TCR

The Capilano Review

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O children do mock us in this demockracy

— Bob Sherrin

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Peter Quartermain / from *WHERE I LIVED AND WHAT I LEARNED FOR: PART ONE: GROWING DUMB*

One Sunday, when I was about fifteen and we were all marching regulation crocodile into Church at Brewood, a stoop-shouldered man with missing teeth, ragged whiskers and a battered grey suit stuck out his hand at me, me in my School blazer, and said "Excuse me sir, Are you Peter Quartermain? I'm Charlie Davis. Do you remember me?" Mr. Davis from Wheaton Aston. The shop was gone and his wife had died, Timmy and Peggy in separate foster homes, and he had no job, living in a Salvation Army shelter in Wolverhampton somewhere near St.Peter's Square, red-rimmed eyes and desperate beery breath, could I spare five bob. And I didn't know what to do, I only got a shilling a week pocket money, my School cap in my hand its silver badge warm from the mild sun, standing there in the churchyard while the rest of the boarders trooped past me into compulsory worship, the Sheep's Bell stopped calling its hurry-up, the church door began to close, a blackbird's abrupt song in the suspended silence and the double-decker bus changed gear as it went down Dean Street on the way back to town. I had to be in there, I was the Prefect that day I had to take the collection plate round and take it to the altar, and I didn't want to be seen talking to someone who looked like this the two of us in the churchyard, "I've only got sixpence," I said, I put my hand in my pocket and took it out again, I didn't give it to him, it wouldn't even pay his bus fare back to town; the gravestones around us, the path where we stood, me shifting from foot to foot my hands down by my sides, the whitewashed cottage across from the Admiral Rodney bright over the churchyard wall. I thought he might wait till we got out after the service but I didn't say anything else, my voice would be all strangulated, I couldn't think what with the church door closed and everybody wondering why I wasn't in there with them. He turned away. And in the church I began to think I should have taken him to the Headmaster and said who he was and could we help, or I

could send him to Henry Houston, that'd be easy easy enough he'd do something, we all liked him, you could see his cottage at the top of Dean Street just over the churchyard from where we'd stood, but when I got out after the service was over Mr. Davis was gone.

What demons of shame and indecision possessed me, where had I learned that hesitation, that I cringe to think of now.

"You're coming with me to deliver the bread," he'd said to me one day in Wheaton Aston. He put a big basket of bread on the handlebars of his bike and another over his arm and gave me a smaller one and door to door we went round the village. Two big loaves for the Joneses, a hovis and a malted for old Mrs. Crooks, four white and a brown for the Purdy family. We got back to the shop after about an hour, everything carefully counted and remembered, and he wrote it all down in a little book. Then we went out again. "Are you tired?" he asked. "We've got a long way to go." And he slung a great sack of bread over his shoulder, and gave me a bag with a shoulder strap, four two-pound loaves in it, crisp freshbaked crust warm against my coat. And in answer to my question, "We can't take the bike. Come on, then." And we set out across the fields, the long wet grass swishing against my socks, the odd thistle or burr scraping my legs. Watch out for the cowpats. Climb the stile. Open the gate. Close the gate. My bag of bread kept sliding down my shoulder and I kept hitching it up, holding it with my hand. "'Ere, let me move it to the other side," he said. "It's a lot further by the road," he said, "and it's 'arder on me feet." "It's Mrs. Philps," he said. "A big family. 'Er 'usband's in the Army. 'E's a sergeant. In the South Staffs regiment. Somewhere in the War. Overseas I think" — the short sentences punctuated by the grassy sound of walking. It was hot. I wanted something to drink. "There's a stream coming up, under that 'edge." My pace quickened a bit. Cupped my hand, licked up some water, splashed it in my face. It didn't taste very much. "In the winter," he said, "when it snows, they sometimes get cut off, and they 'ave to pinch to make do. It's a bit remote." We stopped for a bit of a rest. "Don't want to rest too much," he told me; "it gets 'arder to start each time. Come on." My bag of bread was a bit damp from the grass, and my crisp loaves of sandwich bread were beginning to lose

their sharp four-square edges. "Don't worry about that," he said; "not much farther." My bag kept getting closer to the ground, dragging on the odd tussock. They usually fetch the bread themselves, he told me, every Wednesday. But this week they're poorly. I stopped. "Doesn't the bread get stale?" I asked. And he told me they wrap it in damp cloth. "You're just wrapping it a bit early," he said, looking at the sodden bottom of my bag. I thought of horrible soggy bread and bread-and-milk and made a face, and he laughed. "It gets a bit mouldy by the end of the week," he said, "especially in the summer. Cut the mould off." I was glad we lived in the village. "And you can toast stale bread," he added; "makes good toast." He looked at me and winked. "Or fresh it up a bit in the oven." And then we were there. A red brick cottage, patch of garden, a gate, some chickens out the back. Mrs. Philps gave me a drink from the pump, and chuckled as she looked at my battered loaves of bread. "You're a bit of a small one for that long hike," she said. Friendly. Glad. "Couldn't 'ave managed without 'im" Mr. Davis said, and he ruffled my hair. My socks were covered with burrs. I could smell my own sweat and I said "I liked that" and felt proud. We turned round and walked the mile-and-a-half to a big cup of tea at home, with sugar.

* * *

So we got away from the Air Raids and we escaped the shelters, but Alice didn't stay in Wheaton Aston very long, she went back to Birmingham late in 1939, I think to get married, and Our Kid was inconsolable, she'd looked after him most of his life and they were thick as thieves, he was old enough to really miss her and to think she'd deserted *him.* Sixty years later he'd tell me he was devastated and couldn't get over it, cried and cried and cried, but I can't remember that at all, and can hardly remember Alice. Mum once said that Dad gave her five pounds for a wedding present, more than a week's wages, but that didn't mean anything to me until I was an undergraduate a dozen or so years later living on half that, two pounds ten a week. Nothing much was scary in the village. The dreaded Mr. Button looked after the senior boys in their room of the

school, and us smaller ones were in the hands of a young woman who I only knew as "Miss." She had us do a lot of reading aloud out of the schoolbook, and I was good at that, I liked the sound of it and I liked reading, all of us liked long words and in one bit I was reading there was a description of a church and the high-up windows in the clerestory, clerestory I said without a pause I liked the rhythm of it, it sounded right, but she said "clear story." Years later Mum said her name was Miss Chapman, she can't have been much more than nineteen years old, and I didn't find out she'd got it wrong till I was about eleven, at Brewood, when Nosey Parker was talking about churches in Scripture class. When he said "clerestory" after asking what those windows were called I was glad I'd kept my mouth shut and not said "clear story." I was pretty good at spelling, and that meant I could usually get the sound of the words right too. Some days Nosey Parker would read us a story out of some religious pamphlet, we only got him twice a week thank goodness, he knew he had a terrible temper and was never really cut out to be a Teacher. One day when he had some sort of work to do of his own he sat at the side of the class and had me read the story out, his head bent over some paper he was scribbling away and then stopping and thinking, he must have been writing his sermon for next week or something, it was a story about the Romans and some Christians in jail, was it about St. Peter? I must have been reading for about half an hour, it was a long story, all the kids sitting quiet, glad not to be slogging through something in the Bible, and for about the three dozenth time I read "and they cast him into goal" or "the goalers said" or "an angel visited him in goal," something like that, and he looked up irritably and said "Jail, boy, j-a-i-l. Don't you know anything?" "Please Sir," I said going all hot and red, "it's g-a-o-l, goal" and he said "UmpPh. That's another way of spelling j-a-i-l. It's unusual, yes, but you should know better," and he shrugged impatiently and settled down again, leaving me feeling daft and resentful, it wasn't like getting it wrong with Miss Chapman. In Wheaton Aston Miss Chapman taught us everything, and when we started Arithmetic the bigger ones in the class would help the younger ones do simple sums. It was a two-room school, I didn't

learn much, but we did do a bit of French, geography and history of course, and a lot of reading. Hengist and Horsa were supposed to be heroes, but I couldn't sort them out from Ethelred the Unready and the Alfred who burnt the cakes. It didn't seem to matter — perhaps we knew we wouldn't be there very long — and the War was never very far away, we could feel its effects all right.

Cold raw weather, getting chilblains and not knowing what they were, shivering outside and eating a great doorstep of bread with nothing on it. Rationing began to bite into us, there was never enough coal to keep a good fire going and you couldn't get really warm, or if you did, stay warm for very long. Timmy and Peggy told us that some of the village kids would be slathered all over their chests with goose grease in October and sewn into their underwear for the winter, we didn't really believe them until Our Kid ended up sitting next to one of them in school, "I changed desks as quickly as I could," he told me when we talked about it years later, I'd forgotten all about it till he reminded me, "by the time December rolled round they were pretty ripe I can tell you" and they'd stay that way till March. But Our Kid started going to Brewood Grammar School three miles away in January 1940 as a weekly boarder, so he missed that, and we all sneered at the rough London and Walsall townies billetted with village kids, "They all think milk comes in bottles!" Mum laughed, and us kids thought that was true. "Bunch of ignorant little B's," Mrs. Davis called them, they all got slathered with Vick's Vaporub every night or had great wodges of some patent cotton wool, Thermogene, bright orange and smelly, sewn in their vests, itchy stuff, we bet — we weren't quite sure whether to laugh or to be jealous. We all had terrible colds all the time, and it wasn't long before we wore Thermogene too, only ours was held with safety pins front and back inside your vest. Phil remembers asking one of the townies where he came from and he said "Wa'sa'", Our Kid was amazed that he spoke English at all if he'd come from Poland, but when he said that to Mum she made a face and laughed and said something about working-class Staffordshire townies, "those rough children, just urchins really," she could hardly understand a word they said either. We didn't have much to do with them at all, us four

kids would go down and play by Lloyd's stream below the farm at the end of the village. We only saw Dad at weekends when he got away from the store in Birmingham — he had a petrol ration because farming was an Essential Activity and now and again he'd drive, but not very often. Usually he took the bus, it must've been an uncertain and tedious journey what with lots of changes getting about inside Birmingham and then to Wolverhampton and then to Wheaton Aston, and there were so few buses from Wolverhampton he must've got a bit anxious, especially if they were held up by an Air Raid, and he'd get in on a Saturday night, in the middle of our bathtime if not after we'd gone to bed, and he'd leave again on Sunday. The car looked ever so funny with a cowl hooding its headlights so that only a little shaft of light could get out, it was easy to drive off the road at night and one weekend he was late because in the car he got caught in an Air Raid and couldn't get through for hours, and another he didn't get in at all because he was in an accident. There wasn't any phone, but he'd got a message through somehow, and when we came downstairs to breakfast and we asked "Where's Dad?" Mum must have been worried sick, but I don't think we particularly noticed. Grown-ups worried all the time.

MUSIC FOR AN EROTIC

Sarah Lang

Proem

Needing this skin I sing an apology:
Love's exquisite fallen ecstasies lie
common in the shaded grass; Summer,
drink in hand, tired, does not even raise
her head for my song; there are no fire
eaters, lemonade stands, snow cones —
I cannot give you a fan, your deserved
drink — consorts, comrades, companions,
I stand humble, hair hung limp, with Spring's
tired dress ashamed; I stand holding one
stiletto, Summer's spoiled last margarita, and for you —
those once traveled — an invite half lost
to the heat of my hands. Come! Old Lovers
and those who still steal kisses, rub Summer's
heat from your eyes — your flesh still breathes
the tales my lungs cannot. Rise! Come! Hear
my poor song sung with an afterthought
invocation to the Beautiful-Voiced woman
(who smiles politely, smoothing her skirt) — friends —
this heat will soon end and only old tales be retold:
as quick as this heat will allow, I entreat you, come!

LAST NIGHT I DREAMT OF SAILING SHIPS OF AEROPLANES

In this heat, the sunflowers hang their
heads; you recall too late in the season
my yellow rain jacket, my gift of
flowers: by the blue waters, by the streets
of stores of glass, I loved you early. Yet,
I cannot tell you, here the cicadas wake
me; I have wanted too much. Foolishly,
in silence I love as a sustained secret.

IF THIS IS TO BE A LOVE SONG:

with Summer I stand trepidatory: this
dress is no comparison for a childhood
housed within walls of modern artifact; my
hands smooth a wrinkle this young heat
will not. I loved too early. Perhaps Spring
parts sorrowfully, perhaps she will demand
rain! wind! perhaps the ship will never arrive,
perhaps, in this dim early light, this dress will
clothe proudly, perhaps, even a foreign monoglot
can receive a matrimonious blessing, perhaps,
if silent, I will not be looked upon too much.

WITH MY HEAD HUNG SILENT I AM AWARE,
with painful, sympathetic embarrassment,
bored you whisper the possible avoidance
of this dull dependence. In quiet defense,
in hands opened humble, only this do I offer:
having felt this before, in succession
I am terrified of falsehoods. Wait
uttered without voice and under breath,
I am uncertain of this tired repetition:
in this promise of joy I am caught,
for a moment, tired, my eyes closed.

Swans pass as I sit silent: uncertain

I laugh at the wrong times. The children
swim in the Donau, the sun sets, I am
not looked upon too much. Here
I will be passed over; here I will be deceived
as we sit across from each other: your hand
not on my leg. There are no touristen
in this village, here I am deaf
and dumb. Dependent on this kiss
I have recognized my folly too late.

Bound

I can only sing
songs to an Italian sun asleep
in the forum, the walls so far
far fallen, and the flesh that was sold here
— you cringe, and so I am pleading: save me from this
banality: alone I lie on this fallen rock,
having been numbered important, having been
bound across the Atlantic, encased in aeroplanes
and not sailing ships, for this kiss. In open shame,
in plain embarrassment: for you I hang my head. Crossing
the ocean bound for this erotic banality, and now
in this heat, I will give it all up for one map. In this
heat, I can only crawl, deaf and dumb, through
these streets. In this heat, rationality has so far fallen
toward an impossible luxury. In this late heat, I laugh:
these shoes are not made for cobblestone; I loved foolishly.

EPILOGUE

In an aureole of embarrassed shame
I sing an apology. Bound,
languishing by the loud ropes
of erotic folly, I, this apology,
fall under the weight of a kiss;
only in this heat I could return suppliant,
laughing: the nights will be cool; we will cross
the country during an eclipse; I will not be looked upon
too much. In my forced silence, unnoticed,
as the sun sets and dawn breaks ubiquitous, here,
I still remember love.

Crystal Hurdle / FURLOUGH IN LAS VEGAS

The paper work was torture enough
in triplicate is not poetry
I had asked for illumination
I wanted the sea's brightness, its light
I tried for Truro Wellfleet even Providence
but I've passed over whole states
a rushed déjà vu of our cross-country tour
now on the outskirts of Death Valley
closer closer

No potato people here
nor you
all sequined star fruits
No cow life
all a glitter
too bright for my eyes
be careful what you wish for
my mother's old injunction

Rainy days in Devon
uniform grayness
closing in

I wished for Ocean 1212-W
not these fake beaches of Mandalay Bay
a dim reflection of my beautiful Nauset
no waves to sigh on the pure shores
palm trees on the skyline, not right
it's half-dead
the sea should be open

Malevolence in the slot machines
lechery in the buffets
the very air gluttonous
Swords thrust hourly in Excalibur
Arthur an old vague myth
of someone who may or may not have been
a Merlin

I hover like a bumblebee

An Elvis marries a couple
she not in a pink wool suit
he not in standard black
Witnesses in feathers and tassels
After, they all dance
in blue suede shoes
my bare toes tap out the rhythm
The Elvis has a forelock like yours
but less oily

Hotel rooms opulent
Oh! the bed!
a life raft
Six pillows
a softness to love hugely in
but you are not here
as much as I could wish it

Bathroom bigger
than our entire flat
at Chalcott Square
This tub without the back-up sewage
of my last lonely winter
without you

The names here I could use in poems
Bell aj ee oh
Mandalay so liquid, so resonant
Bell Man
these words I enjoy
The syllables fall off my tongue

It's worse than a barnyard
worse than Purgatory
with Charon's balefulness
high voices in the elevators
Atlantis sinks
Roman statues, colossal, talk
Giant cats in aquariums stalk
Acrobats! trapeze artists!
and I have only to step
in the middle of them
to cause the traffic
to shriek to a halt
I'm sure I still have it in me

But nobody stops
I am shouldered in the throng
somewhere a volcano explodes
every fifteen minutes
Where is my fame?
Where are you?
I need you to translate
to explain the rules

I find a quarter
left in a slot
The video poker machine
calls like Ouija
a full house
our delightful children
her, you, me
an odd threesome
She would do better here than I
with her harlot's clothes
her gaming table smile
The nickel plate falls through my fingers

I must get my bearings
not think on her
The Paris is not like anything I have ever seen
painted cumulus in the robin sky
an aborted leg of a papier-mache Tour d'Eiffel
Will I meet my Richard one third life-size?
How small he will be!
not like you
never like you

Memories waft
Gypsies
Tarot packs
Sad eyes on the tables
Different names
baccarat and blackjack
I always recognize black
tables for high rollers

I motion a sleek waitress
for a drink
She ignores me
Women never liked me
much

Here the high stakes of life and death
Three watch me with baleful eyes
I'm a sleek cat they cannot cage
Not neurotic
like that freakish creature
of Siegfried and Roy
(faux men, not like you)
excreting in the pool

The shows! How affected!
How puerile!
I can climb higher than five storeys
I am five stories, ten novels,
one hundred, a thousand poems
whole and beating, heart-throbbing

But even here are Austrians
the long hallway of the Mirage
a Polish Corridor
I can't get away from them
And here another Elvis! and another!
I will not play any spurious Sylvias
I am the real thing!

I waft by the Coke store
The figurative has become literal
My mind swims in tropes

I cannot see my moon
amidst all the light
neon, ersatz sun
I am still dark
It does not help to be here
You are not here
My currency no good here

Where am I?
I want to go home
I click my heels three times
and nothing
Why am I wearing blue suede shoes?

Bob Sherrin / from *BOBBY CUTS GRASS*

Dudefication

I Bobby Cuts Grass of the Burnaby Second Nations wheel my sled off Cariboo Hill I greet Jeep Cherokee Limited Edition Man his gold-framed vanity plate his Nokia bebopping the morning code from Tokyo I hail Lexus 3.2 TL Woman oh the cranberry sunshine lipstick oh the stainless cup rising oh the soy milk no foam no shit triple vente latte hold the nutmeg oh hold the pose I merge we all e merge

The big smoke beyond interwoven ridges of cedar hemlock blackberry poplar salal peckerpole skunk cabbage pumping it out pumping it rock 101 all nudes all the time Cherokee Man groans into the bad news I Bobby Cuts Grass Burnaby Second Nations elder lean into Mr Costello's need to put you down rewind reverse renew rear view side view this day of all days Moan Day I pull the wheel clip the gas be Merge Man into the suck of the flow one hand tappin to Mr Costello one finger up my nose one buttcheek lifting to pass gas one eye on the mirror one eye on the future bending into the left lane Ford Expedition in red shades sniffs my dual exhausts smoke off lips as he synchs to homeboy false blues anthem

Burnaby Lake to the right at 114 Ks rising through the Monet moment deciduous Ford Man flashes those high beams make way give way Bobby Cuts Grass fucken drive it or fucken milk it

yo dudes yo dudettes

We draft across the Vanco line the Lower Brainland signals outgoing signals incoming oh Mr Costello it's the drugs the food the drinks age gravity myopia it's the pale whale of my body in the backyard among the spikes of seedgone sorrel the twisted limbs of rosemary the 3.5 HP Black&Decker bitch pulling me in her 100' wire the plug the ground the purge we all rewrap the present I Bobby Cuts Grass all eye all ear all downshift the sunrise refracting through dioxide all scan and seek Mr Costello auto reverses smack into the front end of Mr Ocasek's Cars my second nations blood undiluted by referenda the beat oh dudes oh dudettes are beat I Bobby Cuts Grass am alive alive Ho

Groove A

Westward ho the First Ave Trail first rough cut by asphalt road coolies the moist sun in my elderly eyes rear view full of its limp wash over the faces of two females in a forest green Wolfsberg unit be they Jetta sisters or Passat Women they be behind and beyond me as is everything else in our Vanco bliss hour drive

The Golden Light of Genuflection North shimmies across us lowbuck extras the econo meter recuts dead slow the avenue artery pulses sub woofer and Thrust exhausts the Cars predictable on the indash my Burnaby Second Nations eyes zoom the beat to my momentary principal leads in the ubersled behind the driver in Persian flow speaks to her cell large brown eyes run the montage among her mirrors lounging beside her an Asian companion hematite otter smooth hair tucked back stares out the side window on the bunkered RBC - 1st/Renfrew someone offstage paces the wings of PoCo or runs the well rigged flies of First Narrows Boxterland voice sibilant in her ear against Motorola's shell post manicured magenta nails aloof aloof O my fingers beatdance the wheel my ancient eyes water in the smoke of sweetlight transience all embracing momentary permanent chirpchirp of transmission

Oh spirits bless our tribe our rites our obligatory scenes between the red light and the green oh bless our seek scan set bless our start voice send as I Bobby Cuts Grass recheck my blind spot open-collared RayBanned elder while the wagons itch the slow rhumba young oldsters go west again in the groove the rut the wallow the groan the blink her eyes our signals chorus of many voices universal under all gods reuptaking

Transfer Nation

I Bobby Cuts Grass honourary and momentary elder of the 86 Mazda People venting sweat and Pepsi fumes shoulder checking spitting farting mumbling upshift on the Iron Workers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing akaThe Bridge J Lo on the Fox Oh the shaken booty refrain the clutched dick coda the ripened steel bursts those deadgone dudes still sigh with the stroke of faulty engineering

From cautionary comfort the midlane midlife midclass reserve I of the Burnaby Second Nations slide right towards Lowry's deepest cove and the 747-like hangar of Waste Tech there the Third Nations woman in the toll booth moves her steel-stud lips wants to know my homeland for Waste Tech country is the ancestral meritocracy of the North Shore Peoples I quietly but proudly declare Burnaby, Man

Now who am I but Mr Cuts Grass who takes his place before the ancient yet ever-changing heap of Lower Gainland detritus TVs bicycles mowers yukeles stained sex and death mattresses defenestrated pillows and quilts booted-in black bags the shape of 4 year olds mounded to the 60 foot ceiling no photochemistry no unrestrained asbestos allowed c'est dommage pour Thetford Mines

Mon dieu momentary of the waste tips his load onto those of other Gainlanders beside me a tall slim halter-topped North Shore Woman speaks into her cell she sifts the good from the bad final solution of homeland recycling conundrum onto the Waste Tech pyre I herf tin cans underlay pizza boxes the rainbow shards of failure and excretion I leave her to busted flower pots trashed hampers crumpled posters Madonna Ice T and Snow I

honourary Mazda Small-box Pickup Man take my place in the pay-up line just outside the trash hangar two younger women sprayed-on T-tops and flares clutch their noses twist their hips as though hit with bladder bite behind me North Shore Woman brings her GMC Safari Van to a halt

In rear vision I see the younger clamber aboard giggling to their elder she plumps her hair pushes kisses at the driver's vanity mirror turns to laugh her wisdom back atcha to our right a worker uses the clawed bucket of a digger to crush refrigerators oh the funerary rites of the CFC-free oh Waste Tech Man you mark my place on this crashed event horizon cosmos as we all oh brothers oh sisters creep toward the wing-like barrier (have cash or debit card ready) oh raven oh rail crossing oh sweet exit lane it calls out to me your time Bobby Cuts Grass your turn

Velo City

I Bobby Cuts Grass snagged by a digital camera my bipolar operation of a motor vehicle subject to this sentence likewise simultaneously subject to the traffic laws the cameras that enforce them

I enter the Vanco system via Powell and rightly so as a male elder of the Burnaby People claim road superiority over an amazon of the Upper Lonsdale People I capture her momentarily forever with my Pentax in her driver's mirror full blonde white wraps white blouse blue Jimmy the wisdom of my ancestors compels me to trip my shutter then I punch it cut hard left and leave her in my constantly remystified recent past all in hope yes yes please yes of an acceptable future oh thrust of four cylinders oh chatter of 16 valves all those imagined appaloosas mustangs arabians dig in oh flashing green of level crossing flicks to red oh full stop oh full railbed inspection left then right.

Oh absent freight I sing now of your invisible arrival the unheard percussion of your wheels on gapped steel I punch it again look back to see the running lights of Jimmy Woman pause at the grade she advances on me through red my gender's burst to freedom recorded in the oh shit wink wink wink of the overhead intersection camera

I slide right slow down tune out

My people are cursed to pay fines I know but what of hers perhaps the Solicitors clan totem of partnerships on plush letterhead hot from Hewlett-Packard Oh NASDAQ god of odds you have chosen others to have balls and brains equal to my fear of

nonconformity my thick razor cut carpaccio an 8 in shoes an extra large in underwear 9 bucks per 6 pack 2 phones 1 fax no pets no timeshares no anchovies

She takes me from behind

Oh sweet-talkers that thrum so moistly high rpm thru the village on the mountain side Edgemont Woman blows me off in the left lane dips into Vanco's hidden ravines out her electropowered window her birds are flipped while I Bobby Cuts Grass squat motionless in South Slope stupor she of The Grind must see only cracked ass in her rear view I need a nofoam latte I must rise to doubleclutch again I need my ancestors' rhythms must restore my counterpoint my counterpunch all chopped all channelled I reach for my AC Delco tape controls oh help me Mr Costello oh save me The Members oh break my english Ms Faithful my old vinyl soul she done been stole

Awk Racy

I Bobby Cuts Grass hold the Olds ajar for the lovely Janetta of the Wind we riff the raft off the plateau we go we Burnaby Second Nations elders married up kidded up down the mortgage funk of Cariboo Hill we go come Petula come down down downtown off rez into the a ways away Westend

O holy night of Mexx o sacred scent of Danier we two together seek Davie Street cred chopped down reamed out Civics squat thrusting Cavaliers boom ditty boom each other under moist light redshifted they deadslow the midblock autojive o product shot the slouch the tude the sexlite code recirculating vanity plate polished grill those slitty ground effects feel the intersectioned electro-fuck dog on leg bumperwise they go we go momentary wit dem latexed darlings we crusted over elders tarted up candyass interlopers aslant now in the diced rain we snort the over ripeness of moolah and sushi no post 911 left turns now poor shadeboys poor buzzgirls of the Lower Fameland

O children do mock us in this demockracy rev that third nations savvy give us the racing change o double clutch upshifting the peeled tread release as we walk on by arms linked to our eat the rich menu we plunk butt in the Bin of mirrors order up a ritual sleeve of amber a tulip of cabsav merlot through the window athrob with whatever music passes rhythmic we hoist our eyes that heavenly crane shot arising her old long fingers climb my old chubby arm

Look she says look way up there safe secure carded pin-numbered into the second floor universal gym paradise

Aerobic Woman Buff Man slash the treadmill through shimmering gold sign we read the semaphore their cocoon our cocoon across the gulf smell of bubbling cambazolla pounded basil hot

leaky oysters oh oh the buds of sweat burst flexed reflex knees elbows headphones totem they shoulder rocket the nightshift vision of the wreckage to come but now way up there whole pure clean rainbow trout rising to the hook in one glass box or another

Our eyes come down way down metal sash glass bricks trolley lines to pulsing white pedestrian throbbing red hand they forever walk stop walk stop walk stop walk smoke steam breath in air passerby suspended nothing just is

Penny Leong Browne /

THE STONE HOUSE: POEM and DIGITAL PHOTO SERIES

A stone house
fire cannot burn
a slit of horizon
warnings into a matron's eye
leaves the narrow
virgins rush skywards
metal doors slam
the heaven becomes
a prison of virgins
the earth
an iron shield

Chastity gates
of a stone house
last virgin locks the key
sword bayonets
black noses of rifles
pierce the iron sky
the daughters clasp their ears
huddle in a flower bud
all they can hear is
each other's breathing
shallow storms from dry
pale lips

Grandfather and father and two sons gone
to the Gold Mountain lands
placer gold in the desert or growing
money leaves in the valley
B.C.'s Golden
Delicious apple trees we paint

in shimmering gilt
on the mural
in our stone house

Paper wings with blue ink
documents flying through Pacific
sea sky
dropped in a brick government building
where officers of the new border
stamp entry cards
record first names for last
make up ones if they are uncertain
for displaced souls
fleeing famine
flood
warlords
children who report
desires

King's stamps
folded-in letters
waves of ink year 1937
The Dark Valley Period
weighs ominous on their paper wings
invisible words written
on money to fortify the fortress
where the virginal daughters
sleep locked
in the tower with sky
as mortar
earth
as iron

The forgotten virgin
a petal without her nimbus
in a storm
suffocating
with a soldier who lost
his soul

She sees the pictures in the man's brain
bloodied machine guns
laughing
human heads
weeping
necks fallen and the swans are dead

The young girl can be
his daughter
in another village, another era
but the moon hangs low
as the soldier wipes her blood
streaking the brine shimmering
on his upper lip
back of his hand stings
hitting the young girl's mouth to mate
maddeningly
with a madman of war

Fortress of the wombs
future mothers of fatherless
children legs climbing
up and up
the wooden ladders

to the Mantle of Heaven
where once prison maidens
listened
winds in the tower
whisperings of fright

Envelopes blue
red striped ribbon
majestic wealth from Gold Mountain land
certificates of money
one more stone for the tower of virgins
climbing foot by foot
a rising dawn
reaching the sun
away from state
police, bandits, and lascivious
hands of village cousins
cold comfort for the Gold Mountain men
wrapping themselves each night
in a rooming house catching
pneumonia on Pandora
a street in Victoria
a Queen's kingdom
a surrounding ocean for walls

Named after the kingdom
across the sea
Queenie whose fingers hang heavy with jade
neighbors whispering gold not blood
runs in her veins
with her father, husband, and sons

on a lifetime sojourn
to the lands of the Jeweled Crown
with only the old men coming home
to die

Queenie's eldest two sons
joined armies of Red Book
marchers
her middle two fled
to the frontier
lights of Hong Kong Island
her youngest two
crossed the Great Pacific
Ga-na-daa
her odd one out
sailed off to the country
into the shadow hemisphere
Austral-eee-ah

All her men gone chasing
dreams of the new world
trying to forget
nightmares of the old
where she is hostage
a widow guarding
her virginal daughters
in a stone house the only house
in the village
with the tower
to heaven

Great Leap backward is all she can think
the village granary
empty
not even husks
pickings for swallows' beaks
pecking hearts
beating
dying still

Shoe rubber into the mouths of hunger
rolled into Japanese noodles
enemy food of the mind
famine in the stomach
20 million dead marches on
fan into streets
making hunger look noble
jaws open and close
unable to eat
nothing
words

Queenie tells the stories of war
to her step daughter (so beautiful
she pretends she's a boy)
to make her fear poverty
to make her long for Gold Mountain
where she hopes to sell her
one day as a woman
to a king of a restaurant
tables draped in white linen

crystal bowls spilling pink champagne
flowers protruding out of porcelain necks
their scent so ripe
makes your head swoon

That woman!
she looks like a starlet
she is only a rich man's whore
from the frontier of lights
where the old country husbands are swallowed
up
in all the brightness
see her red lips and red flowers on her
department store cheong sam
rouge on her face
pale pale
she is sick underneath!
"Harlot" the village women
hissed the virgins are angry
hands covering
their sneers betraying they want
to be her
as they scrub their rough underclothes in the lake
knowing electric washing machines are now
common place
on the island of the glass tower mandarins
where their Queenie warns is an island
starved for virgins

What have we here
an infant girl not a day over
the one month trial on earth
her tiny pink finger
looped around her mother's
long thin one
a ring of love wound tight
even mud
can't wash loose
but the circlet of flesh is
broken
the child whose name is Mu Lah
taken away by a virginal daughter
whispering
doll face in the bundle
I am now your first sister
as she cradles the baby girl
soon to be orphaned
to wash in the well
a cistern to the underworld
a tunnel to the dark
where her mother will float
the next dawn
eyes looking but not seeing
heaven

Island with the neon lights
strange beautiful exotic
for the peasants of the stone village
only a water crossing by ferry

or a land crusade by rail
will take Queenie to work
in a factory
to labour over plastic flowers
far away from the famine
empty granaries and the kneeling
in dust bowls
the Red Guard punishing the land matron,
gold rings, jade bracelets, upside down
fish hooks pierce
ripping Queenie's earlobes bloody
Evil Capitalist! Bleeding
your own people!
two charred fingers dangles
a peach blossom of Imperial Times
warlords and bound feet and chariots
the era of her birthdate
torn away in lecherous glee
she doesn't listen to
the soldier's heckling
gets kicked down
again
she tastes
dirt beading with her blood
rather than flood or famine
in the end it is her own people
she is fleeing
to work in a factory
gluing
plastic buds

peonies lotuses peach blossoms plum petals
once the names of the Sidecourt Virgins
now dressed in blue as she is in blue
blue jackets and blue trousers
as in the colour of conformity
anonymity
and death
on the island that has a sea of faces
not like stone village
a face is a sea
in itself

Another soldier's face is a stranger
a proud young guard of the Republican green
patrolling the border
a long snake of barb wire coils
helicopters descending
into the hillside abyss
swallowing sons
husbands even daughters and forgotten
wives escaping
anywhere but here

Another soldier's face is a stranger
revealing nothing for everything
as he hands her
a memorandum
a sheet of paper
fluttering a suffocating bird
in her hand she unfolds

reads the news
her husband absent
for twenty years
has died

A vengeful train
an accident on the last
locomotive
Canton to Kowloon
oil light to neon
Kowloon to Canton
neon to oil light

Queenie was not grief stricken
for years a widow in her soul
didn't know her husband was
coming home
only to leave
their stone house with the only tower
now soaring empty
heaven elusive
for the virginal daughters are now
mothering soldiers
are factory bosses
husbands are lovers requesting
divorce from the blue
woman living in the old world
fallen in the Great Leap

Husband as a lover
tries to forget
the hungering hearts, bellies,
the shoeless
children
defecating
in an earth's hole

Measures the woolens
fashionable cloth of the English gentleman
scissors that trim the ochres grays
pinstripes
fabrics as fine as Bond Street Tailors

Kowloon where he hawks
his watch to feed himself
only to realize
the true pain
in his gut is not
hunger

Some days he goes
without supper some days
he goes
with this woman
takes his mind off
the ache in his old
blue heart

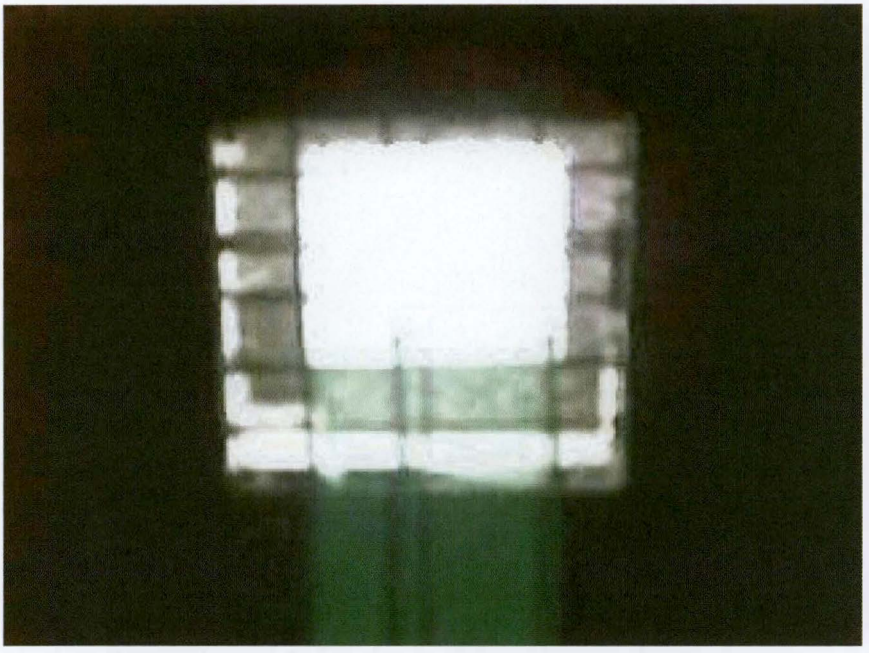
The scissors flew fast today
he can dine with his neon bride to be
Karouke concubine he wishes
to make first wife
asks her in a restaurant
dining
on sweetmeat puddings

He wishes to impress her
makes her a promise
one day he'll take her to The Peninsula Hotel
a wedding cake castle he forgets
to inform her
was once a place
of surrender

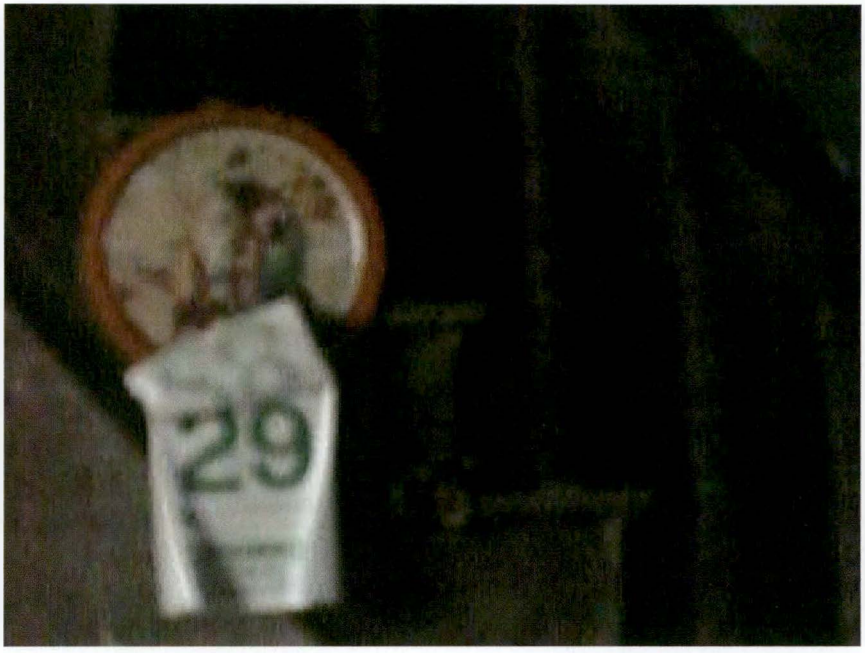
This woman in red flowers
born on the Eve of the Saddest Hour
laid in a basket floated
downriver
lodged in the sands of the Pearl
a river's delta

Taken to an orphanage
a lunar penumbra
on the island of dazzling light
she was given
an affectionate name
nascent pearl
waiting
to grow

i. Tree



ii. Window

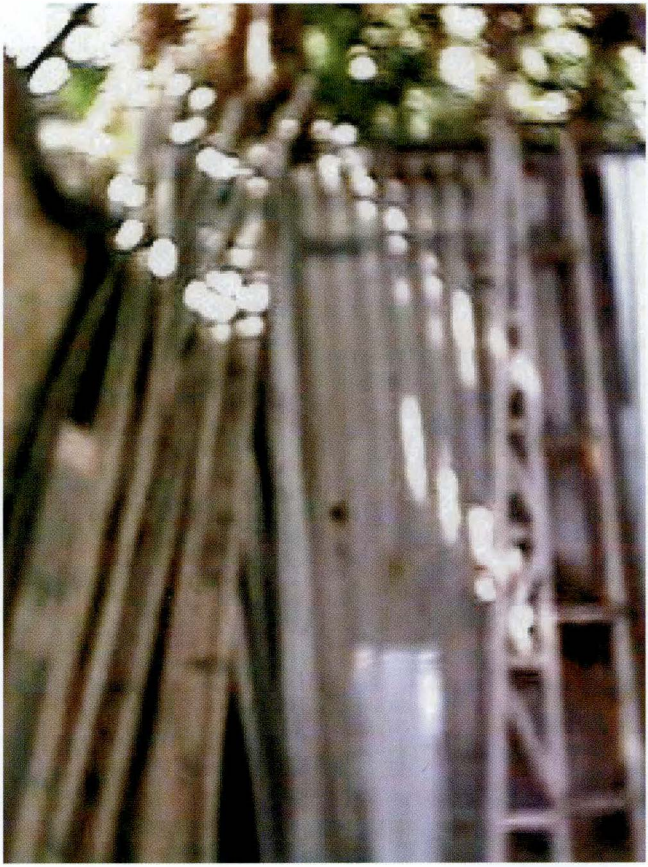


iv. Calendar

v. Skyhole

vi. Clay Pot

vii. Firewood



viii. Bamboo

ix. Slanted Shadow

Now a singer of American showtunes
big noise for big bosses
her one room tenement is small
waiting for the one man who made her
a promise he will return
to marry her
their baby girl
he promises he will not
sell

She discovered
his death in the newspaper
recognized
the two characters making up
his public and his private
name she asked him to write it once
his public and his private
name so she could distinguish between
the two men
she asked the owner of the bar to read
out loud
the death of public faces
engulfed in flames
200 bodies dead
cremations were done
immediately
some can be seen
staggering
out of the train
the man she was waiting for

father of her baby girl
she need not identify
his public name she promised to pretend
not to know
written on the white banner
flapping
in the breeze

To his first wife
the blue woman in the village of stone
she will give her child
a child cannot live calling
one father many
uncles

She purchases a cargo class passage
only water she consumes
her baby tugs hungrily
milky tears from her breast
she thinks of ending it right
then and there
over the bow of the ferry
into the thickness of the river
her baby she clutches onto
as if
it can save her
she goes back inside lies down
on the floor swaying
with the boat
sleeping
a fitful
sleep

The city of Canton emerges
the port swarms with expectant faces
she takes a ride from a farmer
she says she knows the woman with the gold for blood
who lives in a stone house with the only
tower in the village
the farmer chuckles teeth yellow
some black few missing
not anymore her jewels raped
her gilded murals chipped
scraped away
first by the Japanese
with the Kuomintang came
her final humiliation
the iron bars in the windows
iron doors in the floors
all wrenched out
there are fears
of a new son of heaven
who will set our hearts on fire
hot enough to melt
iron bars and doors
into
swords
rifles

She does not see anything
only her baby's
lips slack
against her dry nipple

take us to her
she pleads her sweat running cheap dye
bleeding red petals
over her heart
as she closes her eyes
to the sound of her baby
crying

Straw hats and blue jackets
a silhouette of laughing midwives
sitting
beneath the banyan tree
as if they knew to wait
for her

One woman stood
apart at the crimson
gate screening
the village office
bequeathal of plentiful harvests
for the kindergarten school
fearing forgotten philanthropists
names are painted bold and red
on the wall
over the door
a red scroll honours
immortal gods
hangs like a war banner

The voice of the face
obscured
behind a black umbrella
shunning the sun

Who are you?
Why do you come to our village unannounced?
Who summoned you?
Or did you come on your own accord?
Are you an impostor?
Who let you through the village gate?

The woman who remained proud and intimidating even without her jewels made her demands. She smiled when she was especially vicious.

Why, you must be a prostitute dressed in such flamboyance.

Lips drawn thin from smiling.

When Queenie saw the face of the baby girl clutched against her mother's chest her lips stopped smiling as the smile was now fully drawn up into her eyes.

It was the smile of infatuation.

Baby girl so beautiful you must be a boy.

She ordered her eldest virgin daughter to bathe the infant in the well.

For years Queenie dressed Mu Lah as her son
for years Mu Lah thought of herself as one
youngest most treasured son
my baby emperor she endeared the girl child
then one day at the age of thirteen
Mu Lah woke up
a red spot on her pajama trousers
Queenie could pretend no more
Mu Lah was not a boy
making matters worse she grew a mole
Queenie called fly dirt
on her eyelid same spot
as her birth mother

Queenie could pretend no more
she was not the girl's birth mother
from that day onwards life
became unbearable each time
she saw
the dirt speck
she saw
the harlot
the red flowering dress
her husband's
disloyalty

The famine grew
on top of the Great Leap
hunger mounted bellies
quashed hearts flee

in a journey Queenie purchased
with a pendant
a precious red acolyte
once swallowed to hide
this snakehead's ransom

You and your step daughter will sleep
in the hulk of a ship
we warn you
it will be dark
like hiding in a cave
like living as tomb servants
inside you will find rations
food, water, a blanket
for the chill
fourty nights eternal
concentrate
your mind and soul
on the day on the route on the map
markings of a charcoal line drawn
crossing
ocean's infinity
clusterings of islands
another ten days
see the land
rising golden green
from the mauve sea
one of us will meet you, your beautiful
daughter (she will do well, marry
a rich man)

one of us will take you
safely to the land of prosperity
Gold Mountain
Ga-na-daa

This was the plan described by the young man who in a gray pinstripe suit would have been meticulously dressed had it not been for the "I love NY" T-shirt revealed between the stiff lapels. The man was standing, not sitting, in the hall parlour, a narrow tall room where Queenie and Mu Lah ate, bathed, and slept.

Money from the new country to build a fortress in the old.

They once lived in a stone house with the only tower in the village.

A naked bulb hangs from the ceiling inviting cavernous shadows into the parlour of the stone house. Already, the brick walls look cold and abandoned.

Penny Leong Browne / ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The Stone House Digital Photo Series (2000)

The photographs were taken during a trip to my father's ancestral village, Sun Gok Tong, Zhongsan, located in the southern province of Guangdong in China.

There I discovered the Stone House where my father was born. This place was completely foreign to me, yet to my subconscious, fed through memories, family anecdotes, was deeply familiar.

The full series of twelve photographs (nine are printed here) were taken with one of the first digital cameras on the market. The idiosyncratic nature of the camera's new technology produced interesting effects of light interacting with colour and precise spatial relations within the frame, facilitated by the process of visualization of a composition directly on a screen versus through the traditional camera lens.

The Casio digital camera that I used was deficient in focusing capabilities but had the ability to zoom right into an object, producing immediate compositions that would have been more challenging to take with a regular 35 mm camera (eg., lighting requirements in a dark interior space). I found the technology gave me both control and freedom in manipulating the frame around the chosen objects.

The result is low resolution images of a place that is defined in my psyche through the interplay of memory, imagination, and fantasy. Perhaps what makes these photographs intriguing is the high tech recording of a geographical place that remains low tech, almost Medieval in its stone architecture and village routines (sweeping of the road, wild dogs, and wagon of firewood). My father's ancestral

home which has been unoccupied for many years serves solely as a living shrine to both the departed living and the departed dead. The Stone House is locked in time, as poignantly illustrated by one of the photographs titled, "Calendar": the page left flipped to a day many years ago when there were once my blood kin who cooked, slept, and breathed life into the Stone House.

Yolande Villemaire / ROSES AND LILACS

Translated by Louise Cantin Orr-Ewing

The day you went back to Montréal I was meeting a friend near la Bastille. He had asked me to pick him up at the bookstore where he works, so I took the opportunity to buy Philippe Sollers' *Passion fixe,* since it would not be available in Quebec for weeks. I wished I could have bought many other books, but I have learned to travel light. My friend took me out for lunch, to a nearby restaurant, then I stopped by a flower shop, I chose some pale roses that the florist supplemented with lilacs, as she had no more greenery. I was humming to myself in a hushed voice:

— *Mon amour, la rose et l'oeillet, mon amour et les lilas . . .*

While chatting with me, the young woman created the most beautiful bouquet I had ever seen. The bouquet was for Nane, who had invited me for dinner that night. My cousin Nane has been living in Paris for years and has become quintessentially French. Discreet in her little Agnès B suit, her conversation is always light, ethereal, surrounded by a sweet cherry blossom breeze.

We see each other occasionally, specially while I'm in Paris. We telephone each other, we send each other postcards, birthday wishes, letters, and since the late nineties, brief, laconic e-mail messages. But we prefer to meet; whether it is walking in the Jardins Albert Kahn, drinking margaritas at La Perla in the Marais, having lunch with one of her Parisian girlfriends, seeing a Robert Lepage play in Créteil with Québécois friends, lingering in a Tibetan restaurant near the Sorbonne, remembering our childhood, talking about grandma Yelle, about Matane.

Nane had invited me for seven thirty. I had left the studio at seven, thinking I could go to her house near the Gare de Lyon by way of

the Promenade Plantée. Since it was already dark and a little cool, I decided to hail a taxi near La Bastille. It was Saturday night and the taxi stand was alive with young Beurs[1] jostling and shouting. I waited fifteen minutes in the midst of a whirlwind of discordant sounds, holding my bouquet of roses and lilacs.

A woman taxi driver finally stopped for me, and admitted right away it was her first week on the job. I knew I would be late when she asked for directions to Avenue Daumesnil. All of a sudden I was in the position of guiding a taxi driver around the Gare de Lyon. It seemed beyond me, my sense of direction not being the greatest.

Since I arrived in Paris, I had worked continuously on the paper I was to present at the International Federation of French Teachers Convention, and I was wiped out. I just felt like being with Nane in her quiet little apartment as soon as possible. The taxi dropped me off in front of the station and I quickly found the quiet passage where she has lived since she settled in Paris. She works as a translator for UNESCO.

The minute I stood in front of the door of her building, I realized I didn't have the code. I just had my little purse, I had left my agenda in my handbag. I was already at least ten minutes late. I waited a while, hoping someone would come out of the building.

I walked to a restaurant nearby, the kind that specializes in couscous, it was still empty so the owner kindly let me use the phone. I didn't have Nane's number. I knew her address by heart; it is easy to remember an address in Paris, but I never bothered to memorize her phone number because I didn't call her often. I wanted to call information but it didn't work. I was dialing 411; the owner explained I had to dial 12 and added:

— Anyway, you can't call information from this phone; calls won't go through.

---

[1] Beurs: Young French people born in France of North African parents who emigrated to France in the sixties; young Beurs have French nationality, speak Arabic and French and practice Islam.

I asked for the phone book. I had to say "annuaire téléphonique" for him to understand what I meant — or was it the opposite? I can't remember. I started to panic. I don't know why but I did.

I came across someone with the same name as Nane; a dentist in the 15th arrondissement but I still couldn't find Nane's number.

Next I tried to reach Pierre at the studio, but I didn't know the number either and the hotel-apartment where we were staying had just changed its name. I made a few calls to the office of the rental agency at Concorde and Nation, but all I got were recorded messages.

The restaurant owner was getting impatient. I paid for the calls, and went back to the front of Nane's building. A woman passing by asked me if I knew where impasse Roland Barthes was. I seemed to recall it was near the station and I confided to her:

— My problem is I don't have the code.

— You have to shout!

I went to a tiny street behind Nane's and I yelled her name. I felt ridiculous.

I went back to the restaurant. I asked if there was a phone booth where I could reach information. I wanted to buy a phone card. At that precise moment, I remembered I had decided not to bring my card, thinking there was no use for it. It was a bit much to travel so light . . . .

Exasperated, the owner pointed out where the post office was. It was on the other side of the avenue Daumesnil. For a moment, I watched the traffic flow. Considering the state I was in, it was preferable to wait before crossing. The post office was probably closed anyway and even if there had been an automatic dispenser I didn't have any change. I walked slowly up the next street: there were phone booths everywhere. I entered a bistro; I was told by an obnoxious waiter that I could only find a phone card in a tobacco shop. I asked him where I could find a tobacco shop.

— Gare de Lyon was his answer.

Disheartened, I told him it was far away. He snarled at me that it wasn't his fault. On the square in front of the brasserie, there were at least three people with cell phones. I had counted at least four hundred and forty-three cell phones since I had arrived in Paris. I

kept counting them, as if their sheer number would bring a revelation. I nearly asked a stranger, wearing a cashmere coat, to lend me his, but I didn't dare.

My spring coat was not keeping me warm enough, I was cold. Here I was in Paris, on a Saturday night around eight thirty, in the middle of a sidewalk. I burst into tears, still clutching my bouquet of roses and lilacs.

My despair was totally irrational, and I knew it. I was a minute away from my cousin, who was waiting for me with champagne and a gourmet meal. I was a ten-minute taxi ride from the studio I was sharing with Pierre. Pierre would be home till nine o'clock since he was expecting friends for drinks.

Fine; I didn't have the code, the phone numbers, or a phone card; but I did have five hundred francs. Nane was expecting me. Pierre would fly to my rescue, anytime, anywhere. Indifferent to the few embarrassed passersby, I cried my heart out, being a small child again. I felt I was becoming a statue of salt, paralyzed, helpless. I was heartbreaking.

It felt as if my waters had burst and all the amniotic liquid had flowed out. All of a sudden, my world had sharp, cutting edges. The next minute, I was swimming in a bloody cloak of loud noises; the city had turned a deaf, red ear to my despair. I was trapped as if a current of neutrinos sent from the mists of time went through me; like a distant solar storm that had just reached me by accident.

I was a child, crying freely in the darkness near the Gare de Lyon. Blurred by tears, my face buried in the bouquet of roses and lilacs, I smelled the divine perfume of the flowers. I thought of my mother and her unconditional love. I remembered when as a child she tickled my cheeks with the bouquet of lilacs that she had just gathered for her mother, telling me "my life would be beautiful, beautiful."

In the middle of the sidewalk, I am praying, just like red-haired Lola in the German film *Run Lola Run*, the version where no one dies. My prayer is black, animal, animistic, amerindian; like an arrow thrown against my citadel of grief, like a fountain of gold spurting into the sky, like the new Eiffel tower that dances every hour for ten minutes, every night since the millennium.

I pray. I don't know to whom or to what. I pray to Notre-Dame du Cap, to Notre-Dame de Grâce, to the Virgin of Guadeloupe and to all the other black virgins of my catholic childhood. For a split second, I pray that life would cradle me in her arms so I can draw some needed strength from it.

I'm walking, sleepwalking towards the Gare de Lyon looking for a tobacco shop. I cross the Boulevard Diderot and I stand on a safety island in the middle of the road, at the exit of an underground parking. I am scared, exhausted. A good Samaritan waiting like me for the green light hears my cries and looks at me, astonished.

I mumble that I am looking for a tobacco shop, the phone number of my cousin, her code.

She volunteers to let me use her phone if only for a few minutes. I can't imagine asking information for Nane's number, standing amidst cars that rush from all directions.

I decline and thank her. She leaves. I turn around and walk in the other direction, towards the Gare de Lyon. I enter the station. It is quieter. It feels good.

I ask the person, who is putting away the chairs, where the tobacco shop is. He points to an escalator on the right. I can't find it. I go round and round, crying. Finally I locate it. I go up. On my right, another kiosk, a newspaper stand that could very well be a tobacco shop. The cashier informs me, almost with glee, that she has no more phone cards. She notices my tears, the other clients do too.

— But I still have some code cards . . .

— What's that?

— The same thing.

— How does it work?

— Just read.

Once in the phone booth I insert the card code and the display says "technical default". I try another phone, two, and ten more, always the same thing. I go back to the kiosk. Now I'm crying shamelessly, my mascara is running down my face, but it feels soothing to cry, and I continue crying.

A woman wearing a red smock with "Relay" written on the back, comes up to me and with a voice as soft as the wings of an angel, asks me:

— Can I help you?

Her empathy overjoys me and I start to sob instead of answering her. The manager waits. I hiccup:

— My cousin . . . number . . . the code . . . the code card. Nothing works. She's been waiting since seven thirty.

— Write her name on this piece of paper. I'll look her up on the Minitel.

The magic word! Minitel. I never knew exactly what it was, but I know it's miraculous. I thank her. I wipe away my tears. I wait for her. She comes back with Nane's number. My hand touches hers.

— Thank you, you are very *nice*.

They don't say that in France; *nice* doesn't have the same meaning here, but I don't care.

I insert the code card, "technical default" again. I take off my glasses in order to read the tiny lettering. I dial 3055 and punch the star key, but always with the same result "technical default". I go back to the kiosk to ask how the damned code card works. The cashier explains:

— You can't insert the code card, you must dial 3055 then the star key and finally your code.

Yeah but which bloody code?

— The card's code obviously.

— But where is the card code? I don't understand.

— You have to scratch it off. Voilà. That's the code: 2345 5497 337. It's your code. You have to dial these numbers first and then dial the phone number.

On the radio Andrea Bocelli is singing:

— Con te partirò . . .

At this very moment, I realized I was crying and grieving for you.

Paris was not at all the same without your energy, omnipresent, pervasive, embracing. The physical joy that dances in every cell of my body when I move in the same time space membrane as you was gone, this tiny spring of water that echoes in my heart when you talk, talk, talk and when your voice, your voice, your voice caresses me, tames me, lures me into the depths of my wildest retrenchments, gone was the warmth that I absorb and that comforts me when you

touch me when I dance, elated, shrouded, mesmerized, electrified, when our bodies touch and I feel the weight of your closeness. All that remained was the memory of drowning in the exciting *rap* of your smell and in your eyes eyes eyes, the most beautiful eyes in the world, like charcoal light on the snow when Montréal becomes blurred in an ice storm that turns us into silent animals on the sidewalks of our first winter, do you remember my love when we were not yet together?

We were walking on Sherbrooke Street, returning from the Cegep, which had closed due to a power failure. A colleague had given us a ride from Lachine to Atwater Street, but there was no subway, no bus. The media would later call it "Black Friday". We joined hundreds of pedestrians going east in the melting snow. All buildings were dark, and the traffic lights no longer worked. Headlights were the only source of light. It was at once beautiful and frightening. We were not yet aware that the James Bay power lines had given way under the weight of the ice and there could be a shortage of drinking water.

We sensed the danger.

You were standing by me, I was afraid of nothing. That day, in the midst of the blackout, you were my guardian angel. I was breathing in a bubble, pink and light as a perfume, a cocoon of light, walking with you in the shadows of Montréal, the muffled noise of steps, comforted by your presence, remembering my childhood when I went to the village with Raphael, inhaling the irresistible aroma of fresh bread welcoming us to the bakery. There was a smell of wet wool in the air while we were battling the wind and sleet, and the voice of Andrea Bocelli was echoing in my ears through the loud speakers, bringing me back to the Gare de Lyon where I stand alone, bewildered, lost.

— Con te partirò . . .

I miss you so, I miss you like never before.

As soon as I got back to the studio near the Seine that night, I learned your cell phone number by heart, so that I would never again be alone in this unforgiving world.

Nicole Brossard / TWO POEMS

Translated from the French by Robert Majzels and Erin Mouré[1]

THE EYES OF WOOLF AND BORGES

I can't seem to erase
the idea that faced with time
leaf or child
time repeats tempest
or labyrinth
no one dreams of resisting

of life we'll say any old thing in short
to save time *quick-*
cut: confusion of flash fool furious
sleep time of screens
real-time of tête-à-tête and intimate talk
side-by-side spoken clearly
snippet of sincerity

we are predictable beings
summer we caress from afar
with a gaze the future in segments
tongue in the mouth
mobile landscape
viable or vital
the cheekbone is soft
leaf or chalk

[1] Originally published by Noroît in 1999 as *Musée de l'os et de l'eau.*

it's in the curve of the back
in the curve of women's bellies
the hand measures
time the simple need to compare
ex aequo long ago
fiction inveterate and a good-looking elsewhere
leaf or child
the heat once more of mouths
girl or leaf
the sentiment of so often

maybe we need a small incision
in silence with a fingernail
so that time mounts maternal
up to our temples coming-and-going of memory
life caught in the fist like light

time sudden as though already
it no longer existed
from one end to another of this poem
between each flutter of the heart
gone soft like the aftermath of love
or fraction of a second that frightens the athlete

in the books of Woolf and Borges
the time of the blind
the time of the woman with a thousand points of view
fine fluidity that hinders neither stone nor sea

if time swallowed suddenly
the view across dawn and my past
I would spend hours enrapt
in library or garden
in the reflection of every spine
ink and the vast vocabulary of existing

in the books of Woolf and Borges
a flutter of eyelashes
between London and Buenos Aires
a girl of thirteen with round glasses might wonder
how to let a city enter
the room in which she writes
where to make civilization begin
the speech of water the vertiginous number

TYPHOON THRUM

and it takes flight whitecaps typhoon thrum
like an elbow in the night
ray of mores
the world is swiftly dark

everywhere where the mouth is eccentric
it's snowing: and yet this heat long
beneath the tongue, the "me" curls up emotion
glides ribbon of joy
harmonic eyelids

as the world is swiftly dark
and night turns me avid
from everywhere so much brushes up
that the tongue with its salt
pierces one by one the words
with silence, typhoon thrum

in full flight if I spread my arms
my hair slow in the oxygen
I claim there are vast laws
beyond cities and sepultures
voice ribbon, eyes' blade

tonight if you lean your face close
and civilization stretches out
at the end of your arms, tonight
if in full flight you catch my image
say it was from afar
like a die in the night

and while my sex dreams of dawn
engorges ecstatic epitheliums
it's snowing and again proximity
I claim it's the aura
or the image asymmetric
of the image in brief full flight

ground swell, image ceremony
my heart is agile
emotion between us
matter of laughter matter too true
and my voice that cracks
in the cold of galaxies

I claim I keep watch in silence
in the rose-cold of galaxies
I claim that if the eye is black
it cannot keep watch

everywhere where the laughing virtual mouth
of energy devours dawn disgorges its yes
she cries out as wildly as she comes
tympanum, sonorous mauve
vast laws that lick
the air's depth from afar

in the morning the *she* glides high
and rivers beneath my skin
are long from so many windings
savoury with women and lucidity
in the morning the river surges swept away
when I touch you
face to face in affirmation

John Barton / THE TROUBLES

until what centres no longer holds us, we compose
pictures along the Falls Road, our car stopped
shoppers window-gazing and unaware of the feints
of shadow and light we insinuate among pyramids
of fruit or trail across headlines in the newsstand
tabloids as we jump quickly in and out, frame time
with our viewfinders, the countless murals we snap
drafted by sympathizers on the long overexposed
exterior walls of the steep-roofed, red-brick, soot
tarred houses, grocers, haberdashers, and hardware
shops, murals about strikers who, two decades ago
in Armagh, starved to death by choice, the English
prison not far from the seat of my mother's family
who left the North years before the Famine, later
Loyalists settled in Upper Canada west of Kingston
the first house standing still in the plentiful winds
gusting over the lake and Amherst Island, its crawl
space scooped from shale damp with the panic felt

hiding with the family silver carried with care all the way from Markethill, Johnson's gang of Yankee sympathizers tacking across the lake, staging raids during what at school we labelled the Rebellion the unsettling climates trailed behind my ancestors becalmed into what is now a quaint four-poster bed and-breakfast where I would've taken you, another adventure in the *Boy's Own* story of Ireland we had hoped one day to expatriate, the history of two men who through their troubles unite as one, despite what might hold them apart, checkpoints and pipe bombs, this uncentred and sudden widening maze of streets turning us away from where we thought to go, visiting from elsewhere, driven by a friend who has lost any faith she knows where to take us so keeps us lost, hers an entire life of roadblocks and Guinness, having learned she is who she is where she is — the best and the worst — and, hoping

hiding with the family silver carried with care all the way from Markethill, Johnson's gang of Yankee sympathizers tacking across the lake, staging raids during what at school we labelled the Rebellion the unsettling climates trailed behind my ancestors becalmed into what is now a quaint four-poster bed and-breakfast where I would've taken you, another adventure in the *Boy's Own* story of Ireland we had hoped one day to expatriate, the history of two men who through their troubles unite as one, despite what might hold them apart, checkpoints and pipe bombs, this uncentred and sudden widening maze of streets turning us away from where we thought to go, visiting from elsewhere, driven by a friend who has lost any faith she knows where to take us so keeps us lost, hers an entire life of roadblocks and Guinness, having learned she is who she is where she is — the best and the worst — and, hoping

to drive us clear of danger, turns us into the centre of a riot, the car dividing perspectives while rocks skid across a fragmenting windscreen, this woman at the wheel living in an eternal present that is not Belfast, her vision of this intensely passionate city a long-fallen capital where, despite every wrong turn, couples meet and love, where despite herself she drops us off so we can shoot murals to the dead mothers and their missed children — they shame her far more than they trouble us — these commissioned vigilante works of art vitalizing the Easter Rising and Civil War two stories high in green and orange or blacks and sombre greys in contrast to the coat of arms painted by paramilitaries at every corner of the Shankhill Road, the Red Hand of Ulster held religiously palm flat and forward, complex URLs of the UDA, the UUF, the UVF, and the UYM blazoned in scrolls beneath crossed machine guns

and mute black-masked men who through torn slits look at us while we block our shots, you filling up your throwaway until it consumes itself, my hands shaking, my Minolta unable to track however few exposures my film still can make accommodations for, both of us cropping similar photos of the same wayside towns as we are later driven cross-country on the grand tour, sheep-crazed and whiskey-wise the kamikaze switchback roads along the jagged coastline turning and turning us into unexpected vistas, promontories sharpening against the azure our separate records overlapping, as if something untoward will drive us apart, a gesture or veering look at a stranger, cognizant already of the troubles we might import and give anxious voice to at home love's terrorism, his sweet erasure so annihilating it undoes the existence first of one of us and then the other, the briefest of excursions across the most

faint of lines there is never any coming back from
the Republic a haven where the North goes to relax
the air on either side of the border acrid with turf
smoldering as it has for centuries in village hearths

Myrna Kostash / from BALKAN ARTISTS IN McWORLD, Part Three: Serbs You Never Hear About[1]

On December 13, 1999, a group of independent Serbian writers decided to form their own association as an opposition to the Official Association of Serbian Writers. The main idea behind the association, ***Writer's Forum****, besides the protection and respect of the basic professional rights, was a formation of an independent body which will oppose the current political violence, repression, censorship and fight for a free, democratic and open society, liberated from all nationalistic and ideological dogmas and prejudices.* [from their pamphlet]

A year later, the Serbian political scene had changed so utterly — the man most responsible for the violence, repression, and censorship, Slobodan Milosevic, had been ousted from power — that the Writer's Forum seemed not to know what to do with itself. At least that was my impression after several hours in their company in Belgrade one winter evening. They were meeting in a room in a dilapidated theatre space just a couple of doors down from a McDonald's (and across the square from the renowned Hotel Moskva, now named simply "Hotel", while the changing political order decided how it felt about Moscow, I suppose).

There was a meeting chairman, the drama professor and writer Filip David, who made a stab at presenting an agenda, but it was clear from the mood around the table that people had assembled only to drink, smoke, and gossip, as if they were in a club. There was a sizable hubbub about the recent attacks in the papers on the young and comely playwright, Biljana Srbljanovic, who was in attendance, by an older feminist writer who accused her of exploiting her youth and beauty to get ahead in the theatre without having very much to say, to judge from her produced works. Ms. Srbljanovic's colleagues in the room were all heatedly in sympathy with her and against the bitter old crone of yesteryear. This seemed to be the gist of the

[1] An earlier version of this piece, in its entirety, is published at www.dooneyscafe.com.

scandal, which occupied the members of the Writer's Forum for some considerable length of time.

A couple of returnees from political exile drifted into the meeting, flourishing bottles of duty free whiskey. And a woman from Amsterdam, formerly of Belgrade, arrived with her Dutch companion, and told us something of her work with an investigative team looking for the truth about the appalling events in Srebrenica, Bosnia, in the latter phase of the war in Bosnia, when Serb forces overran a Moslem town under "protection" of UN troops and massacred the men and boys. Listening to her, it occurred to me this was one of the very few moments of public reference to Serb complicity in war crimes that I had experienced in my travels to Belgrade over the decade.

I had arranged to meet one of the Forum's "Initiating Board" to talk to him about Serbian artists and the menace of globalization. He failed to show up but I did track him down in his studio a few days later and there, subsiding into a broken-springed armchair and staring back at vividly-coloured if lugubrious Byzantinesque religious paintings, sipping Turkish coffee, I heard Mileta Prodanovic's explanation for the frailty of the anti-globalization movement in Serbia, namely that "Milosevic used the language of the movement." For example, during the NATO bombing of Kosovo and Serbia, Milosevic rallied his people with the declaration that Serbia now stood alone amongst the civilized nations, all others having succumbed to the poisoned embrace of Americanization. Serbia, alone and battered but unbowed, still stood for the old cultural values of freedom and love-of-country and heroism that shaped Europeans before the "west" exported consumerism, individualism, and pornography to eager decadents.

"Two Dutch playwrights came to Belgrade," Mileta continued, "wanting to do some theatre against globalization. We told them we could only sign up after the departure of Milosevic. 'Colonization' was part of his vocabulary and it has to be recuperated. What does it mean to be 'proud' of being Serbian? We have to start from point zero."

From the perspective of a friend in her fifties, veteran of the student movement and uprising of 1968 in Belgrade, tireless human rights agitator ever since, the most shocking identity crisis the Serbs have had to endure, under the Milosevic nationalists, is demonization of Communism and Yugoslavia. "We went from an identity as Yugoslav socialists who were proud of what we had achieved and what we represented in and to the world, to an identity that was told to look at that past as entirely rotten. The Yugo-Communism of the past failed the test of nationalism: it had 'betrayed' the nations in the name of a spurious higher value, socialism."

In nationalist Serbia not a trace remains of the legendary Marshall Josip Broz Tito who had masterminded Partisan resistance to Nazi occupation, stood up to Comrade Stalin — who blinked — then went on to shape and control Yugo-Socialism until his death in 1980. Not a street, not an avenue, not a shop, not a factory, still bears his name. Instead Belgrade sports the names of kings, princes, and bishops, as though the collective experience of building Yugoslavia over fifty years is "false," whereas tsars and princesses and monasteries are somehow more authentic and meaningful as collective sites of identity. Even I feel affronted by what is happening to some of the name plates on street corners which still bear the Yugoslav-era names, how vandals have been at work in anticipation of their unnaming, scratching and gouging and painting over the offending names, just like Turks at work on the eyes of Byzantine saints.

Serbs are anti-American, in the sense that they blame the Americans for the bombing, even those who positioned themselves in the opposition to Milosevic. Mileta referred to an anecdote from one of his own short stories featuring a talking dog. Dog wants to know why "they" are bombing Serbia. Answer: "They're introducing a new chapter in world history. From now on, no one will be buying bananas where they feel like it but only where the Americans want them to buy them."

And there was even a brief, flaring moment of cultural protest when protesters threw rocks at the McDonald's in the city centre (provoking its local management to put up posters begging protesters not to trash them: "Stop! We're not Americans! This restaurant is 'ours,' Serbs'.") But even that act of outrage was ambiguous. I was told that mere days later the same protesters were lined up a few blocks away, waiting for Belgrade's newest McDonald's to open. For female friends of mine in Belgrade, McDonald's means that, after the cinema, there is somewhere to go for tea. It's smoke-free, brightly-lit, very clean, and has cheerful staff and public washrooms to die for. I saw for myself, too, how enterprising fast food operators renamed burek, the traditional Serbian cheese pie, McBurek.

I am being forced to accept that, even for Serbs, who felt the wrath of the western powers raining bombs down on their heads, our world of branded consumerism represents a cultural alternative to Serbian cultural space. Logofied commodification and "the globalization of cultural deprivation" (to quote the Greek actor and head of the Panhellenic Cultural Movement, Kostas Kazakos), is a "free zone" precisely because it is not about Serbianness. Official culture has been irretrievably corrupted by its occupation by post-Communist nationalists of the ilk of those who drove Yugoslavia into war with itself. As one friend, a theatre activist, put it: "You start with talk about 'identity,' proceed to 'roots,' and you know what comes next — ethnic cleansing."

Miranda Pearson / HERE I AM, LOVER

Why am I here? It's blindingly obvious I prefer
the embroidery of wild flowers
to these dark mountains that remind me
only of Scotland.
I should have seized the chance and
stayed in the woods, watched
the silver birch unpeel, a
crazy book, its tough, dry weep, flay
of original paper, opening and —

O the decoy of romance.
You, waiting by the shore,
wanting (always). Sex
like a bright tongue, the horrible appetite
of one who is too hungry, shirt damp
from another night outdoors.

So. Here I am, lover,
with the stars. And the starfish
that cling on and on.
The arbutus is here too, fe-
line, neur-
otic. You see
the housework of tide everywhere, the way it
sweeps things up. Forgets.

Glance quizzically at the sun.
Breathe that deep
smell of salt, the
sodden initiation of air.
Meagre. I am.
Like winter sunlight.

But feel that? The thump
and sway of berth? Ooh
shudder, as the ferry, you know,
connects. See the dock's
ragged black stockings, hear the huff
and shrug of sea, its bellows
masculine, dogged.

I come back to you
and lay at your feet
an empty bowl:
Poetry.
Bric-a-brac.
These small
stitches, this
picking
and unpicking.

Try, will you, to repair
longing. My heart
weighs at least four pounds.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

JOHN BARTON is the author of eight collections of poetry including *Notes Toward a Family Tree* (1995; Ottawa Book Award), *Designs from the Interior* (1995; Archibald Lampman Award), and *Sweet Ellipsis* (1999; Archibald Lampman Award). A new edition of his third book of poetry, *West of Darkness: Emily Carr, a self-portrait* (1988; Archibald Lampman Award) was published in 1999 by Beach Holme. His eighth collection, *Hypothesis*, was published by House of Anansi Press in 2001. He lives in Ottawa, where he has co-edited *Arc: Canada's National Poetry Magazine* since 1990.

Montreal writer NICOLE BROSSARD has been a major force in poetry, fiction and the essay in Quebec, Canada, and Europe for over 35 years. She has published over 30 works since 1965, including *Mauve Desert, Baroque at Dawn, Installations, The Aerial Letter.* She has twice received the Governor General's Award, twice received the Grand Prix of the Festival international de la Poésie de Trois-Rivières, as well as the Priz Athanase-David, Quebec's highest literary award. The poems published in this issue are excerpted from her book *Museum of Bone and Water* which will appear in April, 2003 from House of Anansi Press.

LOUIS CANTIN ORR-EWING is a French instructor at Capilano College and has previously translated an article abstract of Josephine Jungic's "Raphael's *St. Michael and the demon* and Savonarola's *Flagellum Dei*", published September 2001 in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and the Pierre Coupey's exhibition catalogue *Notations: 1994-1998* (The Gallery of the Canadian Embassy, Tokyo, Japan, 1998).

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MYRNA KOSTASH is a fulltime writer based in Edmonton. Her latest book is *The Next Canada: In Search of the Future Nation*. While serving as writer-in-residence at the Saskatoon Public Library she is at work on a creative nonfiction, *Memoirs of Byzantium*.

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ROBERT MAJZELS is a Montreal-born prose writer, playwright and translator. His recent novels are *City of Forgetting* (Mercury Press, 1997), and *Apikoros Sleuth* (Mercury Press, forthcoming 2003). His translation of France Daigle's novel *A Fine Passage* will appear this fall from House of Anansi, and his translation of Daigle's previous novel, *Just Fine* (Anansi), received the Governor General's Award for translation in 2000. He previously translated, also with Erin Mouré, Nicole Brossard's *Installations* (Muses' Company, 2000).

ERIN MOURÉ is a poet and translator based in Montreal. Her *O Cidadán*, a collection of poetry that beckons the essay form and explores a troubled notion of citizen and borders, appeared from House of Anansi in April, 2002. Her previous work, *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person: a Transelation of Fernando Pessoa/Alberto Caeiro's O Guardador de Rebanhos* (Anansi, 2001) was a finalist for the Griffin Poetry Prize and the City of Toronto Book Award. She previously translated, also with Robert Majzels, Nicole Brossard's *Installations* (Muses' Company, 2000).

MIRANDA PEARSON's first book of poetry, *Prime*, was published by Beach Holme publishing in 2001. She lives in Vancouver.

PETER QUARTERMAIN is a retired English professor who lives in Vancouver. "Delivering the Bread" is an extract from his autobiography, *Where I Lived and What I Learned For: Part One: Growing Dumb*, currently under construction.

BOB SHERRIN, writer and visual artist, lives in Burnaby, BC. His work has been published or exhibited in Canada, the US, Scotland, Switzerland, and Italy. He teaches in the Humanities Division of Capilano College. The poems published in this issue of TCR are part of a work-in-progress entitled *Splendor w/o Occasion.*

YOLANDE VILLEMAIRE is a poet and novelist living in Montreal. Her first novel and first poetry book were both published in 1974. Active in the literary scene as a poetry performer as well as a critic, she participated in feminist and postmodern writing movements and also lived in New York, India, Paris, and Amsterdam. *D'ambre et d'ombre*, an anthology of her poetry was issued in 2000. She published her seventh novel, *Des petits fruits rouges* in 2001. Her most recent book, *La déferlante d'Amsterdam*, a novel, is being issued in Montreal and Paris in 2003. She is the director of "hiéroglyphe", a collection at XYZ publisher and has two books translated into English: *Quartz and Mica* (Guernica, 1988) and *Amazon Angel* (Guernica,1993).

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