A maxim once read: Grief is a strangely clinging thing,

but clouds will glide by.
I don't know about you but I prefer tomatobio.

Suck you, pucker that.
My heart has a short-term lease on the midwest

and what if isn't on the list.
I'd like, in short, to live happily.

Ever and after will be in the end
what you've always dreamed of.
Sean Johnston

THEY MEET EACH OTHER IN AIRPORTS

How long were you making these plans?
I meant to call, they say, not remembering they bad called,

but had nothing to say.
What is the weather like there? Does it matter if it's

unknown? You are dressed in clothes you seldom wear.
You, with your bright bottle of water and reckless necklace,

rub your naked hand, with its dark nails, once across your throat.
Mouthing simple words, voices become terribly discrete.

And I thought so, too, long into the night.
I will never descend, I thought.

I am here in the dark, with my new strangers,
forever. This thing my own wife does in her sleep

beside me—is it habit?
Will someone miss it?

STILL LIFE, FIXING THE MAZDA PICKUP

The father tells the son next time call when it's night, never mind the time
difference.
He should be outside building an ark, or digging a hole to catch the rain, or both.

There was a time when his father wouldn't speak. Now he describes everything
he sees. There is a blue truck to fix, and therefore logistics, which are easy,

except for money. So the father takes his time reciting long lines about how simple
engines used to be—there was no way to diagnose the mechanical with software

and error codes; you knew by listening to the working machine. But this little
truck, with so little rust, won't make a sound. He's been at it the last three evenings.

The only thing left is the starter. Anyway, his hands have grown wider not longer.
They don't feel the cold but delicate movements are beyond them. He's afraid he's

lost
interest in the unmaking and making, the dark hands and oil, the hard crawl under
and back out.
Today, in this conversation, the voices move to wherever without event the refer-
ence

of hung wires. Even now, I can’t imagine where the words go without worrying
there's a virus or worm in your brain and that's why you forget what's been said
despite your best efforts. There is no immunity to a thing like this. I know what
he means.
Time goes too fast. Men don't come home from work anymore with their hair
oiled and parted,

with long sleeves in summer, tin lunch boxes with waxed paper to be reused. You
know
what he means too. There is a Nintendo with cigarette burns on a low shelf in
your own garage.

The garage is heated, maybe for the dog to live in during winter. And if the snow
were heavy,
it would sit impossibly thick on the black wires that used to span the poles. They wires always
seemed loose, they needed stretching, tightening, but engineers have reasons my eyes can doubt.
So even now, with the cables in ditches, I am afraid of the cold. You’re not. I am the one
calling my father, he is the one talking about the old truck. We all know this isn’t a love poem.
Some things are used for storage and we know that. Some things we hold so closely we can’t

see. He is rebuilding a machine. He and I know what it means, so when I hear him smash the window in the background, I want to leave the phone on the concrete floor

and find you. I better go, he says—the father, I mean—and there’s glass all over.
He does what the son is accused of, avoids exclamation.

You do the accusing, but not now. Now we don’t.

SPECTACULAR

The boy at the door says he hasn’t stuttered in months.
It’s a miracle drug and he can’t remember a thing about why
he’s taking it; it’s that good. But the research must be sustained.
We’re good at giving to proper causes like this.

My mother once took a bent and sorry bird to the vet, who couldn’t save it, and thought death was simpler and easier. She was right.

Imagine taking your cup of coffee to work at a desk waiting for broken animals to come and be killed. But this boy walks normal. I saw him go down the street 20 minutes ago, from my spot on the couch. Where are his crutches? Why does he smile?

Two years ago my father died and his disease now kills me also, but slowly, of course. It’s never the child’s fault, when they
tell us things we cannot believe. Nobody should have to sell magazines to raise money for learning words down at the school.

No one should come to my step and ask anything. I care for my poor mother, hoping when it is time someone else will

be there to care for me. This boy whistles and loves the new way he speaks, but does not remember the old way — the twisted words

that stretched for miles like rutted washboard roads, the maniacal pleasure of what went slowly by on its side, or what the length of the journey taught.

What was its strength? What caused him finally to stop on a lush lawn that made his naked feet precisely that for which they were meant? Where

in slow motion the comments made sense, the barking was sharp and f-f-f-fuck off was unnecessary. They all sat in the shade and laughed.
THE COMPLICATED MAWKISHNESS OF MY DAILY WALK HOME

Schools of painted wooden fish are stitched with wire to a wire fence
so children seem as natural as the weeds and rubble
the fence encloses. The beauty of the neighborhood
is everyone’s business, so that’s why my child
put a blue one on there with eyes as perfect as conjoined
moons after a drought. Choking, wordless, he hides all day
in his room. I can’t believe he stutters but
I see it sometimes when we have too many people at the table.
Everything he does is in these projects; I am allowed to see
what happens when he’s silent by the winter or summer
colour he chooses, his precise decisions. He never uses stencils,
and that’s why I can’t abide the stupid orange fish beside his,
the one with nothing but that white name LILY, standing out, here,
far from the ocean, as if a fish were an orange, as if
water weren’t blue as night, when it’s night,
because it is.
Ben Ladouceur

NAUSIKAA

Someday I will be all I need.
If things go as planned
I will be the smell of brick walls, stucco
and linen,
will be sunlight at dawn, curving and pimply
like the side of a fruit: so bright
I will wake me up.
I will be a bicycle that I will pedal,
my spokes will strike my baseball cards
against my bars and I will bleet. In the evening
I will serve me
and a party of myself will dine.
I will pass the salt
and bite the white strips off
my ribs and say “That was delicious.”
I will smoke after dinner
and will rise as smoke. Some night,
I will fall asleep
to the sounds I make outside.

She wakes him up with feet,
a foxtrot on his pudge and youth,
he ponders, is a song for the piano.

Nausikaa blinks, wakes,
as he cracks his fuzzy knuckles she
guesses goofily at his favourite name for a girl.

I like Europa, she says through cream teeth, but only for a redhead.
I used to turn the pages for my mother and the piano’s resonant tenor
my reward.

Nausikaa’s mouth, tiny and tactile, frothed and absolving
like the water at the top of the wave, her mouth is a world,
a household moon.

Nausikaa is the water before it hits the piano, no
he thinks, Nausikaa is the piano, whose hum
fills the house, the house is brought to its knees:

Nausikaa, please, it churns, I want to sing, oh Lord,
ab-my-heart, Nausikaa
I can sing with you.

She is another island left behind
at the top of his pile of islands left behind. Her snores
are celestial bodies and they circle in on his eager Earth.

She wants to be a house for him, her eyes are like
dog eyes, her pink and gibbous tongue. He trudges around her
and puts truth aside: thinks of her as a house.

Shh, he coos, before the ocean takes more of me, and more, Nausikaa,
let me hold you like a seashell, and I will eavesdrop
on your body of water.

ALL I NEED
THE MATHEMATICIAN AND ME

we have mutual friends, we make hilarious
eye contact, his articulate bone structure almost speaks:

I have been known to walk in at the wrong parts
of conversations, there are so few who have known
me as a whole.

Are you anything like me? Do you know the word
“simulacrum”? Does the paper of your body
have creases and folds in the same places?

emptiness is a commodity
for a mathematician, there is much to be done
with an empty ribcage or hollow hands

+ 

think of me as a computer screen,
my nipples as numbers in Braille, my hairs as digits
on the side of an endless ratio:

if you knew how I
try every night to give it
a death, if you knew

+ 

in February I skate the Canal with
the mathematician,
some of these detours are needless

one of us is going to lose his scarf to the
influential winds

he is in love, and not with me
and not with Ottawa
or the taste of sharp oxygen

there is a heat that
shoots madly from the mathematician’s wrapped chest
It must be a concept or a woman
Lainna Lane

ODOMETER TESTING: FIVE METHODS

“By integrate we mean to arc into a space without surface as if it were an inhabitable flickering event” – Lisa Robertson

1. (conversion)

after this outsiders
speech shorn
clipped vowels
the architecture of entrapment
& how to exit
gasoline alley

a northern city (central)
she drives one side
give me up here
I’ll settle
all roads
equal after

2. (suspension)

two hours
duplicitous newspapers
regional tragedies & realty
prospective web of shelf
dusty cigarette box
glass does not burn soaked in solvent
resists, I mean
thumb slick
oil print pronoun
slip mouth gritty egg in
cream tea & opaque
the fractured shell
white but not snow
we will leave
sunday
a new moon
3. (transmission)

it's the queen's highway
so we don't turn
back
radio ourselves
low in the sky
& barely making saints out
divide line tight
against crumpled wool belly
too much tea for drinking

I am drawn to vacant hotel
   drawers & out interior lights
   pillows feathery skin exhibition
   blankets without edges
   it's not like outside
   w/here too shy for waiting

4. (compression)

calgary curves me
carves secret
   offshore cemetery
cutbank edge lifting
   scorched ditch
   ,Cecil rooms
   what happens here
   by hour & overtime
   under the bridge
tight lip of riverbank
branches score the surface
   ,the bow river icing
gone too far without sharp
twang of flame
   -
(fresh water
   injected oil wells
   causeway flooding
   separation
   yields output) (we invite ourselves out for
   noodles)
   -
   he was a few days on the road
   on the rigs
   thought:
   take your chances a city
   without map rough up
   pub darts swaying basement
promises to lose he spoke shifts
   being from an offshore island
   barter for contingency
   shows me a card typed by hand
   shows me a plane ticket home
5. (emission)

morning television glow
semblance of sun

eyes the absence of colour
    pixel speckle
    lint & wet rails
some are afraid
missing reflections of
    others just feel their way
    light emitting
    printed ephemera

things I want
no one

needs
gold hair spawning
new clothes we fit

, transparent
, becoming
Marcus McCann

TWO POETICS STATEMENTS

One: Is hedonism pushy?
A sideways statement by Marcus McCann

I came across The Man with Night Sweats when I was in my final years of university. First published circa 1992, the book is about gay men, gay love and aging. It was Gunn's own coming out in a way, since Gunn spent most of his career hiding his sexuality behind a woolly, linguistic code.

In “The Hug,” his muscle-y, direct voice resonates with a kind of heaviness: what he is saying is, finally, at long last, not a secret. He was 63 when The Man with Night Sweats was first published.

THE HUG

It was your birthday, we had drunk and dined
Half of the night with our old friend
Who'd showed us in the end
To a bed I reached in one drunk stride.
Already I lay snug,
And drowsy with the wine dozed on one side.

I dozed, I slept. My sleep broke on a hug,
Suddenly, from behind,
In which the full lengths of our bodies pressed:
Your instep to my heel,
My shoulder-blades against your chest.
It was not sex, but I could feel
The whole strength of your body set,
Or braced, to mine,
And locking me to you
As if we were still twenty-two
When our grand passion had not yet
Become familial.
My quick sleep had deleted all
Of intervening time and place.
I only knew
The stay of your secure firm dry embrace.
(Thom Gunn, from The Man with Night Sweats, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992)

When we see our stories—here two men in a sleepy embrace (“My shoulder-blades against your chest”) —we find peace in ourselves. No. More than peace. Gunn shows us what intimacy can be shared between men: “The whole strength of your body set:/Or braced, to mine:/And locking me to you.” Man is call and answer, the semantic intimacy twinned in the poem’s quietly-enjambed end rhymes, the double masculinity twinned in the mechanic’s vocabulary: “blades,” “braced” and “locked”.

It was a wonderful discovery, “The Hug”, when I found it, telling me part of a story I was familiar with (sleeping with fellas) and a part of the cultural history of being a gay man of which, at the time, I very little about (the AIDS crisis).

When I was a teen, it was another poem about intimacy that I clung to. Of all the overtly gay poetry I found in the Hamilton Public Library, it wasn’t Walt Whitman, Hart Crane, Edna St Vincent Millay, Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Ginsberg or Carl Philips that got to me the most. Nor was it Canadians whose work I was beginning to discover—Sky Gilbert, John Barton, RM Vaughan—but a rather stolid Brit: WH Auden.
Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

Soul and body have no bounds:
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus sends
Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes
Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit’s sensual ecstasy.

Certainty, fidelity
On the stroke of midnight pass
Like vibrations of a bell,
And fashionable madmen raise
Their pedantic boring cry:
Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of sweetness show
Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness see you fed
By the involuntary powers.

Nights of insult let you pass
Watched by every human love.

(Wh Auden, from The English Auden, Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939, Faber and Faber, 1988)

In this poem, I found a microcosm of everything I would come to feel about my sexual relationships. It was a kernel that opened slowly, over the course of a decade, revealing truth after truth about both author and reader.

Secular love, love that isn’t invested with a lot of bunk about “destiny” and “the One” can sometimes be hard to find in lit of a certain age. Here the love is “faithless” and embrace of stanza one is “mortal, guilty.” (Later in life Auden became religious, but this existential prayer shines with an acceptance of the human condition, sans God.)

The second stanza warns against mythological, capital-R Romantic love, (“Grave the vision Venus sends/Of supernatural sympathy,/Universal love and hope”) and the third stanza gives up on monogamy and life-long attachment altogether. The poem tells me everything I need to know about love—and also which societal rules are hogwash: “Certainty, fidelity/…pass/Like vibrations of a bell.”

Who knew a poem about a bathhouse could yield such weight?

What is the vision Auden gives us of (gay) love here? It’s human, it’s impermanent—but it’s sure as heck worth it. Auden’s poem is just as riveting if, in your own life, you’re looking out over a sea of one-night stands or if you’re entangled in something longer term, with all the stresses and faultlines that entails. Perhaps it doesn’t read so well if you’re the till-death-do-us-part marrying type in search of The One: but those types already have enough literature that re-enforces their world view.

Auden’s poem is everything I could ever hope to write. Although I’ve borrowed my technique from elsewhere—among the living, apologies to Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, D.G. Jones, Kevin Connolly, Ken Babstock, Les Murray, Mark Doty, David O’Meara (himself indebted to Auden)—the urge to write about desire comes straight from the old fart.

It’s comforting—especially for non-traditional lovers of all types. “Lay your sleeping head, my love” reminds us that intimacy is not off-limits—as is sometimes suggested—to us bachelors, polyamorists, serial monogamists, people in open relationships, confirmed bachelors…and the anonymous lover in us all. Whatever the sexual arrangement, “from this night,” says Auden, “Not a whisper, not a thought, Not a kiss nor look be lost.”

And, finally, a plea to “find the mortal world enough.”
Two:

THE SHIVER

The way you had to stand to swing the sledge,
Your two knees locked, your lower back shock-fast
As shields in a testudo, spine and waist
A pivot for the tight-braced, tilting rib-cage;
The way its iron head planted the sledge
Unyieldingly as a club-footed last;
The way you had to heft and then half-rest
Its gathered force like a long-nursed rage
About to be let fly: does it do you good
To have known it in your bones, directable,
Withholdable at will,
A first blow that could make air of a wall,
A last one so unanswerably landed
The staked earth quailed and shivered in the handle?

(Seamus Heaney, District and Circle, Faber and Faber, 2006)

What to say about the sinewy, vital tongue of Seamus Heaney? I’m blown away by the grammar of “The Shiver,” a sonnet which contains no periods—and not because of stylistic deviance, but because there’s no place for one. This is a single 14-line thought. Caught up in the cool confidence of the poem’s opening eight lines, a reader could easily miss Heaney’s sleight of hand. He only provides us with noun phrases—not full sentences—hammering it home by beginning each phrase with “The way you,” “The way you,” “The way you,” and ending each with a semi-colon.

Then, bam!, the one and only main clause – a question that begins the sestet: “does it do you good / to have known it in your bones .../ ?” Violence, power and beauty are summed up in the poem’s finest line “A first blow that could make air of a wall” before the final couplet beats a hasty retreat. To end with a question is appropriate; it rings through us like the sledge’s “shiver” so that we must “half-rest” after reading it.

Most sonnets rhyme, and this is no exception. But look at the internal consonance and assonance. Heaney’s ear has caught something so tightly wound up, the whole poem practically rhymes with itself. Listen to “spine and waist / A pivot for the tight-braced, tilting rib-cage.” In addition to the internal rhyme (waist/braced), “waste” will echo with three slant rhymes (fast, rest, last). But it’s the passage’s repeating consonants and shifting, recombining vowels that really get the tongue working.

Heaney, who turns 69 this month, is still producing A-list material. While it’s tempting to write off the subject as either physical labour or violence, “The Shiver” is essentially a poem of nostalgia. Its narrator is an older man talking to other old men. The poem’s physical labour is a memory; Heaney carefully puts the sledgehammer’s action into the past with the word “had” in lines one and seven. And so, he asks “Am I a better man because I used to do physical labour?” I read it rhetorically, with a tacit “yes” implied in the octet’s loving description. But that’s part of the beauty of the poem. An answer is implied, sure, but remains “withholdable” in the “unanswerably” crafted poem.

These days, I’m really stoked about poets who pay close attention to consonance and assonance, in particular who write lines heavy with guttural noises like “The Shiver.” I’m talking about the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon and Les Murray—which finds its Canadian expression in Ken Babstock and Karen Solie, among others. Does this sinewy tongue have a name? Why haven’t I learnt it?
CREATIVE CYborg ANXIETY MONOLOGUE

So what I’m antsy.
I miss my prosthetic
suggestion box.

Snowstorm and
doubt in cahoots, how
the walk begins,

the sweet weekend
stupor broken by
a sidewalk

thinned to footy
ditch lanes. Roadside
gone rural.

In the hustle,
a thought a minute
cooking dings

of Michael’s crutches,
will for pub lunch
he risk slipping?

Intubation
yanked out—
a today problem

of was unconnected
cell-and web-ly
some eighteen hours.

M.I.A.
A zap blackening
schmucked hydropole,

or like a big wet tether
and, bred domestic, blank
space scares me.

Is it so far
from drunk, a math
suddenly beyond me?

I have a motherboard
like an extra ear
and sound travels.

At the four-lane
the sidewalks clear
or widen, the trudge
to lunch
thickens. The tiny cohort
of plug, port, jack

an unsure college;
here the lecture in maybe
fits the three ring.

But when the rope
of path opens up, I think
to miss something

manufactured
is OK. If an email
swam uncaught

and if he hobbles
to the pub or no—well,
test scores welled up

without that data
and hiccup, er, glitch
it elbowed off. There,

I think did it?
Have the chips
bloomed

like bruises or
tattoos? A singing
card or tin pace

maker? Then again,
the uncanny method
of unwiring

a robot—to purge
tools is teething reversed,
no matter the resale
on refugee parts.
The creative cyborg
anxiety

monologue
I test. Or
I test and reset.
rob mclennan

from VARIATIONS: PLUNDER VERSE

Catriona Strang’s
“Low Fancy,”
variation one

I am a renovated tongue; tell us,
if love is simplicity, stunts,
irritation. Respond.

Barry McKinnon’s
“pages from a prairie journal,”
variation two

or is it my imagination

stillness, before lemons
at the country store

the dust settled, clinging
to the fine hairs

given to me
, a mistake

when i was in love
i was in love

you could tell
by the way i hid

trees
into guitars and birds

distinction before rain
and confectionaries

this museum of skulls
and sex

like alien dust
Barry McKinnon’s  
“pages from a prairie journal,”  
variation three

this country is dying  
with the sureness  
of history; a block of houses  
the renunciation of boyhood,  
of manhood  
when curtains settled; how  
can i love  
is it the lemon juice, my  
strong name, house, given  
to me a mistake  
you can tell, by the way  
with the distinction of pride  
and grandmothers  
i have no symbol  
as curtains; nameless

Catriona Strang’s  
“Low Fancy,”  
variation two

next night i’ll leave  
or name an ease  
annulled  
if latitude quickens,  
no more  
to burst their manner  
with ominous sight  
a distinct irritation  
it can neither carry  
nor obscure
Stephanie Bolster's
“The Japanese Pavilion,”
variation five

there is a mouth
it can easier to be happy or sad
over the wall, a crane
i only said serenity
the less plentiful dream
that erotic triangle they inhabit
repeats

bpNichol's
“talking about strawberries all of the time,”
variation three

naming his name, shout softly
their relation
is clear, description
of a landscape
second time, a bird speaks
thru a river
description, any
, glows
a different thing
simply parts
as strawberries,
sense
now let me say, no,
it is
when i let myself
, happy
as you would recognize
Catriona Strang's
“Low Fancy,”
variation three

whose addled bonus, as caring
as a bulge

mirrors prize hymns,
glass cone

grabs

promise me, dont safety
the old excesses

from now on

damn misery
and silence

in unison

artist: Gail Bourgeois
Vane-Heart, 2008, acrylic on canvas.

www.gailbourgeois.ca
Christine McNair

MOON AT 3:00 AM, REFLECTED

Like a cut fish, I feel for the light
on the tips, the grace found in nailbeds,
or on the ridge of a storm, things
that cannot call out their own name,
silenced by yelps and pitches, a night
gone purple with cold. Only a step
between what is and what isn’t,
a break in the throat. I dream
of white waters in cold glass,
a reckoning - a breaking hope.

I dream but don’t rest, only a scar
of shore to the left window,
mare tranquilitus, mare equus,

the white lap of the water in the sink
slipping between my fingers, I suck
the tips and crave the salt.

MATTER

You’ve come back from the dead:
they delayed you with flowers that bloomed
in the night, each cereus fluorescent,
their petals flush with powder. I blacked
my eyes out until I saw sparks, until a pulse
came under the eyelids and I see you smiling,
growing faster and taller, eating up the sky
until all I see are your hands and they wave,
you laugh until the ground shakes, until the clocks
burst open, spitting out their wheels and a flock of books
fly up, bent like doves and all that time spent waiting,
knowing you’re too reckless to live amongst fossils,
too much of everything to be nothing.
LONDON

Beetled black cabs shook down the road but I kept stepping, down to grey oiled Thames, to the postcard shops where plastic beefeaters slashed red over chalky sky and imperial column. A tangle of bridges cross the waters and I consider a child adjusting her shoe, one sneaker on the curb, the cobblestones melting into asphalt and cement. I walk until cathedrals fly up before me and I brace myself, all steel girder and beam. Nothing moves, the names of dead poets engraved in rock, but all I see is the flat indifference of windows.

The green hymn of the church flows with light poured under pale wood pews and I bend knees and light candles, scratch the white waxy pillars. And a choir is singing, they shuffle high crackling voices to echo a pastor in aubergine robes, vestments trimmed with thickest and darkest pile. A word hovers over me and I try, I search things out, but I can't help it; I think I am tired of London.

THE HOUSE

fills me with dread, it sits, an isolate, a cloaked man, lidded windows, baseboards humming, empty shelled rooms, the place I once stood.

Grows, but retains shape, expands and devours while I'm lashed to foundations. I drag it with me – damp grey basement, peach shag, scuffed doorways, your chipped blue cup. I stumble under the weight of grass shuddering in the yard, your hangers still in the closet, your sock still on the floor.

I call out your name to wood, I scream it at masonry, I worry at metal nails, I put my lips to brick.

The cruellest thing you ever did was chain me here and walk away, the gate in the fence still swinging.
MOVEMENT

this sensation of flight stands still your body
pushes back through the takeoff
the shake and rattle of seats clicking like keys
you fly but don't fly, 20,000 feet, 30,000 feet
as careful and straight as a yellow ruler, but
icarus thickens himself in the deep wells of your heart
poisons you with wax wings
and the flutter of his insistent pulse
you do not move but you think you do

CANADIAN AIR FORCE

I want to know who names these birds,
Beaver, Bonaventure, Caribou.

Why would you call a plane Albatross?
Lysander, Jenny, Catalina?

Some you can understand,
the heavy Hercules
the quicksilver Arrow
the tiny Chipmunk

but why Voodoo, Tomtit, Vampire?

The optimistic Starfighter,
better known as “Widow Maker”.

Our own patriotic Canuck
better known as “Clunk”.

I would like to name them for once:
grab each plane by the fin,
shake them until they bleed
the syntax of fuel and metal.

Their bodies bending in my grip
names that roar and rumble in my ears,
their pulpy centres stain red my fingers,

a burst of love
opens their skins, holds them in the quick
half-spoken stop of a first breath,
the rhythm of names inhaled.
Colin Morton

PLAY GOES RIGHT ON – NOTES ON POETICS

Perhaps the first time I heard poetry spoken and realized it, the poem went

Liar, liar, pants on fire.
Hung your clothes on a telephone wire.

This was a special kind of utterance, I knew right away. The insistent rhyme and rhythm, the vivid images that, I knew, bore a peculiar relation to the truth. Those images created by nothing but words packed a strong emotional punch, but said little or nothing about the location or condition of anyone’s clothing. The words referred to something else, a subtext that my preschool mind had little difficulty in grasping. Strangely too, although the words were packed with emotion, kids could express those emotions and go right on playing with the kids who made them angry. The words, because they were poetry, had a power to release emotion and also the capability to deflect those emotions, usually, away from a physical confrontation. This was a compact lesson for a four-year-old. Although they were fighting words, the lines invited not a physical but a verbal response, preferably just as clever. Poetry doesn’t make things happen in the usual way, I understood early, but things do have a way of happening when poetry is around. And it often leads to more poetry.

The first person I mentioned the “liar” verse to remembered a different version:

Liar, liar, pants on fire.
No one as high as a telephone wire.

Poems often acquire variants with repetition. In this new version, the feeling remains just as strong, perhaps stronger for small kids who have been frightened by the movie Pinocchio. Literary allusion isn’t a sophisticated refinement limited to court or ivory tower poetry; it is there from the start. We live in a world of stories as much as a world of things, and we understand stories by reference to other stories.

Cosmologists tell us that nothing about the universe would have been the same if things had happened slightly differently in the very early moments of its existence. Slight differences in initial conditions may have unpredictable consequences. The formation of stars and galaxies, the ratio of matter to anti-matter, the number of space-time dimensions—all these are the products of history, or evolution.

The same is obviously true of a poet. My flash of recognition on hearing Liar, liar, pants on fire probably marked me as a poet or writer from early on. Words have the power to create virtual realities—whether to dream of, work toward, or use against rivals—and whether as reader or writer this would always be a big part of how I understand the world. On the other hand, my poetics—my poetic practice—has depended on a series of historical accidents, chance encounters, and paths not taken.

In junior high school in Calgary, I spent summer holidays writing science fiction novels. Writing was an extension of daydreaming and a reflection of my reading. I enjoyed writing a few poems as school assignments, but I never thought of “becoming a poet” until the summer of 1965, when at nearly seventeen I hitchhiked from Calgary to Montreal and Toronto and returned with my older cousin’s university copy of Walt Whitman in my duffel bag and the lyrics to Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” in my head. Both made an impression on me; the latter more immediate. I picked up my mother’s old guitar, learned some chords, scanned the surrealistic liner notes from Highway 61. Back at high school I spent study periods scribbling poems and passing them across to my friends for instant comment. In the library I found some Frost and the New Canadian Library anthology Poets of Mid-Century.

It would be an exaggeration to say I learned anything from these early encounters, but it made an impression to know that poets live and breathe in the real world, and that Irving Layton could proclaim, “Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom.” As far as I could tell, that’s what Whitman was saying too. I was seventeen, so freedom was something I was very keen on. But I wasn’t ready to think about the ways of making poems. The guitar, the long hair, the debate with teachers over which of us was the cynic—all were expressions of sixties rebellion. But on another level, without yet reading Rilke, I intuited that to write something of my own I had to change my life. Only then could poetry start seeping in to occupy the vacant space. Being a poet was a refus global on a personal scale: it was a refusal of my middle-class upbringing and its expectations, including the expectation of a war every generation. A refusal of the culture of resource-extraction, the profit motive that turned the engines of the city, the province and the country where I grew up. Reading poetry and, almost immediately, beginning to write it affirmed for me that another way of living did exist.

I was aware of my own ignorance. How could I not be? What to do about it wasn’t as clear. I knew of no contemporaries, and made the youthful assumption that I was the first to discover everything writing poetry gave me, as far as purpose and direction were concerned. A short bike ride away, George Bowering was writer-in-residence at the University of Calgary, but I didn’t know that and would not have dared approach him if I had. By the time I enrolled, Bowering was gone, and Calgary went back to having no poetry scene. Except in the book stores and libraries, where I acquired, among others, Penguin’s Modern European Poetry in Translation, Anwood’s Circle Game, Notes for Underground and Power Politics, and several volumes of Neruda.

Recognizing my own ignorance, I chose literature, history and philosophy courses at university, my enthusiasms running, as seems likely for someone half-drowning in Whitman, toward the spilling wealth of language in Shakespeare and the pantheistic leanings of the Romantics. Keats’s letters were, and still are, a trove of critical touchstones for me, best known being “negative capability”—the poet’s immersion so far into observed experience that he “pecks about with the sparrows” leaving behind thoughts of society or self—which Keats contrasted to the “egotistical sublime.”
As I found in Atwood’s early books, the poem is a dive into another world, an act of shedding the ego (“escaping personality” in Eliot’s words). Blythe’s *Zen Classics and English Literature* related a thread in the English tradition with haiku and other Asian traditions. Anthologies like Jerome Rothenberg’s *Technicians of the Sacred* looked at ritual acts like shamanic trances as literary creations. Some of my visual poems, created as “objects for contemplation,” and chant-like sound poems owe their eventual form to my reading and listening in those forms.

I was never perfectly satisfied with this idea of the poem as an act of separation, however. I could not, in any case, escape my personality or avoid cluttering my poems with cultural debris that must betray the North American face behind the veil.

Pablo Neruda, a figure of the romantic poet in the seventies, to a North American poet’s eyes, called for, and wrote, “impure poetry”: “worn with the hand’s obligations ... steeped in sweat and in smoke, smelling of lilies and urine ... impure as the clothing we wear, or our bodies.” A poetry that includes the whole world (or seems to), rather than a refined distillation of it. Increasingly, as the measures of my writing expand from the lyric moment to historical eras – their deaths and births – I find my diction and vocabulary are “impure.” I want to mix casual with formal expressions with slang, to force clashes in the levels of language like the clashes of architectural styles in a modern city that is built upon an ancient one. I would like my poems to be as startling and vivid as “Liar, liar, pants on fire”; to light a fire under readers’ conventional expectations; to fan the embers of emotion with that gust of inspiration that Albert Goldbarth calls afflatus; to cause sparks of both recognition and surprise.

“A lyric poem is no railway schedule,” said Kurt Schwitters. If you want to know exactly where you’re going and when you are going to get there, then poetry isn’t the vehicle for you. The poem will soon go off the rails.

Poetry can be serious play, but it is always play. The rules are there, but as in the game of nomic, the object is to change the rules, or to use them in an unforeseen way, to see how far they can bend. There’s no formula for this kind of thing. For me it’s a matter of trial and error. In classrooms I have compared writing a first draft to playing a computer game. In the game, you can try all sorts of manoeuvres that have little chance of success; you can crash that racing car ninety-nine times before the stunt succeeds. Likewise when writing poetry: it may seem impossible to find the right mix of thought and passion, wildness and elegance, but I go ahead and try anyway. The wastebasket and the delete key are always within reach.
Jennifer Mulligan

THEATRE OF THE (EXACT) MOMENT
(or, DYLAN SINGS GRETA GARBO)

I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours.
Bob Dylan

1.

blame it on a simple twist of fate, that
i never meant for this to happen
there is nothing else to consume
remember only the way you paid attention
found laughter in my throat in my eyes
used me as a stone
fingers on my knee
on my back on my arm
touch of change
rush with no release
cassading collide

2.

a poem is a naked person, &
you never said anything
return of silence
too much to topple sand from my eyes
weak for one moment
your hand engulfed
brief flesh
heat and strength
touch of electricity
soothed me into slumber
into something that does not exist

3.

chaos is a friend of mine
that gets something from every exchange
crazy warmth too much of all at once
with the nothing i know about you
except your eyes
physiological
internal workings
reflect
centers of black pools
touch of breath
deeply into everything around
you take it all
MADNESS

My advice to you is not to inquire why or whither,
but just enjoy your ice cream while it is on your plate.
- Thornton Wilder

that your zipcode is coastal as opposed to my valley
that between us there is chemistry of touch
that you are a nanosecond of my life's schematic
that without you, there still is a me
that by your voice inflections you gave me everything
that you would have, and I would have and we know it
that you realize you will not see me again

VANCOUVER ETC.
SUMMER 2008

the sun and the moon
and your voice low

you were wondering
but didn't ask

red liquid poured from
your hands into my mouth

watched moves
against him or you

happy I was staying
thought of our time together

mapped it through
your frontal lobe

watched movies unfold
into small hours

with you to work
and I to home

not wanting it to end
but having it end anyway
Pearl Pirie

POETICS STATEMENT: WEIGHING MAPS: TRAVELLING POETRY

Poets tend to fall to circles. Some people pop up whether the venue hosts page poetry, form, free verse, spoken word, haiku, small press or big. Their model of poetry is more Venn diagram than the Frisbee that keeps to the ultimate park.

Poetry is a large label, contains and reflects parallel realities to fly to. There are constraints. It's a matter of physics how each cannot deeply, daily understand and care about everyone else's life. What was the statistics Silliman floated?

“If you read two books of poetry per week, you will fall behind in your knowledge of what exists and is out there to the tune of 3,900 books a year at minimum. Another way of putting it is that, at two books per week, you could read the poetry books published in the U.S., just in 2006 by roughly 2045. If you read a book a day, however, you can get it done by the end of 2014 or thereabouts. And then you could begin on 2007.”
(http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2006_06_01_archive.html)

And that's just the Published Books. Life is busy. How to winnow? Arbitrary as résumés thrown out on the basis of margins too narrow or font not as preferred? Or a typo, or a passé style? We need to reduce the options, the input.

Do we? Dana Guthrie Martin, when speaking on collaboration, spoke to this headspace of abundance, but on the view, when writing, that less is better,

“Some poets seem to operate from a position of scarcity when it comes to poetry, not one of abundance. They feel more gives you less in the end, as opposed to giving you more in the end. As if we only get so many poems in our lifetime and to play around with poems means we're going to run out of poems faster. Like the outdated notion that men have a finite amount of sperm and masturbation will result in dried-out plumbing.”
(http://mygorgeoussomewhere.org/2008/08/22/collaboration-might-look-bizarre-to-you-but-there-really-is-a-point/)

The more you read, the more you write, the better?

“I love poetry; oh I don’t read poetry” – various poets over the years

Might they be onto something? Is staying away from what you love the way to preserve it, or does distance only preserve the statement not the state?

By engaging more, you lose the sense of Truth of the feeling, tempered by negative examples, but gain a depth of experience that makes the love complete. Or am I channeling my mother and her counsel of, “You don’t have to like family, just love them. Love isn’t a feeling. It’s action.”

The more I read, the more I react. The more I write, the more I write, and the more I throw and the more carefully I decide to not chase a thought, understanding just how long final polishing can take. The censor flips on and off like a light on the blink. The upper brain may add all kinds of labels but it’s the lower brain calling (for) the shots. Reading poetry that is a dopamine hit restarts the blind hedonistic search and re-skews what I think is worthwhile or interesting.

We gravitate towards what fills the gap the way that a repairman gravitates towards a house needing repair, as Rumi put it. Poetry is a reaction to what it refuses to talk about or insists on talking about.

It is negative space in the sense of it being the shape of what it is not speaking to. It implies what isn’t said; it doesn’t explain the silence. Is it because the contents of the unreferenced is ubiquitous and bland, or because it is taboo?

Poetry is a response but how to read the psychology? An overwhelmed life wants - distraction and motion and nonsense and keeping the frenetic juggling to not stop against the barbed quilled pause and be thrashed by the porcupine lash. - or calm and needs to self-medicate with words of balm to counterbalance the intensity of the threatened beasties in the tree, in the ditch in the–. - or to stage protests against some outrage and pour every upset into that symbolic coffer for change.

Poetry gives clues on the spectrum of motivation. It's communication that shows how someone ticks while entertaining in tocks. Words are half the experience, the reader completing the poem. How does a reader in flux line up words that will map into the need?

“It's like making a map.” -- Elizabeth Bishop to Susan Howe

The process of reading and writing maps the self and the world while changing what it draws by putting it in one set dimension and asking to suspend disbelief over all the other ways it could be but “isn’t”.

But Why?
In obsession with time and dopamine hit of words, what counts as useful purpose?
For adding back beauty? For pressing out from inwards obsessive spirals? To press inwards into entrancing spirals of drilling thru mountains? What is the goal? To reinforce current path, learn it down to the stone? For confronting what's decided, thus deflecting into new regions? To appreciate all, or let oneself fall smaller but happier in the scarcity of a small loved set?

What's the cost of reading or writing in any particular direction? One way is to look at how the story went for others – what they pursued and were pursued by. What problems are they attempting to resolve thru their work? Are their goals comparable to mine? Can I induce or reproduce problems by pursuing the models of thought that are other lives? What's the trajectory of a piece? Am I coming from or want to go there?

In a dream there was a Maori/Haida hybrid totem, only one section, a Maori face but raven wings. It was dive-bombing a poet I tried to protect. The voice of the creature was a twisted ribbon and sounded like an East European crowd of hundreds settling and chatting. It dive-bombed us until I took panic in feet and ran. It pursued me instead until I literally ran into someone else who was braced for my impact, and as I looked back the totem dissolved into pixels. A later dream picked up the theme and I saw the totem on the wall of whom it had pursued, but it rested on a plaque like a deer, its log-head halved. I put my ear to its mouth but it was silent.

- own journal

Which trips add energy and value? New paths are long and strange and with sensory overload. Old roads we can autopilot thru. In poetry I resist exclusive streams. Where does that come from? I want to expand the map, of how others think and live. I want to keep the definitions of poetry – and thereby, perhaps by weak logic, myself – as open as possible. For some reason this seems important to me. Perhaps this comes from a vestigial ban on disagreeing or hating anything, a desire to keep to the spectrum from lukewarm to hot. Perhaps I position myself here because derisive superior sneers or any hierarchies distress me. Perhaps it comes from a need to see flotational good when the majority of all things are overwhelmingly pessimistic-feeling.

Good is in all, in different densities to different people. That doesn't mean that all poetry is equal and good poetry, in absolute or relative scales. One doesn't go mining where there is trace amounts, but veins. Different purposes need different mineral however. Public poetry as therapy is a shoe for a hammer. Private poetry as art is a hammer for an egg. Sometimes being (self-) named a poet is like being called a doctor and given scrambled eggs to make back into fresh in body, ready to conceive into a shell. But with each new form comes the boldness that you think you can be a doctor. Or a chicken. And with learning each constraint better, a humility check, a development, a mechanism to stay honest with messy date.

Hoarding reflex to not throw out anything as useless. When I try to make Good, it is in order to perceive, directly or obliquely something intangible, transitory stories, to add to archives what seemed significant, so that now or in retrospect there's enough data to reconstruct the current astutely and break the pat narratives of how right we are, or used to be, or how wrong.

It's perhaps part of my psychological bent, to act as peacemaker or instigator inside closed loops of consensus. It's part of the global trend of how, over life, I keep drifting to roles of information clearing house, liaison, to bridge distinct, normally non-overlapping worlds. I perceive better with sets of diversity. I'd rather be the meercat on watch, but keeping one role causes fatigue as well. I have to burrow deep by times, rest in being absorbed in a passion to pursue thru long tunnels.

Perhaps the tendency to look for wordiversity comes as a by-product of arranging luxuries of time to sift wide, or comes from a love of being a fish out of water, or a holdover romanticism of Renaissance Men. Or from a comfort with periphery, or discomfort with the commitment of being in inextricably deep where I am fully blinkered and therefore vulnerable to blind-siding. Learning as defense.

When I try to refine classes, subgenres, or even poets, that I'm more likely to like, I often find the result is missing the eureka that can't be indexed. It can be anywhere. The more I read any kind of poetry, the more I like it, and the more I like what isn't it. The more narrative I read, the more I like concrete poetry. The more I read experimental, the more I accept identity based writing. The more I read haiku, the more I want to break to the wider space of longer forms. The more I read imperial I, the more weight goes in the pendulum of BB tray to sway to what is not married to the linear and literal or what is sanctioned syntax for the social outings column at a local paper. The more I read of safe affirmations of form and fern, the more I lean into political free swarm and slam, surreal and creeds of anti-semantic.

The more I read the less sense the word poetry makes, descriptively or prescriptively. The label itself becomes a barrier. To see someone else invoke the word poetry makes, descriptively or prescriptively. The label itself becomes a barrier. To see someone else invoke the word poetry
K. I. Press

TURNING TO GLASS

The fossilization of soft tissues is not common.
You were born soft—hardened
while communing with beer bottles – old brown stubbies.
It takes a hundred thousand years or something.

Glass starts as sand and will end as sand.

Your organs harden.
Crack and fissure.
Brittle horrors we glimpse with every grimace.

Neat trick.
If you harden, really, physically, then our metaphors have no meaning.
We shut up and stop complaining.

LET US NOT COMPARE TRAGEDIES

Do not compare tragedies.
Each tragedy is its own. It was felt on its own, and tragically.

Your tragedy is equal to all others, for you.
You will almost undoubtedly meet someone, maybe every day, with a sadder story
than yours.
Be sympathetic. Soldiers may have raped them. They may have swerved
and killed their families, the only survivor. But do not be ashamed.
Your pain, for you, is just as good as theirs.
It fell to the ground with an almost inaudible thump, and a dog started eating it,
and you cried.
You were at the circus, which made it worse, and it was the last Sno-cone in the
tray.
It was the circus, at the Ag Grounds. There were clowns. This, finally, is what
makes it
unbearable.
DICK AND JANE AND ANDROID

No! You are lying, I have no emotions, therefore, I do not cry.
I am an Android.
I am not afraid of the dark sky, nor the bright fields of snow.
I have not seen wild dogs in the garden.
My toys are not lost in the snow.
I am not as smart as I look.
The cold does not make my face go numb;
it is numb.

Someone sweeps in with a big hand to stiff upper lip me;
it does not hurt, but I must be locked away.
My metal self my own bright lock,
under the covers with a flashlight and Dick and Jane.
Do not cry Jane.

THE LAND OF STRESS

Paralysis is slow
stress, relative.
Earth moves, lava flows
paralyzed between the tremors,
a slow, undetectable creep.

Passivity, relative.
The earth acts through no fault of its own.
Which direction to send the continents?
If you asked the earth, it wouldn’t know.
Passive spitting new rocks on our fields, passive tripping us with itself.

Forgive it, it’s just a planet. New rocks will grow lichen, sheep and fertile valleys
then fold into themselves, melt and start over. Sooner or later.

Stress keeps minds and bodies
on high alert, possibly red, at least tangerine.
Ready for whatever, sooner or later, will kill them.
Roland Prevost

WITH APOLOGIES TO CHARCOAL WITCH

Transmutation’s drudge work done
by mouths.

Insects in congregations
    crawl in heaps
recycle
    a good cause.

    Summon up the plague again
send it to pluck harvests.

Pummel down the gates.
    Shape the apparent curse
from sage pews.

Names wrapped in dark cloaks,
attract the hiss / belong as underbelly.

Make room on the canvas
for us to co-exist
    like editor        cuts
large characters

lay to rest.

SUICIDES PACKED

Mutual victims of
bland weather. Mercenary
operations coalesce into
our bold in names:
larger headlines.

~

Glacier-climb accessories:
picks & cleats. Body warmth
disturbs clothing, anoints
our radioactive importance.
Sharing this next stance,
drenched in sweat that
clings to fear &
anger, where both
equally nerve-slam.

~

Armistice pens, stolen
before signatures get
affixed. Surrender
to the rambly
trembling note.
THERE'S ALWAYS

slanted rain
a dirty pavement sullies it
& a grate that swallows whole

Symptoms twitch at the chance
when changes sync to the pitch

On paper maps, highlit paths marked:
how best to navigate another's tragedy

Nest instincts stim the gene
stems, working on it thru you.

Battleships sail this gutter
enforce under typical security pretenses –
these gridlock streets

OUTSIDE THE CINEPLEX

At some point arrive to
questions of recession.

The amazing power, of a child under six,
to discomfit every adult in earshot with
a three-letter question: "Why?"

These first indications.

Or later, bulldozing past Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum*,
noticing cardboard fronts
instigating floods to soften back to pulp.

Further instances, depending on thresholds of:
love gone bad,
ill luck,
face of mortality setting off alarms.

All snooze-buttons broken.

A returning comet's elliptical orbit –

maybe once or twice after that
before our three-letter question's really
done with you
or time runs out

Trapped in a tautology
with zero doors out –

unless you make one up
& dare take it
ZENITH SCRAPER
From this rooftop skyline
parades a vague underglow

Each honeycomb apartment throws
a step in the gestation of everything
good or bad yet to bloom

Insects collect behind windowpanes
all the stories that ever were
on every stage in eyesight’s reach
for whoever’s playing a bored Balzac
overlooking

One thin snapshot moment
wedged
whether one were to
check out / or not:
it’s a long way down

Wine bottle’s half full
you heading up to join me
any minute now

HOW HALOGEN GRINS
(unrequited 17)
under track lighting
much pilfered moon

this cocktail minute rambles
jabs the ribs

puff it up larger
than jawbone hinge

skip red heartbeat’s flesh
insert what’s silenced between

didn’t know you’d attend –

& my lion of a passion
can’t escape the zoo
DECOPLED THE INERENCE

During your division into mitochondrial pairs, what were you thinking?

Your sleepy imprecise hard to make out face off the shiny horizontal of this arborite table – one flattened cheek in repose.

Lately, the low-light graininess of your opinions, sliced out whole. My sandwich instruments still conduct just-so stacks of aminos.

What amniotic plan hatched & packed away for later?

The seize of your utterance into the funnel of my hearing – the cochlea’s spiral itself never actually seen, but humming there

all the same at work.

APPOSABLE THUMBS

slo mo and big
half a prefab house
sails thru the air

at the roadside’s edge
by the traffic circle
where he’s hitching

( odd taste of tomato sardines on oatmeal bread
or maybe the knife point
brandished self-defense last night
/whatever his thoughts interrupted

a flatbed truck careens
doesn’t guess centrifuginal forces

& so it’s demi-house cargo tips
flips end to end flies
show noisy shatter
into the ditch beside him

tales to tell
practically drop at his feet

another ten metres &
underaged meat his name

that evening
when two soused women
teachers on a driving vacation
provided quite an education
IF PRESSED

traffic zigzags
ice-cumulus
one beam sun day reaches february ground
   fell to nothing &
   light-years crossed hands
stick to lanes on highways
   we trem/ bled tum/ bled until
   time itself reset itself fit self
driveway turn signal
   shout from wide-open
equation or
god:

CLAM OFFENSIVE

A wet dog shakes you off
Apartment's finally just my own, re-gained

Post safe faces scaffolded & chiseled
colourpic
   as carpets for the outside world
to trudge on
   Rust that only flakes
dream of / your lips
plastered unfit inside the walls
Vehicles, well-armoured again
missiles, deterring again –
invading a clambake gone awry
Monty Reid

CONSTRUCTION SITE

1. CRANE
Deus ex machina.
A claw comes out of the sky.

2. HARDHAT
It keeps you from looking up.
But whatever falls, you’re protected.

3. TORCH
What comes apart in the fire
can also be healed by the fire.
Either way, it’s hard on the eyes.

4. GLOVE
One glove is lost.
The other one says ‘hold on to me
hold on to me’.
It knows.

5. PIPE
If all the pipe in the world was laid end to end
It would reach to where, Mars?
That’s what pipe dreams of, lying there in a pile.
Mars, and plumbers.

6. CABLE
Unspool it through the maze
of what you longed for.
Whoever comes behind you
will wonder why the hell
did you put it there?

7. LADDER
Whatever takes you up
also carries you down.
You have to go
whichever way you fear the most.

8. I BEAM
In cross-section
it is pure ego.
And if you cut it there
it won’t hold anything
up.
Shane Rhodes

Manifestación

In March 2008, a cascade of cacerolazos (“big casseroles”) took place in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina. The sound of banging pots and pans spread from barrio to barrio as people took to the streets to protest inflation, food shortages, increased government taxation on grain exports, and to sound support for Argentine farmers.

The above image (a waveform) was obtained by inputting a cacerolazo sound file (recorded on an Olympus digital recorder) through WASP (a speech analysis program designed by Mark Huckvale of University College London) to graph signal amplitude against time progression. The audio recording was made in Buenos Aires on March 20, 2008 at approximately 7:30 PM on the corner of Alvear and Rodriguez Pepe.

Fonts of Power
mediatation on Treaty Five, inspired by the video installation “Revolución” by Ernesto Oroza

Her Most Gracious Majesty, the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland (Braggadocio)

Her Majesty the Queen (Curlz)

HER GOOD PLEASURE (Perpetua Titling)

Her Majesty's Government (Party Letters)

Her Majesty with the behaviour (Gill Sans Ultrabold)

Her Indians (Handwriting Dakota)

Her Majesty further (cracked)

HER MAJESTY IN THE PURCHASE OF AMMUNITION (Ouch)

Her Majesty in bringing (Courier)

Her Majesty, Her successors (Future Condensed)

Her Majesty with the behaviour (Myriad STD)

His Majesty the King (Edwardian Script)

All text in this mediation is taken from the Government of Canada 1875 Treaty Five document. Font names have been added (in Myriad Pro).
Suzannah Showler

TESTIMONY

if a plane crashes in mauritania
and nobody is there to see it
does the pilot die

(hollowed but whole
the inversion of a question
thickens with age)

the remarkable thing is
swallowing, a memory of water

an absence
dead tissue, a hole where language
slick as muscle, gleans against, forgets
itself.

significance holds its weight in lists
names, what we become

breathless patches of scalp

a dusty alto

learned rabbits, gardens curious
the sex of trees
hinging on weather

how much was lost,
and which dialect insisted
the firmness of triumph

there is something to be said
the roped finish,
the crimson reduction

the folding of a life
and offering

artist: Marc Adornato
SMASH – 2007
This is a still frame from a video-performance where Marc creates a wall of noise pollution with an organ, and then smashes it to pieces with a baseball bat. This video-metaphor for modern times can be seen on Youtube, Marc’s website, or on his 2008 Video Art compilation DVD, “Earth Craze”.

www.adornato.com
Sandra Ridley

POETICS STATEMENT: 5 STATEMENTS : 5
DISCARDED NOTES

If poetics is unruly. If it resists being defined. If it's shifty & dynamic. If it responds. If it changes as we do: by who we read, where we live, what we live through, who comes into our lives, who leaves.

* 

Growing up on a grain farm in Saskatchewan. The nearest town down the TransCanada & across the tracks. No, not a town, a hamlet of twenty-six people.

Packing a vinyl suitcase & climbing into a Greyhound bus.

This is what I remember – but so what?

* 

What we can't.


* 

As potent as words & their collusions can be, something essential is missing when we write: what wasn’t told, can’t be told, what we don’t know & might not ever know. *If only & what if.*

What could our little lives have been like?

* 

Where poems may lie: in questions, in uncertainty, in fragments & distortions & transient versions of stories which might or might not have been lived – the elusive, hidden, invisible, lost, absent.

artist: Stephen Taylor
contact: stephentaylorcd@gmail.com
Mike Spry

BOGGLE PICKLE FELINE

The widow Parker's head exploded like a pigeon full of antacids. Her seventy-eight year old body stood in place, wrapped slightly around the door frame of her apartment and into the hallway. A Readers Digest was still firmly gripped in her left hand, where her wedding ring still shone brightly where it had for fifty-six years. Most of her skull was missing, and what remained was smouldering wastefully, like a Sunday morning campfire. And then all you could hear were the sirens, faint and anxious, in the distance. Cat slept.

Sirens had passed through my life unnoticed. At the retirement home where I work, or used to, as an orderly, they are part of the day. They signal a constant cycle of the elderly being restocked like shelves at Wal-Mart. After my first few weeks I hardly noticed their desperate wail. It wasn't such a bad gig though, really. I could have done without the bedpans, the soiled sheets, the unanswered knocks at dinner time. But it had its advantages. For example, once you knew who the Alzheimer sufferers were you could help yourself to the occasional gift. Mrs. Carlson for example in 629. She thinks she smokes two packs of cigarettes a day, when in fact she only has one. Luckily she smokes my brand. Mr. Malone in 243 does not go through a bottle of Grant's a week like his worried family believes. Miss Kramer in 222 is not constantly misplacing her panties and nylon's, and her neighbour Mr. Cooper is often found wearing Mr. Rollins's toupee, and vice versa.

Sometimes I'd switch all of their television remotes. The thought of them flicking helplessly at a blank screen sends me into hysterics. Cat though, Cat doesn't find it amusing at all. Some days I liked to watch Jeopardy with Mr. Howell on Channel 7, an hour after I watch it with Mrs. Griffith on Channel 18. Howell fancies himself a genius, and is constantly baffled by the poise with which I answer all the questions. There's usually twenty bucks riding on Final Jeopardy. That's an extra hundred an hour after I watch it with Mrs. Griffith on Channel 18. Howell fancies himself a genius, and is constantly baffled by the poise with which I answer all the questions. There's usually twenty bucks riding on Final Jeopardy. That's an extra hundred.
drummer from Journey and left us to hit the road. Or maybe it was Styx. Or the bass player from Kansas. Dad always told the story differently, but I got the gist of it. Women were whores and the 80's sucked for rock. We always had a roof over our heads though, and Golden. He made a mean Kraft Dinner. Added a slice of processed cheese to it.

He tried though. Once when I was six, in a moment of sobriety, he bought me a pet hamster. Unfortunately by the time he got home he had forgotten about the furry little purchase. He left it in the car. It was winter. In Ottawa. We found it the next morning frozen to its water dispenser and hard as a rock. I would've named him Chester. Dad said nothing and pitched the cage onto the front lawn and drove me to school. He told me that all women were whores, gave me a swig of his Golden and said to get over it.

We did go camping once. We drove up to Murphy's Point and pitched a tent. Dad drank Golden and made us a fire with some gas he had me siphon from the Buick. At night we burned hot dogs and he told me ghost stories about a disembodied groupie that haunted single fathers in their sleep. Later, Dad got out his .22 and we went out shooting the hinges off occupied outhouses. Dad was a steady shot, even when drunk. This was made most evident on my eighteenth birthday, when I came home from school and found him slumped in his recliner, a Golden in one hand, a shotgun in the other and the back of his head covering most of the wall behind him. A note was tucked into the pocket of his shirt. It read simply: "Avenge Me." He was thirty seven, tucked into the pocket of his shirt. It read simply: "Avenge Me." He was thirty seven, and I miss him.

I took Cat from the home about a decade ago. You're not supposed to have pets, so when Mrs. Drummond complained that someone had stolen her cat, the administration simply had her intake of blue pills upped and made arrangements for a steady diet of pink pills in the near future. At first Cat seemed upset in her new lodging, pissing everywhere and being generally uncivil towards me. I bought her expensive food made with rabbit and potatoes, and a very large bag of catnip. Eventually the opulent meals and not across? Well they didn't tell me. Plus, apparently the sight of my own blood makes me faint. Odd, for a man who once spent three days cleaning up pieces of his father's brain. And I hadn't bothered to plastic bag the place because I figured, well, not to have to worry about it. I came to a few hours later, just not fucking dead, and I mean really, what does it take? But the mess. Christ. I didn't bother doing it in the living room and swallowed three pink, two blue, one brown and some Tums (poor pigeons). Cat just sat across from me and stared. It was creepy. A few awkward minutes later I passed out (or so I think, I may in fact have blacked out, there's no way of knowing, Cat hasn't said either way). I woke up some eighteen hours later, covered in my own shit and piss and vomit. Cat was nowhere to be found. There were several angry messages on my answering machine from a severely pissed off gentleman from Angelo's Westside Pizzeria.

So, ya, pills don't work. But at least at this point I was mentally prepared for success, which took a load off. Even got me kind of excited, in a Brockville sort of way. I had hoped to be successful by slitting my wrists. Anyone ever tell you to cut up the wrists and not across? Well they didn't tell me. Plus, apparently the sight of my own blood makes me faint. Odd, for a man who once spent three days cleaning up pieces of his father's brain. And I hadn't bothered to plastic bag the place because I figured, well, not to have to worry about it. I came to a few hours later, just not fucking dead, and I mean really, what does it take? But the mess. Christ. I didn't bother doing it in the living room and swallowed three pink, two blue, one brown and some Tums (poor pigeons). Cat just sat across from me and stared. It was creepy. A few awkward minutes later I passed out (or so I think, I may in fact have blacked out, there's no way of knowing, Cat hasn't said either way). I woke up some eighteen hours later, covered in my own shit and piss and vomit. Cat was nowhere to be found. There were several angry messages on my answering machine from a severely pissed off gentleman from Angelo's Westside Pizzeria.

After that, I started calling in sick to work a lot, but not before a healthy pilfering of pills of all colours and shapes. Even some big brown ones. Word to the wise man, pills don't work. You've seen it. Truth be told I didn't really expect them to. My cousin Raoul tried pills, just ended up passing out and shitting himself. Same with Rebecca Schaffer. And Jackie Collins. Or maybe it was Joan. Fuckit, it was a Collins sister nonetheless. I stapled black plastic garbage bags over everything in the apartment, even the floors, so I wouldn't have to spend the next day cleaning my own excrement off the Lay-Z-Boy. I remember having to clean pieces of my Dad off the wall, the carpet and his Lay-Z-Boy. Not a peaceful memory.

I know it sounds weird, but the suicide attempts gave me something to do, a purpose kind of. I never had a purpose before. Made me feel important for once, like a city councilor or a pornography sound technician. Garbage bagging the apartment took a while too, Cat hardly lifted a paw. She watched quietly from the window sill, ready to take off at any moment. Bitch was mocking me. When I was ready, I sat cross-legged in the middle of the living room and swallowed three pink, two blue, one brown and some Tums (poor pigeons). Cat just sat across from me and stared. It was creepy. A few awkward minutes later I passed out (or so I think, I may in fact have blacked out, there's no way of knowing, Cat hasn't said either way). I woke up some eighteen hours later, covered in my own shit and piss and vomit. Cat was nowhere to be found. There were several angry messages on my answering machine from a severely pissed off gentleman from Angelo's Westside Pizzeria.

I shouldn't blame Cat though. I accept the blame. Some mornings my reflection scares me, so I can imagine how the rest of my world must feel. Late Monday afternoon Cat found me passed out on the living room floor with a half empty bottle of rat poison in my left hand. Cat did nothing of course. I came to twenty minutes later. If it hadn't been for the fact that it was an organic and humane rat poison meant to put the rodents to sleep and not kill them, she would have felt so guilty. A pizza arrived shortly thereafter. I had figured someone besides Cat would have to find my body. I tipped very well.
When, in grade one, we were asked to bring in our favourite bedtime story most kids fell asleep. Dad, of course, had made sure I knew everything there was to know about handguns. He showed it to me one afternoon while we were watching nothing on his unplugged Sony plasma screen. "For killing Jesus," he said with a wry smile. I had no idea what he meant.

I'd ever seen in my life. Made a Magnum .44 look like a gerbil's penis. He showed it to me one afternoon while we were watching nothing on his unplugged Sony plasma screen. Luckily they weren't home and I just borrowed some beer and let myself out. I ran into the delivery guy from Oregano's in the elevator on the way back up to our place. I guess pizza places don't share information. The damn cat still doesn't laugh when I told her. Beat me fair in Boggle though.

How many ways can you kill yourself? How many ways are there to skin a cat? (Thought I saw Cat crack a smile there, but now I know it was just a hairball. Or she's smarter than I give her credit for. Clever maybe is a better word.) Problem is, I had no guns. Weird, cause I did. After the investigation of Dad's death, the shotgun had to be given to me as it was legally part of the estate. How twisted is that? Hey kid, your Dad's dead, here's his gun, have a good life. I threw it off the Champlain Bridge. Regretted it ever since, wishing maybe I had considered the future before my hasty decision. Then I remembered Mr. Morrisette, from 512. Had the biggest handgun I'd ever seen in my life. Made a Magnum .44 look like a gerbil's penis. He showed it to me one afternoon while we were watching nothing on his unplugged Sony plasma screen. "For killing Jesus," he said with a wry smile. I had no idea what he meant.

Pills, wrists...oh ya, the hanging. There are no beams in our apartment, but I've got a balcony, right? So I tie the one end of the noose (nearly impossible to tie by the way, luckily my Dad had taught me as a gift for my tenth birthday. I had asked for a puppy) to the railing and the hoopy part around my neck and I step off the balcony. I know what you're thinking, why not just jump off the balcony sans noose and plummet to my death. Well, I didn't think of it till just now and plus I only live on the fourth floor and lots of people survive fourth floor falls. My cousin Zev for example. And Gary Sandy. And Christy McNichol. But ya, so I take a header off the balcony but I cut it short or something, eh? I ended up firing through the downstairs neighbours screen door. Luckily they weren't home and I just borrowed some beer and let myself out. I ran into the delivery guy from Oregano's in the elevator on the way back up to our place. I guess pizza places don't share information. The damn cat still wouldn't laugh when I told her. Beat me fair in Boggle though.

Dad, of course, had made sure I knew everything there was to know about handguns. He would read me Smith & Wesson catalogues and NFA safety literature as I fell asleep. From my cold dead hand. That was my favourite expression as a kid, still is. When, in grade one, we were asked to bring in our favourite bedtime story most kids brought The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, or Curious George, or Dr. Seuss. I brought Your Friend the Safety. These days they'd take your kids away for something like that. So, needless to say, I knew how to use the gun. I sat in my Lay-Z-Boy and glared one last time at Cat, who was attacking the failing light of day on the other side of the room, not even paying attention to me. In one hand was Mr. Morrisette's beast, in the other a .50. (Sometime in the mid 90's Molson reduced the alcohol content in Golden to 4.5% from the more respectable 5%, so I switched my family's allegiance. Dad would have been proud.) I put the barrel in my mouth, thought about my cousin Zev for example. And Gary Sandy. And Christy McNichol. But ya, so I take a header off the balcony but I cut it short or something, eh? I ended up firing through the downstairs neighbours screen door. Luckily they weren't home and I just borrowed some beer and let myself out. I ran into the delivery guy from Oregano's in the elevator on the way back up to our place. I guess pizza places don't share information. The damn cat still doesn't laugh when I told her. Beat me fair in Boggle though.

My face pressed against it. The world on its side, a dark burgundy ocean slowly covering it's sterile white canvas, and backing Cat into the corner. She glared one last time at Cat, who was attacking the failing light of day on the other side of the room, not even paying attention to me. In one hand was Mr. Morrisette's behemoth, in the other a .50. (Sometime in the mid 90's Molson reduced the alcohol content in Golden to 4.5% from the more respectable 5%, so I switched my family's allegiance. Dad would have been proud.) I put the barrel in my mouth, thought about Journey's percussion section and Sam and Dad and squeezed the trigger. Click. Nothing. Shit. I checked the piece. Safety off, chamber full. I tried again. Click. Son of a motherless fucking...and just then out of my periphery I saw Cat crack the smallest of smiles, and though I can't prove it I swear I heard the faintest of giggles. I try again. Click. You can't imagine the level of my frustration. After a lengthy review of the piece there was a knock at the door. Ah shit. Not even sure if I had any money. Then it occurs to me. I open the door and before the young chap from Georgie's could grunt "hello" I shoot him in the shoulder.

"Motherfucker," he screamed in a confused yet oddly mannered state of awe, "you fuckin' shot me."

"Sorry man, didn't think it was working."

"Doesn't do me much good now does it, asshole."

"Oh it's just a flesh wound, you'll get workers comp. Quit your whining."

The gun resting in my left hand, I bent down to inspect the poor guy's wound. "Sorry to make things worse man, but I don't have any cash on me, you wanna cat?" and just then Mrs. Parker from 4b opens her door and in a natural reaction I raise the gun and it just goes off, and well, shit.

"Like a pigeon full of antacids," says the pizza guy. That's where I got it. I wasn't being insensitive or nothing.

Cat poked her head out of the apartment, nodded hello to the pizza guy and suggested that we go inside. The sirens had us both a bit scared. I gave the pizza guy the rest of my .50 and a roll of paper towel. As I close the door I heard him ask: "Hey, is that Boggle?"

So, I followed Cat into the bathroom and locked the door. I plunked myself down on the floor and listened to see if I could tell how far away the sirens were. Apparently pretty close. "We're in a load of trouble Cat," I say to her. She says nothing, of course.

"You would've liked my Dad," I tell her. "Quiet. Liked Lay-Z-Boys. You have the same sense of humour. You wanna play Boggle?"

"To tell you the truth sport, I don't find you the least bit a challenging competitor. You've got to make the small words first and work your way out. You're always looking for the big words. It's not Scrabble, chief. You got any nip in here or is it all in the kitchen?" But Cat says it all with its eyes.

I think about the white linoleum. I think about shooting Cat. I think about Dad. I think about the white linoleum. I think about God, and absence. I think about the white linoleum. My face pressed against it. The world on its side, a dark burgundy ocean slowly covering it's sterile white canvas, and backing Cat into the corner.
How do I go on

It's just that I've tried and I still don't know my way forward when the way back is so insistent, like a path dug deep past the roots of old gnarled trees. I know the bark off by heart, the way the knots grow, where the squirrels have burrowed, and how the rot tunnels deep. I could put my hand in if I weren't afraid, but I am. I stuff it in my pocket and walk on, sliding over the next great root, the leaves slippery in the drizzle, the moss that deep velvety green I've always loved but still the quiet which can be peace can also be not when I'm out here alone and know a crackle behind me or off to the side or over there could mean another and which would be worse? The black beard of an unknown or the black of one who belongs but is foraging for a winter's worth, looking for the same as me just different. We're all empty, I know that, trying to find the berry glimpsed through green, the branch like a thin slash, the wet dripping that comforts till the words linger too long.
Zack Wells

1ST SATIRE

Condos, condos, condos! All over the city
They are blooming like chancres of concrete and glass.
Why, just down the hill from my house, the autobody
Shop and secondhand clothes store have been demolished,
Dozers and loaders have dug a deep pit and now
The latticed boom of a huge crane swings its tip
Very nearly over my roof as it lifts, shifts
And deposits its loads in allotted spots
On the rapidly rising erector set.

How,
I wonder, do they plan to market these dwellings?
“Just a stone's throw from the Halifax Shipyards, drift
Off to the soothing clang and bang of the night shift's
Repairs.” Or “Located conveniently
On busy Barrington Street for a quick commute
Downtown by car or bus.” Or “With stunning views
Of the Halifax Harbour, Canada's largest
Natural sewage lagoon.” Ah, yes, “Sit out on
Your balcony with cigar and sherry, letting
Their aromas mingle sweetly with exhaust fumes
And sewerage!” Or how about, “Adjacent to
Mulgrave Park, a City Housing Corp. project, home
To the displaced descendants of Africville
Residents.” Or, on a similar theme, “A hop,
Skip and a jump from Seaview Park, formerly home
To hundreds of poor black folk, now a lush scenic
Green space in which to promenade with your pooch.”
Or the historic appeal: “Across the street from
The Narrows, site of the world-famous Explosion—
But don't worry, it's not apt to happen again!”
The possible angles are practically endless!

But who in Halifax will they find to inhabit
These model modules? What worker bees can afford
The mortgage and fees for their share of the hive, when
Minimum wage is six and a quarter and most
Jobs available pay minimum wage? They're out there,
However, the modestly wealthy, I see them
Zip by me in slick German cars and Japanese
SUVs as I trudge the sidewalks carrying
Groceries. What they work at is anyone's guess.
Movie stars pop into town on occasion
When studios can save, thanks to tax breaks and rates
Of exchange, or when rugged rocky coastlines
And quaint Maine fishing towns are needed for a shot
In the latest Stephen King adaptation.
But most of the money's no more sexy or
Exotic than Hollis St. hookers—and only
Slightly more criminal: doctors and lawyers
And government jobbers from all three levels,
Hotel managers, slum lords and restaurateurs;
The sort of parasites you expect to see thrive
In a port city provincial capital,
Alongside rats scuttling around the towers
Of the derelict South End grain elevators
And the condemned crack dens at Gerrish and Creighton.
And how could I neglect or forget the professors,
Custodians of science and liberal thinking
At colleges whose going rates are unrivalled
In Canada? No wonder their enrollment swells
With the spoiled brats of rich Upper Canadians:
They're the only ones who can swallow the fees
And inflated rents on the streets named for trees.
Maybe it's their mommies and daddies snatching up
These proliferating habitations as sound
Investments to recoup the cost of their kiddies'
Tuition. The peninsula's only so big
And can't be expanded (unless city planners
Decide to level Point Pleasant and finish the job
That Juan started. Imagine the grumbles of green-
Eyed developers over the waste of so much
Prime land!); the market has nowhere to go but up,
Up, up. Good news for me and the wife, I suppose,
Since we mortgaged a house here two years ago—
Even if the new building blocks out our sea view...
We can always move to the country, become
Absentee landlords, sit on our purchase until
It doubles in value, then sell it and retire
On the proceeds, leave Halifax and its suburbs
To the devices of profs, politicians and rats.

Oh, but how far out of town we’ll have to go
To get out of town! For those who don’t want condos
Or the retro charm of a fin-de-siècle
Handyman’s Special, the sprawling suburbs beckon:
Dartmouth, Bedford, Hammonds Plains, Cole Harbour, Clayton
Park, Timberlea, Bayer’s Lake, new subdivisions
Hacked into the woods each week, each one stretching
City limits and purse strings farther. Pretty soon,
There’ll be nothing left in the kitty after road
Repairs! Pretty soon the city’ll reach all the way
To Sheet Harbour. And why? Because it’s cheaper, folks
Figure. Cheaper to have your dream five-bedroom home
Built on a half-acre in a cul-de-sac—safe
For the kiddies—than to confine the fam to cramped
Quarters in town. Until of course you buy your two
Cars, with high payments, high premiums, high prices
At the pumps. And if time, as the man said, equals
Money, then don’t forget the hour each way you spend
Stuck in that car and time spent mowing that precious
Half-acre to keep the neighbours from calling you
Lazy—not to mention blowing the snow from
A quarter-click driveway to get your debt-laden
Ass to the job you hate. Oh yes, so much cheaper!
But just think of how much better it’ll make things
For the kids growing up. None of the unwholesome
Lures of the city, none of the poor troubled youth,
None of the crime—and none of the fun! Nothing
At all for them to do, in fact. But don’t worry,
They’ll find drugs and booze to distract them from boredom
In crowded classrooms and cable TV. They’ll hate
You for making them grow up in Porter’s Lake, but
It’ll give them more character when they’re adults—
Hell, it just might make them want to buy condos!

2ND SATIRE

It must be summer. Three massive cruise ships moored
At the South End piers, where once immigrants landed
On their westward way, and where soldiers shipped
Across the Atlantic to Europe to kill and
Die, survive and return the same way—now a stop
For globetrotters to idle and shop en route
To and from the Caribbean. A lovely chance,
Too, to jump ship and repatriate, as a bunch
Of Chinese folk did, just hopped off the boat and crossed
The street to the train station, paid cash for tickets
To Montreal, posing as a Korean tour
Group—a safe gambit in Halifax, where no one
can tell one Asian from another—and were gone.
A far less perilous trip than those Cubanos
Are always attempting on rafts. Comfy, even.
I wonder if the curators have added this
Brave tale to their repertoire of Pier 21
Tear-jerkers?

Ah, yes, once again, the waterfront
Boardwalks swell with tourists; vendors and buskers rub
Winter sleep from bleary eyes; loud, green, oversized
Amphibious vehicles terrorize streets
And irritate locals with megaphoned blab;
And all over town, garishly painted man-sized
Lobsters advertise how quirky, free-spirited
And fun Halifax is—just like Toronto.
But the surest sign the city has embraced
Tourist whoredom? Hotel bellhops sporting tartan
Kilts—respectably underclad, of course; we’ll have
No highland shenanigans here! That goddamned plaid
Is everywhere you turn, as if anyone here
gave a haggis’ hind-end for Gaelic heritage.
Sure, some folks in Cape Breton know more of ceilidhs
And caber-toss than they do in the “Old Country,”
But ask the average Haligonian what
Nova Scotia means and he’ll just look at you queerly
And answer, “Don’t ask me, buddy, I only live
Here.”
PETTY HARBOUR CODPIECE

Mouths gaping, they trawls the Grand Banks and swallows
Whatever they crosses. You’d swear they was hollow,
Maws without bottom, appetites endless. They never says no.
No wonder their name means both cunt and cock.

Less whore than slut, dead easy to lure, hook an haul up—
Jigged on a handline, strung like flesh bulbs on a bultow
Or gagged in a gillnet's cod-end, flippin an floppin,
They hits a ship's deck or a dory's caulked boards with a wallop.

Stretched out on the flake, under sun, wind an salt,
Don't take it for haddock, hake, snapper or pollock—
Fresh, my son, flakes packed like feathers, nothin to top it,
Anything said to the contrary's perfect codswallop—

But there’s no great lot to catch, salt an cook, not nomore,
Least not on the Banks off this emptying shore.

We’re so far sunk in nostalgia that Culture,
Tourism and Heritage are all in the same
Government portfolio. Poets, if you want
To live high off the hog, it’s best to tailor your
Grant application accordingly, indicate
A desire to write epic verse about your clan’s
Struggle to haul bluenose potatoes from stony
Ground, coal from unstable subterranean seams
And lobster pots from the unforgiving and
Furious ocean. Whatever you do, don’t tell
Anyone you want to write what you actually
Know; the truth can only damage our precious self-
Image.

No we’ll have no novels of Appalachian
Incest, no landscapes of slowly rusting Chevys
And Fords, no tales of trailer parks, the crack trade, gang-
Banging, murder; we’ll ignore the moonshine shacks
In the backwoods of Meat Cove, pay no heed to
The squalor and booze and drugs on reserves (all
Glooscap, no glue-sniff); we’ll pretend that the country
Farms and villages aren’t dying a slow and sorry
Death from their cores, fishers' sons and farmers' daughters
Hitching to Halifax to work for minimum
Wage, or leaving the province forever, selling
The family farm to a corporate outfit,
The lobster license to a factory ship from
Abroad, the shorefront cottage to Deutschlanders
In search of a summer retreat for retirement.
None of this will help sell our pastoral idyll,
None of this will make our vibrant culture appeal.
Rob Winger

RE/READING SUBMISSIONS

we’re writing poems on pansies
on the fall of Icarus
on genitals
on cancer
again

another ode to the despondent North
another smeared, Algonquin park expressionism

we’re writing poems on the wretchedness of staid love lives
on the intimate shovels of ancestors
on our discoveries of Beats, of Image, of Breath
on the last sentimentally dirty bits of autumn

here are our prosaic politics
writ large across a Benetton billboard
our re-telling of the telling of a retelling of World War Two,
again
another easy caricature of a burning Bush.

(outside my window
some bastard has dropped a Budweiser bottle onto the concrete
where my son draws chalk daisies

enough with what’s beautiful and ripe:
of one last line devoted to sunshine)
of course there's loss
of course dead-end narratives, clipped angels, et cetera

of course the heartless rich with corvettes, surprise decades of fat, first memorial dysfunctions, first leaky holes in genealogies, of course rain

of course war, et cetera
of course houses and houses and money, banks and bills

of course cardboard walls & bread
of course needles, bullets, side-swept dramatic pauses, alimony

of course stolen kidneys, shattered livers

of course cursive arguments, kids glued under blankets with stuffed tigers, hearing, of course, our perfect punchlines (undelivered)

of course there are letters for funerals or prizes, for relatives shipped, returned, discovered

of course roots grow late, re-sales, broken bones, shin splints

of course rail-lines stitched over cuts, needles

of course, proof
Rachel Zolf

from THE BOOK OF COMPARISONS

(Arabic/Hebrew roots)

pasturage

meadow

fatherhood

an Arabic expression used to designate a person
the first to invent a particular story

mercy

originally applied
to one who deflowered a virgin

womb

in the course of time,
a metaphor for any person

white-carrion vulture
place of abode

she will dwell

though exalted above place

yet He is place for everything

time

he comes time after time

inn

and consequently I perished

or

spa

and I consequently became distracted
an interview with Nina Berkhout by rob mclennan

Nina Berkhout is the author of three poetry collections — *Letters from Deadman’s Cay* (NeWest Press, 2003), *This Way the Road* (NeWest Press, 2005) and *Pas de Deux* (Turnstone Press, 2006). Originally from Calgary, she currently lives in Ottawa.

rob mclennan: I’m interested in the pieces that eventually became your first poetry collection, *Letters from Deadman’s Cay*. How was it that this book first came about? Was there any particular reason you shaped it as a poetry book, as opposed to short fiction or even a creative non-fiction book? Was writing poetry something you had already been doing?

Nina Berkhout: All three books I’ve written have a narrative thread — my first book, *Letters from Deadman’s Cay*, began as a series of letters which found shape in poetry because that was the only way that I could properly express the experience I wanted to recount. The collection was based on my living on an out-island in The Bahamas, setting up a community museum. This was a case where I needed to tell a story but wasn’t sure how to go about it. None of the other approaches I tried did any justice to what I was attempting to convey, and I felt there was too much detachment and an unsettling distance between myself and the writing. I’d been writing poetry as well as short fiction for a while, and in this case when I tried telling my story through poetry, everything clicked. For me, it’s easier to express what I’m feeling in a condensed manner, using few words — what I love about poetry is the physical and emotional act of gathering the word, and the magnification of details in everyday life. I admire novelists who are able to maintain the reader’s interest for hundreds of pages, but I’m not sure that I could ever do this — the same goes for *This Way the Road* and *Pas de Deux*. I write what I’ve experienced and for these two books, I did not consider any other form because poetry is the force bringing me closest to what I want to communicate.
rm: Does this mean you’ve abandoned fiction? There are certainly novelists who have used condensed forms. Is fiction something you might return to someday? Given the strong narrative impulse in your three collections, I would say you haven’t abandoned it completely.

NB: Well, in terms of one of the projects I’m working on right now, I’m still not sure which form the manuscript will take. In the past, I’ve ventured into various genres of writing. Sometimes it’s the story or theme that drives the form for me, and I have to dabble in different genres until it all clicks.

rm: What do you think the advantage is in writing the same project in different genres, until, as you say, “something clicks” in the form? I would be interested to see the difference in, say, your first collection from the current prose poetry form into something more along the lines of creative non-fiction, for example. What I find interesting about Letters from Deadman’s Cay is that it doesn’t read like a book of “travel poems,” but more in the style of something along the lines of Eli Mandel’s journal poems, or even other pieces by Robert Kroetsch and Smaro Kamboureli. I know the idea of entering a foreign space and writing from it was problematic for Di Brandt’s poetry collection Jerusalem Beloved. Were you aware of the potential difficulties of writing “outsider” poems that might have presumed a kind of authority that you didn’t necessarily have?

NB: Trying something out in different genres can be an interesting way of looking at various aspects of a subject. On the one hand, it can broaden your understanding of a subject but on the other hand, “practicing genres” or playing around with an idea too much can spoil the spontaneity of a work. With Letters from Deadman’s Cay, the collection wasn’t reasoned to the degree that I was actually thinking about “genres” at the time – it’s more that I wanted to convey something fresh in my mind and emotionally, that would reveal that strong experience I’d lived through on the island. When I tried recounting my story in ways other than poetry, it just didn’t flow or seem as creative or as accurate as the actual experience.

As for the difficulties of outsider lack of authority, this is a tough question. I believe that the writer himself is the ultimate authority on his personal reactions and feelings. With Letters from Deadman’s Cay I knew that with certain passages I had to be a little careful, and I certainly didn’t want to hurt anyone I was writing about, but this was not foremost in my mind while I was writing and had it been so, the writing might have turned out differently. I think poetry can imply a certain sensitivity to the feeling of others, whereas honesty in non-fiction might be seen by some as an indiscretion. When I finished the collection I sent it to the islanders and fortunately they were proud of it and happy with it, but this outcome was by chance.

rm: According to the interview you did soon after the publication of your first book for CV2, the book was the result of letters you sent home, and it was actually your mother that suggested turning them into a book. How is it being the child of artists, with your mother a writer and your father a photographer? Have their own works at all influenced your own?

NB: That’s right, hence the title of the collection. I was sending letters home regularly (many of which reached my family months later or never at all). Within these letters, I included poetry I was working on at the time, about the landscape, people and experiences I was encountering on the island. When I came home my mom suggested I retain what I’d experienced by putting it to paper in a manuscript form. My family are always my first readers, and after I complete a manuscript they offer suggestions before I send it off. I wouldn’t say that they influence the nature of my writing per se, but my parents have always encouraged me in whatever I wanted to do and especially in terms of creative projects. It was incredibly inspiring growing up with my mom writing and painting, and my dad practicing photography. I’d have to say yes, absolutely, their work has influenced my own.

rm: So it’s more a matter of encouragement, as opposed to more specific influence? And who were the authors that first attracted your attention, in those early days when were you starting to think about composing your own works? Who are the authors that have stayed with you as reader, and as author, there in the back of your head as you write?

NB: I would say both. My parents continually introduce me to so much in terms of art and culture, which I’m sure influences me, and their own work inspires me as well. As for authors, when I first began writing I remember I was reading a lot of Leonard Cohen, which resulted in awful, sentimental poetry! Cohen is one of the greats for me; that hasn’t changed. As for current influences, it varies depending on geography, time of year, mood, the focus of my writing, etc. These days, I’ve been rereading the works of Gwendolyn MacEwen, Louise Gluck, Paul Celan, Medbh McGuckian and Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau.

rm: If your first collection came out of a series of letters, and your third, Pas de Deux, was a collection writing out of your knowledge of dance, how did the poems that became your second collection, This Way the Road, come about?

NB: My academic and professional background is in museology. I wrote This Way the Road while I was working at the Royal Ontario Museum, where many projects included working alone in storage vaults. Being surrounded by artifacts and history, my imagination ran wild. I’ve also always had a fascination with the Hindenburg – as a kid, I saw or perhaps dreamt that I saw a blimp above me, while playing out in our backyard. Only later on did I learn the macabre history behind zeppelins. In This Way the Road, I combined my museum experience with my interest in the Hindenburg, as both artifact and historical event.
**rm:** *This Way the Road* works as a single narrative constructed out of individual poems, structurally far different than your first and third books. Which came first? Do you even write individual poems, or is it all connected? You seem to deliberately write yourself into books as opposed to single poems; from where does this impulse come?

**NB:** Well, not quite. It’s true that the idea of a narrative came first for *This Way the Road*, but this was also the case for *Pas de Deux*. With *Letters from Deadman’s Cay*, I fit poems I already had into a narrative. The individual poems came first, and I worked around these to fill in the gaps. That is to say, I gradually felt the need for a narrative, and wanted to fit these individual poems into a story I was trying to tell. Sometimes I start with individual poems, like in *Letters from Deadman’s Cay*, and realize there is a certain connection between the poems; I begin seeing a storyline or narration. For me it can happen both ways — I do write individual poems and sometimes they fit into a narrative, but other times they do remain individual poems standing on their own.

**rm:** How aware are you of balancing autobiography in your poems? Were there facts chanced in poems along the way, significantly altered for the sake of personal comfort or for the sake, even, of the text? Have you ever been worried about giving too much away?

**NB:** I’ve never altered poems for the sake of context or comfort — poetry is about the opposite of comfort. Unlike other genres of writing, poetry requires truth and autobiography, to some extent. If the poet is reluctant to include his personal experience, sentiments and opinions in what he writes, he’s switching over to the realm of fiction.

**rm:** In the CV2 interview, you say that “Truth is ridding the self of excess. So is poetry.” Do you still believe that?

**NB:** Yes, I do still believe that a poet can’t skim surfaces; that one must peel away layers to reach the inner core, wherein lies truth and meaning.

**rm:** You’ve lived in a number of locations across Canada, including Calgary, Winnipeg and the past two years or so in Ottawa. Has moving to other parts of the country, and even other parts of the world, affected your considerations of writing, and how you approach a poem? How have you approached or interacted with the communities of those cities? Do the writers that happen to live around you make any effect on how it is that you write?

**NB:** I’ve found both Winnipeg and Ottawa to have very active writing communities that are encouraging to writers, and culturally stimulating. In these cities, the writers are welcoming and accessible. I’m not sure that one landscape is more stimulating than another, since it’s always what you make of it. My first two collections were published by an Alberta publisher, and even while living in Toronto, the contact I had with NeWest Press was important for me, as it introduced me to writers such as Stephen Scobie and Shawna Lemay, with whom I was privileged to tour and give readings. The landscape of The Bahamas, and travelling to other parts of the world, provides me with extremes which have certainly shaped my writing. And when I arrive in a city for the first time, I find there is a sense of isolation that influences my writing. I think it’s the writers I read and admire that affect how I write, more than the ones living around me. Of course, some of the writers in the cities I’ve lived in happen to be the ones I admire. But if, for example, I’m surrounded by writers who practice performance poetry or spoken word, I wouldn’t necessarily start doing it because this just isn’t my way of writing poetry.

**rm:** Now that you have three published poetry titles under your belt, what do you think you’ve learned about the process of writing along the way? What has changed about how you approach a poem, a collection, a book? Do you shape your collections any differently now than you were when you started? And after collections on museums and dance, where do you see your writing going from here?

I’ve learned that having published in the past doesn’t mean you’ll ever get published again. Maybe you’re only as good as your last poem. Maybe what I’ve done before is just practice, or maybe it’s the best I’ll ever do. I always hope I’m learning and improving, and that my writing will keep getting better. I’ve also learned that I can’t write without a certain discipline, and that when I don’t discipline myself, I stop writing. Obviously, there is a certain discipline implied in completing a manuscript. There is also a certain sense of observation that develops with time, and a realization of certain personal things one needs to be a writer. For me I have a hard time hearing the muse and being creative without order and routine to my days, and periods of introspection and silence. Nor do I want to abandon my life — some writers can do this but I have found that I cannot, perhaps to the detriment of my own writing. My writing has gone from museums and dance, to something I’ve recently finished which deals with a relationship ending. Right now, I’m working on individual poems, not linked at all to any sort of narration. I’m hoping this will carry me through the long, cold winter!
artist: Danny Hussey
painting on 144 plywood panels
Title: WHAT
Series: Signs Of Language (Exhibition, Ottawa City Hall Art Gallery, Feb.6th to Mar. 22)
2008 73x41”, Oil, tar, plaster, and ink on plywood

www.artengine.ca/hussey
author biographies:

Cameron Anstee is working on an M.A. in English at Carleton University where he is a contributing editor at *In/Words Magazine & Press*. He has been generously published by many kind faces in Ottawa, most recently in the *Bywords Quarterly Journal* and *Peter F. Yacht Club*. In 2008, he won the Lillian Found Award (Carleton University). He has chapbooks. cameron.anstee@gmail.com

Michael Blouin has published in many Canadian literary magazines including *Descant*, *Arc*, *Fiddlehead*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Event*, *The New Quarterly*, *Grain*, *Queen’s Quarterly*, *In/Words*, *Variations*, *Ottawater* and has a collected poetry *I’m not going to lie to you* out with Toronto’s Pedlar Press as well as a novel *Chase and Haven* with Coach House Press in Fall 2008. He has been the recipient of *Arc* Magazine’s Diana Brebner Prize for Poetry as well as the Lillian I. Found prize for Poetry from Carleton University and is a finalist for the Lampman Scott Award. He can be contacted at luckyus@sympatico.ca as well as on facebook and at http://minor-poet.blogspot.com/

Stephen Brockwell is the author of *The Wire in Fences* (Balmuir, Toronto, 1988), *Cometology* (ECW Press, Toronto, 2001), *Fruitfly Geographic* (ECW, 2004), which won the Lampman Award for poetry, and the forthcoming *The Real Made Up* (ECW, fall 2007). His poetry and essays have appeared in numerous print and electronic publications including *The Danforth Review*, *Queen St Quarterly*, *It’s Still Winter*, *Maisonneuve*, *Prism International*, *bywords*, and *Prairie Fire*. Brockwell grew up in Montreal but has for many years lived in Ottawa. He runs a small information technology consulting company out of his home.

Monique Desnoyers spent her childhood in small towns along the north shore of the St Lawrence river past Quebec city before being plummeted into the world of Montreal with its multitudes and divides. She is third generation bilingual on her French father’s side and going back a few grandmothers on that side there are French, Irish and German women living in Eastern Ontario. She left Montreal to study graphic design, fine arts and critical thinking in Nova Scotia and had painting, sculpture and video shows in galleries. She has worked in film and television, decorative painting and interior design, high tech, and is currently employed in Ottawa by the largest local employer. In her unsparing time she collaborates with poets to design graphics and chapbooks, and has recently started designing websites.
Amanda Earl's poetry has been recently or will be soon published in Rampike (Windsor, Ontario), filling Station (Calgary, Alberta), the New Chief Tongue (Mount Pleasant, Ontario), Peter F. Yacht Club (Ottawa, Ontario), some assembly required (pooka press, Vancouver, BC), Van Gogh’s Ear (Paris, France). above/ground press published two chapbooks by Amanda in 2007/2008: Eleanor and The Sad Phoenixian's Other Woman, Welcome to Earth is her latest chapbook (Bookthug, Toronto, Ontario). Amanda is the managing editor of Bywords.ca and the Bywords Quarterly Journal and blogs too much at amandaearl.blogspot.com and ottawapoetry.blogspot.com.

Jesse Patrick Ferguson was born in Cornwall, Ontario, and he’s the author of 5 poetry chapbooks. He has contributed to publications such as: Grain, The Dalhousie Review and The New Quarterly, and he has work forthcoming in Poetry Magazine. He’s a poetry editor for the Fredericton-based journal The Fiddlehead, and he’s a celtic ballad collector, playing several musical instruments, most recently a mandolin he made from a biscuit tin. His first full-length book of poems will appear in 2009, with Freehand Books, the new literary imprint of Broadview Press.

Once upon a time, Warren Dean Fulton lived in Ottawa. He graduated from Immaculata High School & then Carleton University. Active in Ottawa’s literary scene in the mid 90’s; He ran reading series, published little things now & then, here & there, & read often at open mics. Since 1994, he has run a micro-poetry press, pooka press. He now lives in Vancouver, w/ his wife & 3 kids. He helps put food on the table, working in film, Recently he has visited Ottawa for; the ottawa small press book fair, to the Dusty Owl Reading Series, to see & visit w/ friends & family, & to work on some feature films in Ottawa, & Manotick. He has had poems recently published in; bywords.ca, In/Words, Zygote In My Coffee, Clockwise Cat, & Unquiet Desperation.

Adrienne Ho grew up in Ottawa South. Now living in Iowa City, via Montreal, she holds an MFA in Literary Translation from the University of Iowa, where she’s a doctoral candidate in Comparative Lit. Writing appeared lately in Burnside Review, Circumference, Denver Quarterly, and Ninth Letter.

Sean Johnston’s poetry and fiction have been published in numerous journals, including Grain, the Malahat Review, and Bywords. Most of what he knows about poetry he learned studying journalism at Carleton University in Ottawa and reading/hearing at the Tree reading series. He teaches literature and creative writing at Okanagan College in Kelowna, BC.

Ben Ladouceur is a fourth-year Carleton student and an editor at In/Words Magazine.

Lainna Lane has lived in Ottawa, Vancouver, and most recently Edmonton where she has very slowly completed her English and Comparative Literature degree at the University of Alberta. She finances this by working in an office tower guarded by peregrines. When not in office or school she enjoys traveling, working at Other Voices literary magazine, playing dodgeball, and mixing a mean mint julep. She has publications in the 2007 student edition of the Olive Reading Series chapbook, an issue of The Peter F. Yacht Club and the first issue of The Garneau Review.

Marcus McCann’s first trade poetry collection, Soft where (Chaudiere Books) appears in spring 2009, following a pile of chapbooks, including The tech/tonic suite (Edmonton AB: Rubicon Press, 2008), Force quit (Toronto ON: Emergency Response Unit, 2008), petty illness leaflet (Ottawa ON: The Onion Union, 2008), Heteroskeptical (Ottawa ON: above/ground press, 2007) and So Long, Derrida (Ottawa ON: USEA, 2006). He is the editor of Capital Xtra, Ottawa’s gay and lesbian newspaper, and he can be found at marcusmccann.blogspot.com

rob mclennan lives in Ottawa, where he has never done anything wrong. The author of some twenty trade books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, he has three poetry collections appearing in 2009, including gifts (Talonbooks), a compact of words (Salmon Publishing) and wild horses (University of Alberta Press), and he is currently working on fiction and non-fiction. He spent the 2007-8 academic year in Edmonton as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, and his online home is robmclennan.blogspot.com

Christine McNair’s work has appeared in The Antigonish Review, fireweed and Misunderstandings, in the chapbook Conflict (above/ground press, 2008) as well as a recent above/ground press broadside. She won an honourable mention in the Eden Mills Literary Competition and second prize (poetry) in the 27th Atlantic Writing Competition. Her first publication was in a ninth grade English textbook. She apologises profusely to any students traumatised by her story or by the inane English class questions which were appended. She tries to pay the bills working as a book conservator in Ottawa.

Colin Morton’s recent books of poetry include Coastlines of the Archipelago (Buschek Books), Dance, Misery (Seraphim Editions) and The Local Cluster (Pecan Grove Press).

Jennifer Mulligan lives in Gatineau (Hull). She makes stuff up and works in IT. Her poetry has been published in above/ground press broadsheets, Bywords.ca (www.bywords.ca), ottawater (www.ottawater.com), and In/WP. Her first chapbook “like nailing jelly to a tree” was published by above/ground press in January 2007.
Pearly Pirie is currently playing in many ponds, haiku, vispo and mechanically separated meat poems. She recently had a chapbook with above/ground press.

K.I. Press got an M.A. in English at the University of Ottawa and is finally getting some use out of it by teaching at Red River College in Winnipeg. Her latest book was Types of Canadian Women. Currently, she is hungry for lunch.

Roland Prevost lives and works in Ottawa. His first chapbook, Metafizz (Ottawa ON: Bywords 2007), was launched at the Ottawa International Writer’s Festival. He was the recipient of the John Newlove Poetry Award for 2006 (judge: Erin Mouré). His poetry’s also published in ottawater 3.0, the Variations Art Zine, the Bywords Quarterly Journal, and the Peter F. Yacht Club, among others. He’s kept an allsorts lifelong journal, and loves to observe the night sky through his various telescopes.

Monty Reid’s recent books include Disappointment Island (Chaudiere), Lost in the Owl Woods (BookThug) and The Luskville Reductions (Brick). He lives in Ottawa and works in the middle of the construction at the Canadian Museum of Nature.

Shane Rhodes’ most recent book of poetry, The Bindery, was published by NeWest Press in Spring 2007. Winner of an Alberta Book Award and the Archibald Lampman Award, Shane’s poetry is also featured in the anthologies New Canadian Poetry, Breathing Fire II, Decalogue, and Seminal: Canada’s Gay Male Poets.

Suzannah Showler grew up in Old Ottawa South. She currently lives in Halifax.

Sandra Ridley is a Saskatchewan-born poet living in Ottawa. Her first manuscript of poetry, Downwinders, won the 2008 Alfred G. Bailey Prize. Part of this collection, Lift: Ghazals for C. was published as a hand-stitched chapbook by JackPine Press in 2008.

Mike Spry was born and raised in Ottawa, where he attended Broadview and Elmdale Public schools, as well as Nepean High School. In between his time living in Vancouver, Toronto, and Costa Rica he often returned to the nation’s capital to work in restaurants and count Royal Oaks. His collection of poetry, JACK, was published by Snare Books in 2008. A collection of short stories entitled 30lb Monkeys is forthcoming in 2009. He lives in Montreal where he is the Managing Editor of Matrix and the Programs Coordinator for Summer Literary Seminars.

Gillian Wallace has lived in Ottawa for over twenty years. She’s edited academic books, taught university, and written a thesis on original sin. Her poems have been published in The Antigonish Review and Ottawa Arts Review.