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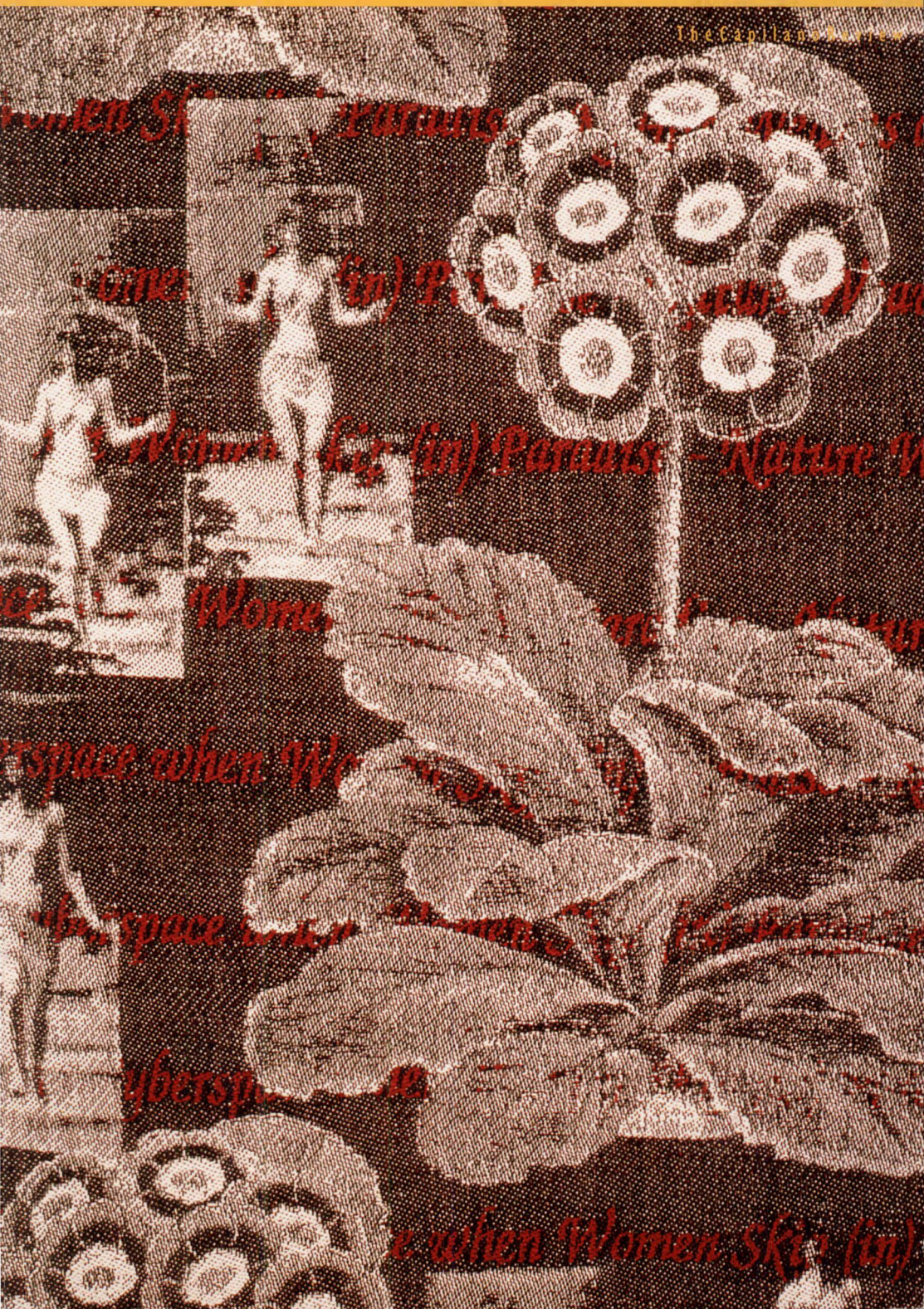
The Capilano Review



things . . . learned *in lieu*

— Ingrid de Kok

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Jenny Penberthy / CARTOGRAPHY OF ONE'S OWN COUNTRY: An Interview with Ingrid de Kok

In March 2004, *The Capilano Review* hosted South African poet Ingrid de Kok as its Writer-in-Residence. She consulted with local writers on their manuscripts, gave a reading of her poems, and in a lecture titled "'Verbs that move mountains': Commitment and the Lyric Poem," reflected on the nature of the poem's authority in the public sphere.

Ingrid de Kok grew up in Stilfontein, a gold mining town in South Africa. In 1977 she immigrated to Ontario, Canada and then returned to Cape Town in 1984. She has a MA from Queen's University. Among many other projects, she co-edited *Spring is Rebellious: Albie Sachs and Respondents on Cultural Freedom* and contributed to *Negotiating the Past: the Making of Memory in South Africa* and *It all begins: Poems from Postliberation South Africa.* Her poems have appeared in *West Coast Line* and in *Sulfur.*

De Kok's collections of poetry — *Familiar Ground* (Ravan, 1988), *Transfer* (Snailpress, 1997), and *Terrestrial Things* (Kwela/Snailpress, 2002) — have been published in South Africa. Her work has also been given much attention in Europe, the US, and Canada. It has been translated into several languages including Italian, Dutch, French, and Japanese. In April 2006, a collection of new and selected poems, *Seasonal Fires*, will be published by Seven Stories Press in New York.

This interview was conducted in print rather than in person in September 2005.

You're just back from the Berlin Internationales Literatuur Festival. In the summer you were at the Rotterdam Poetry International Festival. What were they like? Are these international writing events important to you as a poet?

Both were rather wonderful, because of the nature of the audiences, and because of the presence of other writers — often people I had not heard of before, though they are significant in their home countries. In Berlin the audience was informed, respectful, sober. In the Netherlands the festival foregrounds Dutch poets as well as foreign ones and the audiences seem to be more partisan and engaged.

I had only attended a few international literary festivals before these two, but I understand that they can become a fix, with some writers gravitating from one to another year after year, rather like the writing retreat perambulators. The events do widen my reading, introduce me to other traditions, complicate my notions of contemporary work. And it is valuable, not to mention humbling, to test one's voice in foreign environments. Both the Berlin Festival and Poetry International place great emphasis on translation — especially Poetry International, where the commitment to translation, into Dutch but also into English, is extraordinary. In Berlin actors perform the poems in German translation. In South Africa, there are 11 official languages but few resources for multiple translation, and vexed debate about its necessity, so I was impressed by the power of Dutch translation culture.

Does the South African writing community sustain you? Do you feel the influence of other South African writers? It's a diverse community and I wonder how lyric poetry co-exists with the more public, performance-based poetics of black South African poets? Is there an influence from the South African diaspora?

I have been involved in aspects of the writing community since my student years and then through the eighties and early nineties when political engagement, writing and performing were closely interrelated. Sometimes injurious to the writing, but an inescapable condition of the period. I still read fairly widely around the country,

assist some young writers with their manuscripts or in getting published, talk at book launches, help with writing events and other projects, occasionally guest-edit journals or review books. I spend more time doing this sort of thing than writing and I don't particularly enjoy it. I would not say the writing community "sustains" me, though the wider cultural environment does. I am lucky to have supportive friends who are also excellent writers, readers, and artists. But the writing community in South Africa is as mutually suspicious and envious, as divisive and judgmental, as elsewhere in the world. The quality of book reviewing is poor. The resources — publishers, prizes, journals, fellowships, etc. — are scarce or nonexistent, so envy is in a motile relation to aspiration.

While, as you say, the writing community is diverse — because of class, race, gender, access, educational opportunities, language, reading and writing traditions — the products are not as diverse as one might expect or hope. And despite the obvious truth that lyric poetry operates in a print-based and more conventional reading context, it is not as cut off from the performance-based work as it might at first appear. Play and critique exist in the lyric arsenal too. Nor is the writing of lyric poetry by any means only a "white" practice. Recently, excellent lyrical collections have appeared from two black poets — Rustum Kozain and Gabeba Baderoon.

There are crossovers at play between lyrical work and the more public poetics you refer to. For example Cape Town has quite a rich poetry reading culture and every week or two there is some kind of well-attended gathering at which poetry is read — either print-based or more performance-based work. The politics of performative work has itself shifted, from the anti-apartheid evocations of the past to energetic undermining of current nation building myths. Lesego Rampolokeng and the urban poets he has influenced are still important, using a range of linguistic codes to produce critiques of social conditions and of language itself. There are also groups of women poets around the country who deploy their poetry for directly feminist aims. Performance poetry here, as in many places, tends to draw younger listeners and participants — in South Africa mainly but not only black. Some of the work is to my ear self-regarding, formulaic,

more or less crass; and some is openly commercial, employed by advertisers to sell "lifestyle" products.

And the influence of other South African writers on my writing? I think probably not. I don't think my admiration for some of them has necessarily resulted in their influence on my work. Or maybe I just can't see it.

I have strong connections with South African writers who live here but also with others who still live abroad, but visit South Africa frequently, like the novelist Zoë Wicomb who lives in Glasgow and Yvette Christiansë, whom I think of as one of South Africa's finest and most innovative poets, though she lives in New York. Some writers returned home in the nineties, people like Keorapetse Kgositsile, who has published several books since his return and is an important model for many young poets. The increased mobility is bracing, and is breaking down the virtue made of isolation in the eighties, when the cultural boycott was at its height.

Have there been changes in state support for the arts? For literary magazines and publishers of literature? Employment for poets? Performance opportunities? Festivals? What does the Grahamstown Festival offer poets? The Durban Poetry Festival?

There have been limited changes. The key one of course is that mainly Afrikaans writers were privileged in the previous dispensation and now the resources are more equitably divided. There are a few more literary magazines and internet publications; somewhat more publishing opportunities. No real employment for poets as poets really, though a lot of (unpaid) performance opportunities and more festivals. Tiny things mostly but some larger city festivals and the Durban Poetry Africa festival which invites interesting foreign poets. The National Arts Council gives very little money to writers as far as I can tell; the Department of Arts and Culture gives most of its money to big public projects like Robben Island. Basically the country's money is assigned to education, health and housing, all desperately needed. Support for culture is largely symbolic.

Has South Africa seen a growth in demand for Creative Writing courses in the universities or in the community?

Yes. The University of Cape Town was the first, I think, to offer courses at undergraduate and masters levels. The University of the Witwatersrand and KwaZulu Natal now do this too and no doubt other places too. The industry is still in its infancy though there are large numbers of people wanting to do these courses and a fair number who have emerged from them have had work published. The Centre for the Book in Cape Town offers various courses to writers and provides advice for self-publishing and community publishing ventures and there are other modest initiatives in the country. The Centre for Extra-Mural Studies at the University of Cape Town, where I work, offers a small range of writing and art courses to the public.

I think these are positive developments, especially if what they produce is a group of sophisticated readers and reviewers. The reviewing culture in South Africa is parlous (in English especially; Afrikaans is far better served by serious and well-read critics). But I know there are some negative potentials too, that creative writing here will become technically more assured but that certain kinds of human experience and language experimentation might be dumbed down or modified to suit "academic" criteria.

How has South African poetry developed in relation to the other arts, particularly fiction and drama? Are you ever tempted to write fiction or drama?

There is interesting new poetry around, as I mentioned. But I think much of the inventive work is being done in drama and fiction. I think of the work of Ivan Vladislavic, for instance, and Zoë Wicomb, of new writer Mary Watson, of Njabulo Ndebele and dramatists like Mike van Graan. I am sometimes tempted to write fiction or drama, but until recently I have resisted it. I don't have a narrative consciousness, I don't think in terms of plot or cause and effect. I think in rhythmic shapes, in patterns, in sounds. Even the essays or speeches I write long to be poems.

Since 1994, South Africa's isolation from the rest of Africa has ended. How have you experienced this as a poet?

First of all it means one can travel on one's own continent. And therefore, theoretically, can respond to a much wider human and natural environment, if one chooses to. And access the work of African writers in new ways. Africans from around the continent find their way to Cape Town too, so the possibilities for interchange and comparison have increased. I do read more Ghanaian and Nigerian work but, because I don't read French, very little from Francophone Africa, even though I went to a festival in Djibouti in the early nineties. I was recently included in a compilation of African poetry edited by Harry Garuba, a Nigerian critic and writer based in Cape Town; and the opportunity to access other African writers through this double issue of *Poetry International* from San Diego State University has been valuable.

The political content of South African poetry will surely have changed over the last decade or so. How do poets deal with the past now? Is there a weariness with the subject now that there's a new generation of young people who have no memory of living under apartheid?

Well, the gestation of a poem is a mysterious and opaque thing and does not seem to respond in any immediate or predictable way to historical change. And the past — its binary pressure and political language — is so potent that it still inflects a great deal of South African composition in poetry and in fiction. How could it not? For many, apartheid is not exactly dead, it is just hiding more furtively.

It seems to me that, among many, there are two apparently conflicting pressures at work: one towards an identification with the nation, which requires a way of writing into a celebratory space, into the future; the other towards a critical analysis of the new dispensation. The latter may include expressions of anger and disappointment at the pace of change or at the rise of a self-interested new elite. Some young black poets who were too young to write about apartheid now write fiercely about post-apartheid inequities.

Your question asks whether the political as a primary category has been modified. I think it has, but only slightly. The "political" novel or poem is, however slowly, changing into something more reflective, with a greater trust of the imaginative range of language, of the authority of the inner life as well as of the external public context. Writers feel freer to claim multiple identities, not simple single political identities.

My feeling is that there is still a tedious tendency, in poetry and in fiction, to look for the big, the overarching, the monumental statement, the epic, the hold-all that will say everything there is to be said about South Africa. With an overarching set of political narratives controlling us, it is difficult to trust the smaller gesture, the little or muted angled story. But then, look at all the blockbusters coming out in the USA too. A sign of national anxiety rather than strength?

How have your own poems changed over the same period?

Do you think they have? I really can't say. I seem to return to the same topics, to notions of home, relational bonds, the fragility of the body, social disruption, sorrow, and survival. My books seem to all have had the same pattern, alternating personal recollections about childhood, mining life and love, with sections on the textures of immigration, travel, or absence, and sections more directly related to political and social landscapes — apartheid, the truth commission, AIDS. The sections are always interdependent — and I remain interested in the way poetic language can provisionally reconstruct remnants of identity, memory, history. I am still drawn to the elegiac note, though I have been writing some satirical pieces, some longer narrative poems and some tiny little descriptive fragments.

I'm curious about your beginnings as a poet. Did you write before you moved to Canada in the 1970s? Did Canada play a role in your development as a poet? You returned in South Africa in 1983 against the tide of white emigration. How was that?

I had written quite a bit before coming to Canada in 1976, had been published in small magazines and some anthologies, and was probably known already as poet. But yes, Canada did play a significant role in my development as a writer. I lived in Kingston, Ontario, and met a number of writers there, such as Bronwen Wallace, and later Carolyn Smart, who is now my sister-in-law, and others. Stan Dragland, whom I think is a wonderfully elastic writer and critic, published my poem "Small Passing" — now a widely reprinted poem — in *Brick*. Early on I had poems published in journals such as *Event*, *Fiddlehead* and *Descant*. It was an invigorating time, a period when I reconceived myself as a poet, And I still think of Canada as a second — and an intellectual — home. In the last few months I have helped set up the first Association of Canadian Studies in Africa, and my ties remain strong.

I did return against the tide. There were personal reasons as well as a conviction that I needed to be back in South Africa in order to write. And I wished to re-enter the politically engaged environment that I had earlier abandoned.

Since Familiar Ground *(1988), the forms of your poems have tightened — the lines are consistently shorter and there's more rhyme. How conscious is that?*

Both unconscious and conscious. *Familiar Ground* has both short, tighter poems and longer narrative ones. All play with internal rhyme. But I have become more interested in end rhyme. Particularly when writing about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony, I needed a frame that could control the material and also allow it to breathe, to have its own autonomy. I wanted something quiet and something formal.

You give close attention to sound in your poems. You require "close listening" from your readers. Perhaps this goes some way towards explaining the a ppeal of your lyric poetry for live audiences. There is a performative quality to your handling of phonemes.

I respond to poetry that is intricate, rhythmic, where the cerebral is integrated into rhythms of meaning, rather than other syntaxes — of argument for instance. I like to work with patterns and patterning, with the dangers and pleasures of repetition or its variants, with internal rhyme.

Your poems often arise out of or build themselves around overheard or recorded speech.

The rhythm of a line or the shape of a word — yes, that is how some of them are built. I try to listen carefully to the private account and to the public record — not to the material facts necessarily, but to the motive force. And in South Africa the "record" is particularly charged; suspicion of the way something is reported is built into our fabric. That means at best that people subject language to quite close scrutiny, but it also means we are unusually prey to conspiracy theories.

You perform your poems quietly in the voice of a shamed truth teller. How do you experience your relation to an audience? Does this vary with a home audience or an audience abroad?

I don't think of myself as a truth teller. That seems very elevated. But shame is an honourable word. And yes, I hope I read quietly. The drama should be in the language and the voice should respect the silence speech leaves in its wake. I don't think there is a major difference in the way people respond, though I tend to give slightly more contextual information about the poems to foreign audiences, something I am not really comfortable doing. I think people want to feel that the words count, not the speaker.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and AIDS poems are almost unbearably sad to read. What was your experience writing them?

Painful. I attended some Commission hearings; I listened to many broadcasts, read the reports, compiled notes of various kinds, wrote

scraps. But I did most of the final editing at the Rockefeller Centre in Bellagio where I had a residency. It was strange but not estranging to look out on Lake Como in those most beautiful surroundings and be writing of such horror and pain. Sometimes I had to shift focus altogether, and during that period I also wrote a series of poems set in Italy.

The published AIDS poems are only a fraction of what I have written about the pandemic and especially about women and children. Many have had to be shredded, hopeless because so strident and angry. The demands of writing about AIDS or about testimony hearings are acute; all sorts of respect and delicacies have to be maintained.

With these and other more recent poems there's a move towards a collective mourning, a global consciousness — South Africa's pain added to history's tally.

I have always written about other places, though conscious, I hope, of the myriad difficulties and dangers of "poetic tourism." But yes, I think it is probably true that a shift has taken place. Is it that the world seems even more interconnected than it did before? Or that South Africa's history can be understood as less unique now that the great burden of apartheid — which imposed an imaginative burden as well as a political, social one — is in retreat?

The trammelled injured body is a frequent presence in your later writing — the physical and metaphorical body. Did you write "Pilgrimage" and "Body Maps" as a pair — touring the city/mapping the body?

HIV and AIDS, and South Africa's deplorable history thus far in dealing with them, is always present at the margins if not the centre of one's daily consciousness. So to map the body as a site for pleasure and pain is not just an academic or rhetorical gesture. Injury and its consequences to individuals, to social consciousness, to the issues of rights, to the way we understand shared or separate community life: this harm sediments our culture.

I did not consciously write the two poems as a pair, though they were written in the same few months, and it is interesting you thought they might be related. Perhaps the body and the built space it inhabits are the key frames which keep us upright, alive, in connection with others. How vulnerable are they, and what does their loss mean to our collective memory? Is it possible to recon-figure the past or maintain reciprocity and compassion in the light of fragmentation and disintegration?

Your reputation as a poet in South Africa and abroad derives, of course, from the skill of the poetry and also from its relation to history and culture. I'm interested in aesthetic achievement in a highly charged political and historical context. You're addressing large public issues but in a very fine-tuned manner. How do you understand your success?

I don't know the answer. After all, poetry reaches the tiniest of audiences. But I do think people respond to complexity, to the experience of listening to another mind work its way through feelings and ideas, and to how these resonate in the air. I find that readers are very alert to writers' motives, to what they feel they are being turned into as they listen. They don't want to feel that meaning has been closed, is over, even before their interaction with it has begun. Nobody wants political education or any other education, when they read or listen to poetry. Not even in a "highly charged political and historical context." I am preoccupied with the question of how the lyric individual poetic imagination can encounter unyielding social experience without becoming programmatic or self-aggrandising. Like most poets, I just try to recompose the known and offer it to a temporary community of writer and reader.

Postmodernism seems not to have left a visible mark on white South African poetry. The dispersion of authorial control might have been an attractive strategy for the white poet. Perhaps the reduction of agency and accountability offered no solace to the white poet. I think of Lyn Hejinian's statement: "The 'personal' is already a plural condition." Any thoughts?

I am not sure of your trajectory here. I think postmodernism has left a mark, on white as well as black poetry, but perhaps not the sort of mark one sees in North America. It certainly has influenced the work of Yvette Christiansë and Karen Press, among others. But in countries where expressive conditions are apparently more benign, it is perhaps easier to assert that there is no undivided or essential self to centre, no authority to claim. For those who experience power, control, subjection, rage, guilt, revenge, the reduction of agency in a literary guise is potentially suspect. I am aware that this is a contested position, but I would still claim that the imagination in charged environments has particular responsibilities. That does not mean that poetics in South Africa is somehow out of touch with philosophical developments or the specialized politics of the academy.

There's a shift away from first person governed lyrics in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and AIDS poems plus the two recent ones. In fact, I notice a declining number of uses of the first person pronoun across the three collections: at a quick count, 6 out of 32 poems in Familiar Ground *use no "I" pronoun, 19 out of 29 poems in* Transfer, *and 28 out of 38 in* Terrestrial Things.

That's an intriguing observation. I must be getting old. I will have to think about my disappearing act. Perhaps for writers like me, the "I" is less authoritative as one ages, not more so. But hey, I don't have a problem with "I." It can be a tool of exploration that is sourced in the self but not confessional.

How do you feel about writing a long poem? I note the weakened closure of the more recent poems.

I find long poems very testing, especially at readings. I feel self-indulgent, forcing others to tolerate extended ruminations. Do you mean open-ended endings? Some of those poems are about fractures, lack of resolution, so the endings are intentionally consistent with the poetic material, choices.

Which contemporary poets do you follow with interest?

The great Japanese poet, Shuntaro Tanikawa (in translation, of course); the Nigerian Chris Abani, now living in the USA I think; Szymborska, also only in translation; poets in the USA — there are many that interest me, but at the moment I am reading Carl Phillips and Martin Espada. Nathaniel Tarn I rediscovered recently. He has written a magisterial recent poem about a visit to Namibia. Ron Padgett's poems are a source of great pleasure. Of the Canadians — I am a bit out of touch, but Anne Carson; George Stanley (though I have read nothing since the selected, *A Tall Serious Girl);* Sharon Thesen; Don McKay; Stephanie Bolster; Jan Conn; I liked an intense collection which came out some years ago by Rachel Rose called *giving my body to science.*

The truth is I am not reading much new work. I am re-reading Seferis, Ritsos and Cavafy; Muriel Rukeyser; Amichai; Borges; Frost. There is no logic to any of my reading — it has no particular trajectory; I read more fiction than collections of poetry. I read what is recommended to me by friends, I burrow and borrow, I pick things from my shelves randomly; I don't belong to any "school" and I don't read as if I am attending one. I am entirely unsystematic.

How does Cape Town enter in to your experience as a poet? Living in Kalk Bay which was spared the racial segregation that remade South African city living?

My consciousness seems to be determined by the rather ugly mining landscapes of my childhood, not by the beauties of Cape Town. But I have lived in the Cape for more than 20 years now, and love living in Kalk Bay. I don't want to romanticise it — it is a village with much of the same class and race divisions as elsewhere in divided Cape Town, but the fact that there were fewer removals of black people from their homes here than in many other places means that there has been a continuous black fishing community and a continuous white community. This makes it an unusually relaxed and united place. I like its shabbiness, but it is in danger of becoming gentrified.

Does your working life at the university contribute to your life as a poet?

To the degree that I sometimes get research leave, or leave to accept fellowships, yes. But not really otherwise. I work in adult education at the University of Cape Town. I am not a literary scholar or teacher. I work long hours and have almost no writing time outside of one month's leave a year. And my intellectual and creative contacts tend to be with people not employed on campus.

The covers of your books are always fascinating. How do you choose them? What do you have planned for the Seven Stories book?

My first book's cover was a photograph of children on a building site, by David Goldblatt. I first had to submit my manuscript to him, and an essay on why I wanted to use that photograph. I was very grateful when I passed the test, and even more delighted when recently he used a few lines of mine for a collection of photographs called *Particulars*. William Kentridge, who is a friend, gave me permission to use his drawing *Mbinda Cemetery* for my second book — and Jane Alexander, also a friend, let me use her haunting montage *Harvestime* for the cover of *Terrestrial Things*. I love the disconcerting image, its foreboding and poignancy, but some people are very disturbed by it. The cover for the new book hasn't been settled yet.

Can you talk about your new book, your first to be published outside of South Africa?

I was approached by Seven Stories Publishers in New York, who offered to produce a collected. That gave me cold feet — I thought it might be hubris, so we decided instead on a collection of new and selected poems, called *Seasonal Fires*, due out in April. Seven Stories is an excellent small left-leaning press, and I am impressed by their willingness to risk publishing somebody with only a limited reputation in North America. A South African version will be published in June by Umuzi, an imprint of Random House, South Africa.

Ingrid de Kok / FOUR POEMS

Pilgrimage

Take a trip, take a tour.
Go to newly bombed cities
to see what remains in the rubble,
scorched fragments or things saved whole.
Statues, courtyards, a wash of painting,
piazzas where people burned or still stroll,
mosaics, reliquaries in crypts,
holy sites, libraries, illuminated scrolls.

Visit Baghdad to scan what's left
of the beginnings of civilization,
Bamiyan to reassemble in your mind
giant sandstone Buddhas
from whose empty cocoons
flew the butterflies of the spirit.
See Madrid where Goya still accuses,
view the flattened towers of New York City,
ravaged Mogadishu and Beirut.

Then if you have time make a backward journey
to ancient Byzantium and Alexandria.
Traverse Bushman deserts and Aztec mounds
where memories hum in the sun.
Closer and closer, while some still remember the detail,
travel to Coventry, Warsaw, Dresden,
Hamburg and Hiroshima,
place your feet in the prints of the dead.

And then fast forward with your guide book
to cities undestroyed.
Go now. To still breathing
places of accumulated love and power,
where the line of a drawing,
an angle of light on a building,
a word's gravid pressure on a page
the sound of a ribbed instrument,
things made by hand, remade by eye or ear,
have not yet been forgotten, razed.

Body maps

Take the body trace its outline
map its armature
tendons viscera scar tissue
fractures swellings
promises and wishes.
Map age genes place of origin
and love's lineaments.

For mapped onto each body is love.

Cartography of one's own country
or the contours of a foreign land.

A journey through forests
over cataracts
turbulent rivers peaks
ravines rift valleys
grasslands wetlands
oceans sand.
Down mine shafts.
Through truck stops.
In towns and cities.
On tarred roads dirt tracks.

At the shoreline is a flare
where pain's fire
consumes itself
with its earth-hunger
unquenched thirst
burning wings.

It lights the way
back to touch
soft or violent
stretched or shortened
above below
where there are sounds
soft calls moans
fright resistance silence
movements
towards or away
where there is rupture or seeping
where openings are buds
that shrink or blossom
where the spine buckles
or uncurls
where nails draw blood
or declawed fingers
touch tip to tip
and palms dance.

Mapped onto each body is
that first launch into love:
parachute drop of our begetters
and then each body's own
open or closed arms and legs.

And onto the bodies of those
who die of love's lesions
we map our love too
guilty shadow tracings
lucky escape routes
provisional survival.

Take your own body
or the leached body
of your mother your father
your brother your sister.
Transparent body
of glass of leaves
of encoded messages
to the past and the future
unique thumbprint maze
ubiquitous death mask.

Take it trace it map it remember.

Things we know

They come and they go
The things that we know

The things we once knew
And the ones learned in lieu

Of the things we once felt
Being lost in the veld

Smell of rain on dirt
First word first hurt

Last smile night fright
What caused the fall

From love and grace
The meaning of your mother's face

The rhymes of a verse
Exact words of a curse

Suddenly needed, and then
That injunction again

About the mote in the eye
And the other one — was it a lie —

about the other cheek?
And what was the inheritance of the meek?

Did they get the earth? Or was it heaven?
Was the sign of the beast three sixes or sevens?

They come and they go
The things that we know

The things half lost
Glossed in shadow and light

The sound of a word
The shape of a sign

The edges of pleasure
The outlines of pain

from *Sketches from a Summer Notebook*

Sunflowers

In case you think
the sunflowers in the field
are always on summer holiday,
florid fools raising
oil-stained cheeks
like drunks in a bar,
you are wrong.

Believe me:
that yellow and the deep furry eye
is Apollo's camouflage, aka God.
They're allies of the sun,
timepieces on the landscape's wrist
and van Gogh and Blake are visiting this afternoon
to tell us what they mean
and how we too should grow and live.

Ruth Scheuing / FLOWERS AND LEAVES: CONSTRUCTING NATURE

Cyborg women weave translucent thought into sturdy
cloth and with Arachne still defy the gods.

Nature weaves a digital dream into the text and
Philomela has her own web page now.

The Fates still weave with Ada's help on
ancient looms and computers . . . .

Myths and stories about weavers have long been the focus of my work. Myths give shape to the past and inform our present and future. My involvement with mythic weavers started with Penelope and Arachne, who were able to shape history through their weaving as a powerful recorded language for women. My ideas about myths are about rationalizing the way symbols exert power in a given society so that they flow fluidly from Greek Myths to Fairy Tales, Science Fiction, and Cyborgs.

My interest in Jacquard weaving started in 1997 when I read Ada Lovelace's statement: "The Analytical Engine weaves algebraic patterns just as the Jacquard loom weaves flowers and leaves." Ada Lovelace's unique background in art and science, poetry and mathematics (her father was a poet and her mother a mathematician), reflects my own interests in science, art, and language. Her translation of a text by Manabrea about Charles Babbage's 1843 Analytical Engine contained the above quotation and the first instances of written software. The engine never quite worked, but contained the basic operating principles later used by computers. The process was derived from the Jacquard loom, which used punched cards to store and process complex information as zeros and ones. The Jacquard loom was developed in 1804 by Jacquard in response to demands for

weavings with elaborate imagery, influenced by fabrics brought back to Europe from Asia during the 18th century. Napoleon funded this new technology to fill his empty war chest. The motifs feature elaborate floral designs and thus provide an excellent forum for reinvesting patterning and imagery composed of flowers and leaves with new meanings. They also show unintended developments in technology.

Textiles have long played an important economic role and still do so today with NAFTA and global markets. Textiles reflect cultural exchanges and colonial relationships; they cause trade wars and labour problems. (Ned Ludd was a Lancashire weaver, who fought the use of this new machinery and left us the term "luddite.") Crafts and contemporary weaving are often associated with "traditions" and a romantic view of a past, lost forever. Working with one's hands holds many of the same desires associated with an ideal of untainted nature. In reality, textiles have been at the forefront of technological change. My hand-woven textiles combine the technologies of ancient looms with computers — art made possible through technology.

My relationship with "Flowers and Leaves" evolved over time, influenced by backyard gardening and hikes in local mountains, as well as visits to museums to see historical textiles such as Bizzare and Rococo silks and chinoiseries. I am also interested in exploring issues of "decoration" and its relationship to the "feminine" as reflected in textiles. Muybridge's photographic records from the 19th century show women doing domestic or mundane tasks. By layering these images with re-presentations of "nature" I hope to demonstrate some of the contradictory assumptions about nature, culture, technology and gender roles.

Definitions of nature reveal a range of contradictory meanings. Nature often suggests that which is separate from human activity and is used to project desires seemingly unattainable, thus "nature becomes romanticized, patronized and forever the passive recipient of our desires" (Soper). Donna Haraway in the "Cyborg Manifesto" proposes more fluid boundaries between humans, animals, and machines instead of defining them in opposition. She suggests, "We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are Cyborg" and "The Cyborg myth subverts

myriad organic wholes, in short, the certainty of what counts as nature — as a source of insight and promise of innocence — is undermined, probably fatally" (Haraway). Computers and weaving have been connected in Sadie Plant's essay "The Future Loom: Weaving Women and Cybernetics" and her book *Zeros and Ones*, which discuss weaving as digital processing of data. Weaving, of course, is and always has been a digital process.

The images for my weavings were created in Photoshop from various sources, including scans from real plants and books, digital photographs and images from websites. Then, the colours were reduced and translated into weave structures, using JacqCAD or Pointcarré software (industrial Jacquard weaving softwares). The resulting file, containing only black and white information was then uploaded to a computerized Jacquard loom in Montreal at the Centre de Textile Contemporain de Montreal, where I wove initial tests and pieces by hand. Some pieces were also woven by a technician, from files I sent via the Internet.

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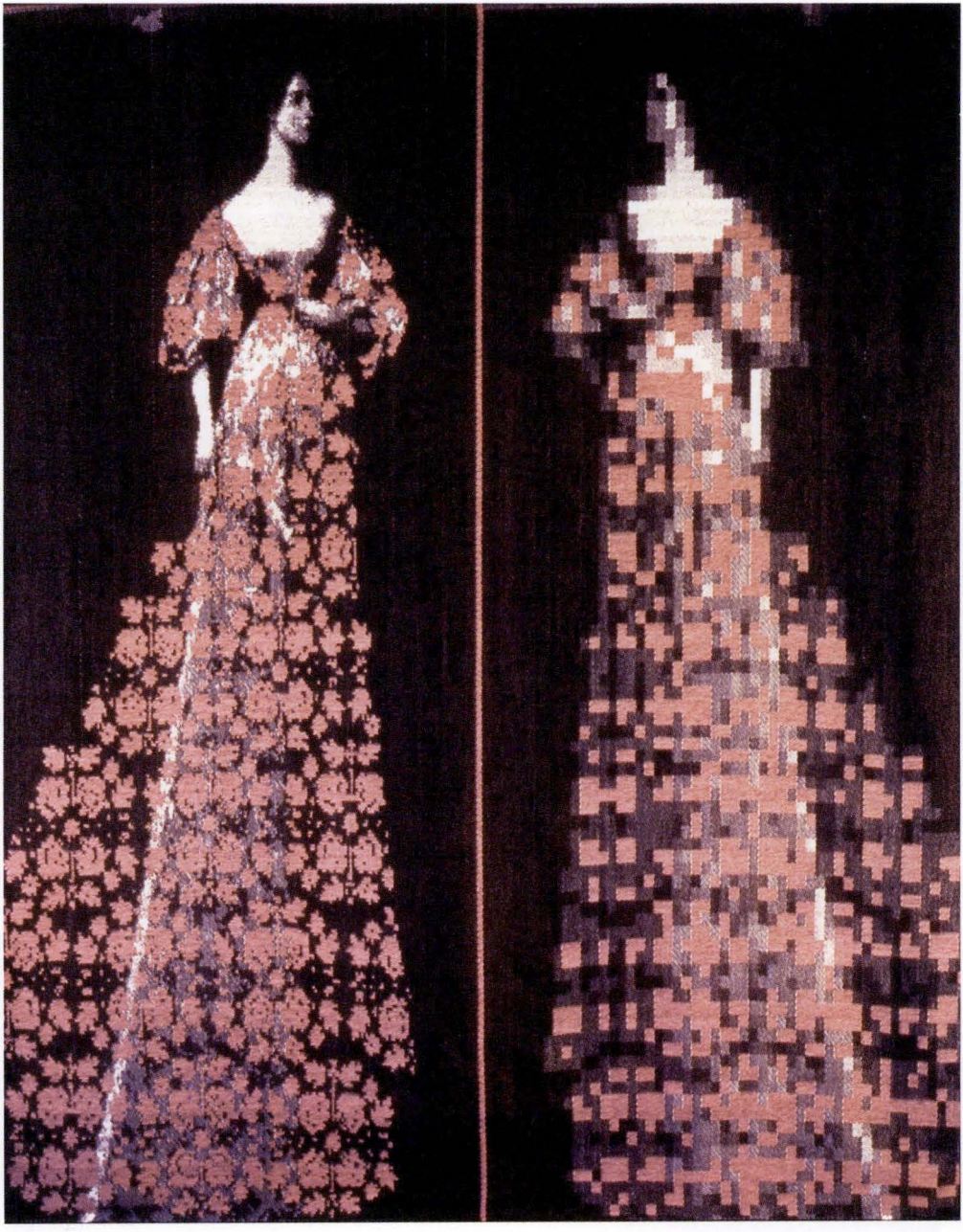
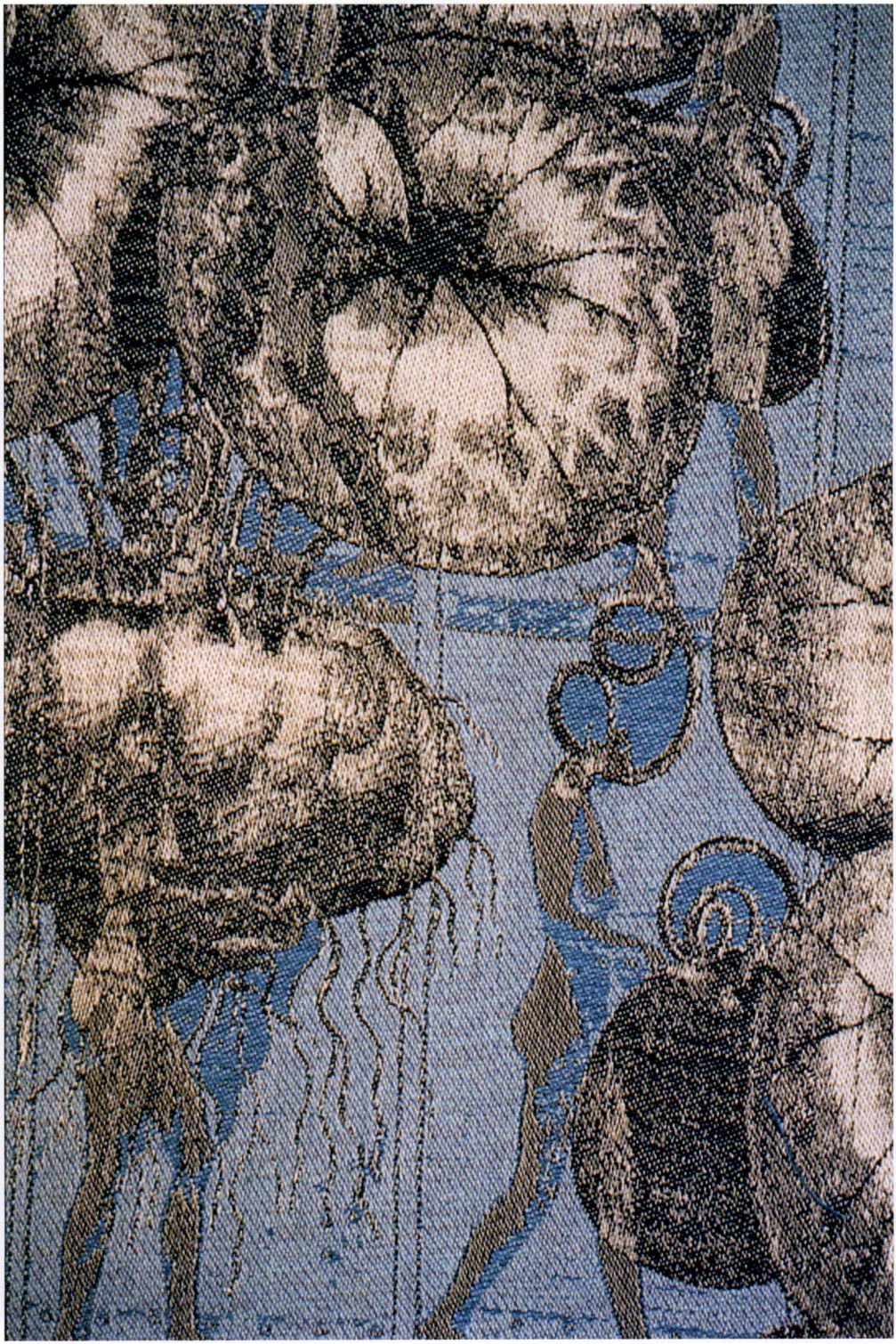
LIST OF WORKS

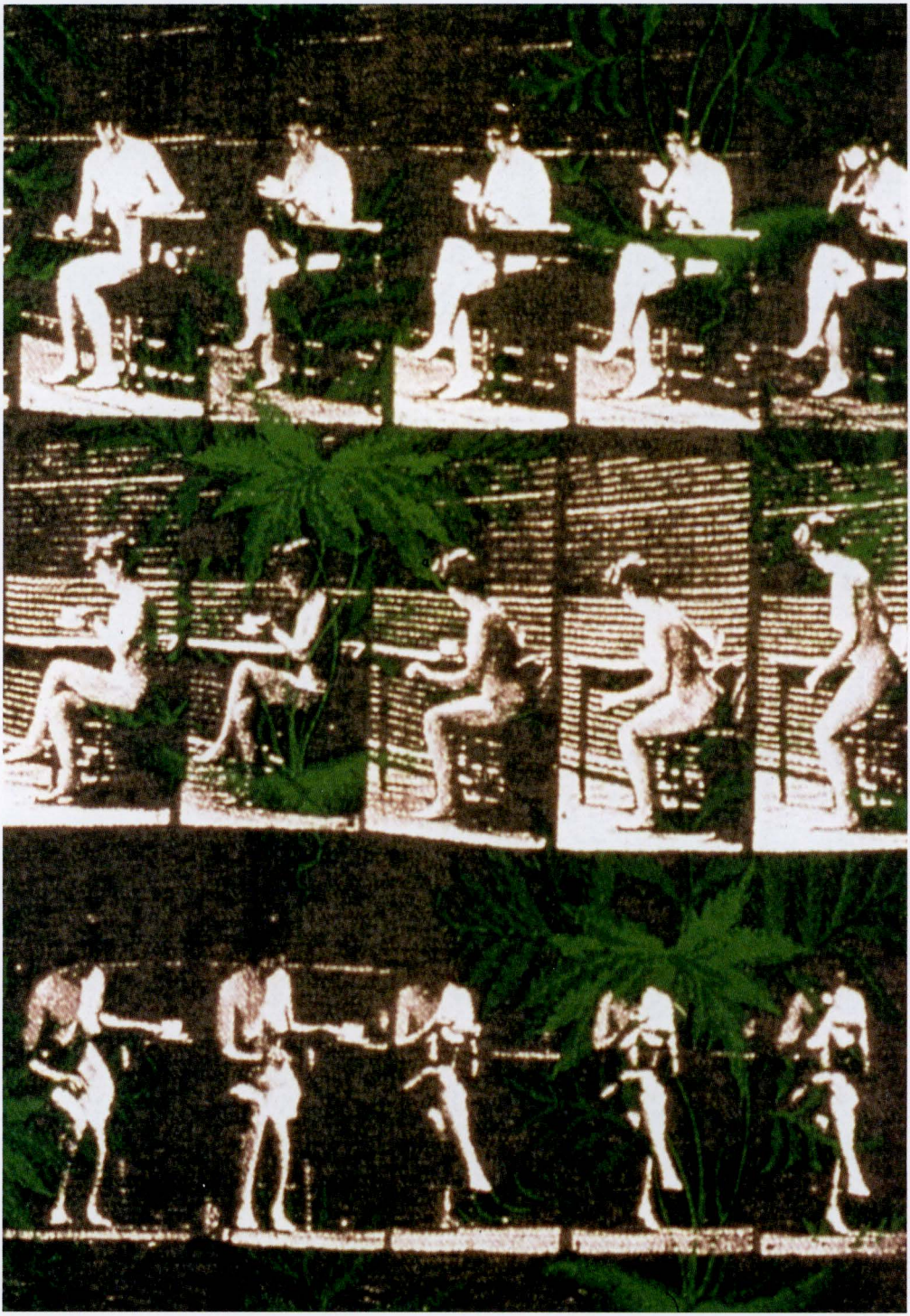
All works are computer assisted hand-woven Jacquard fabric, cotton

1. Flowers and leaves #2: Cyborg women weave transluscent thought . . . , 1998, 72" x 40"
2. Flowers and leaves #2: Cyborg women weave transluscent thought . . . detail, 1998, 72" x 40"
3. Flowers and leaves #4: Ada Lovelace: Queen of the Engines, 1999, 48" x 40"
4. Flowers and leaves #7: Cyborg Descending Staircase, 1999, 60" x 40"
5. Flowers and leaves #8: Ada Lovelace: Queen of the Engines I + II, 1998/99, 78" x 40"
6. Flowers and leaves #11: cyclamen, 2001, 67" x 40"
7. Flowers and leaves #11: cyclamen, detail, 2001, 67" x 40"
8. Flowers and leaves #19: green tea, detail, 2003, 62" x 40"




The Analytical Engine Weaves Algebraic Patterns just as the Jacquard Loom weaves Flowers and Leaves





Michele Leggott / HELLO AND GOODBYE

there is a path that climbs
out of sleep with clear notes
on five fingers
blown across sweet grassy
plains there is no holding
them they move like the wind
over your sleeping face
which knows where it has been
and why it must remember
the path that climbs
out of sleep and into the green
heartstring morning

vibrato the bell in the throat
the ball in the whistle when it's low
and your breath is the slow bounce
of ropes that braid and twist
and hold up the floating planet
as if by magic
tremolo a fibrillation of the air
and its concertos better even
than a neighbour deciding between
harpsichord and salt fish
running through his fingers
and over the dark garden to where
we're walking along
looking for the sound
of a word so deep in theft
its adventures have hardly begun

delirium lady
in Illyria with a lily he calls
Elysium the newly alighted angel's
lineal poise lirio what would you
on her silver tomb lirica
the white notebook up against
the red wall the black words
going on into the light
lady I am negative wingspan
in Illyria and he is
Elysium a lily a lyric
a white delirium

I saw you, you were
a minim wraith of silver light
the day moon a figure
on the road the blue moon
resurrected *sister lucy gone*
to heaven in her silver boat
grass ghosts beginning to sing
and you on the spiral road

when I walk sea waves
as I turn glass hammers
and turn again wind chimes
sleeping with the last track
climbing the stairs in the dark

I wait and wait
and the weight of waiting
is impossible cicadas shrill
above the cricket boys
over the daughter chorus
that pearly necklace
I'm looking for in all the stations
on the way to Ocean City
Go with Eros it's plain as day
a mob of arboreal lorikeets
another kind of whistle
for the chorus
chiasmos comes and goes
thiasos is my east
my new looking my ghost
along the spiral road

looking up
from the dark garden
I see the vision of the boat
sailing in the sky
Fra Angelico's room and nobody
left behind no one missing
out on its mother of pearl ceilings
I cannot bear the pain
liths of orange what does it mean?
liths of orange roughy on
a big white plate
life and limb kith and kin
lift us into heaven tonight

forgetting remembering
Konai's grandiflora words
a bowl of cool air anticipating
the sun in its pisces pool climbing
the walls and the towers
waiting for the words
the silver mirror spirals
here now always
the lovers in the fountain
oblivious beginning
their two fish kiss
and sister lucy in her boat
skimming up the hill

Chus Pato / in mid-century

translated from the Galician by Erín Moure

Chus Pato answers questions by telephone while finishing off a long interview ("ten pages!") with the eminent Galician journal Grial. She's running out of time: tomorrow she leaves on holidays for Rodalquilar where she'll get a few days rest before heading to Argentina where, this very August, she'll turn 50. There the poet whose audacity has most shaken the Galician lyric of recent decades will enter middle age; in her own words, she feels "fatigue, plenitude and a kind of déjà vû that makes me very happy." Behind her are the years during which her texts found their "definitive form," when "the romantic and post-avant-garde 'I' blew apart with incredible turbulence." Her explanation of this process is striking: "the 'I' emigrated toward the other personal pronouns and at the same time crashed through borders to enter other literary genres. From this turbulent and exploded place, I go on writing, without guarantee." Part of that revolution, the appearance of her book *m-Talá* (2000) – "I wrote it under tension, with violence. With insomnia." – was a major event, a title that opened unexplored paths and schools that even today are in ferment. Then came *Charenton* (2004), another book of poems that harrow the breath, and in which Chus Pato locates two tendencies: "One is like a kind of finale to *m-Talá*; the other tries to get away from *m-Talá* as fast as it can. In this second *Charenton*, the poems of starting fresh, is the first appearance of that sensation of déjà vû that makes me so happy. I seem to have an ever increasing interest in writing from the non-alphabetic, which is to say: in constructing texts with as little literary mediation as possible, not because I want to engage to what some poetics call real life, which to me is a bore: rather, I want to take a mortal leap without a net, so as to be even more literary." In this issue of *Revista das Letras*, Chus Pato presents ten texts from her current project, *Thermidor*, in which she extends and amplifies her gamble on that "mortal leap without a net."

Antón Lopo
Revista das Letras, Santiago de Compostela, 5 August 2005

[•]

Let's start: (Hrg) at the bus stop with a bag of paramecia

reason says that there's nothing unusual in this snapshot; the protagonist does what she always does, it's just that now she has to cover a distance of 2000 kilometres, which isn't so infrequent either

(the green tiles of the airport in the country of eternal rains)

and she springs forth as hero, as multitude, as protagonist, any episode that binds us

[•]

Sleep's best with the window open, rocked by wind and the torrential mix of all the waters, or on the high summits, or on the banks of the great fluvial arteries of her continent and with them (with the arteries) and in the sled of one of her woman ancestors she traversed the frozen Rhine and continued on foot along the tracks of the Empire toward the country of great massed trees // always headed in the purple direction of sunset, through the Black Forest and over the pass from the Jura to the Vosges, the wide plain of the Saône, the fertile cultivations of Champagne and Poitou (Jurassic), the region of the Landes or cradle of Aquitaine (Tertiary), the frigid passes of the Pyrenees, the Cretaceous nation of the Basques, the Cantabrian cordillera and the Río Navia

— when will you write of the hero or heroine meeting the Suevi people?*

*Translator's note: The Suevi crossed the Rhine at Mainz in 407, fleeing the Hunnic invasions of their land, today known as Swabia. After 2 years in France, settled by 409 in the wilds of NW Spain, in Galicia, mining and cultivating flax for textiles.

— I decide that the heroine encounters some historical figure, I decide this so as to extend the time of narration, to confound it, to make it real; in this particular case the difficulty lies in the choice of character, who in the end is a collective march, I was interested in the description of this itinerary; there was no vision, no voice to have detailed the ice and waters flowing in the core of the earth, the horizon obliterated by white, the blue of the sky, the pelts, weapons, horses, the cold and this strange woman adventurer who is welcomed as family, the contrast between the Germanic voices and the speech of the protagonist; it's like this: a decision is made, the rest is force, impulse, perception and commotion, gut and logic of language

the heroine thinks of a circular house straw-roofed with a single space for cooking, working and loving and drops off to sleep and her body's almost weightless on the planet

— do all girls play at recovering from ecological disasters?
—some
reader (he) / author (she)
— do they all have toy bathyscaphes?
— not all, no, some

[•]
not even her continual transit, this perpetual state of passage: all sorts of signs, affects, messages, whatever

like the monstrous face of freedom, that slalom of abysses

[•]

A peaceable tendency that shows itself in a slowing of mental processes and relaxation of the body until images of planetary harmony flow, thus forests (and always, always, oak forests of the sort that bring unclassifiable pleasure in the dampness of earth, grey

clarity of the skies or of the rare rays of sun), plus images of oceans and always, always, of the Atlantic, the coastline: sands, dunes, marine birds but also halfway between the surface of the waters and the abysmal deeps, images of submersion that inevitably bring her back to her double placenta which in the months of her own gestation allowed her to develop the organs required for what she identified as "origin": the love of walking, and language. Sometimes in these navigations she visualized her daughters and through this watery flood she enters in lamination with all the nutritive forces of the species, because of this, enunciation repeats, its rhythm // always, always sanguine

time, that of anyone or no one // a high consumption of words

[•]

It happens right in mid-crosswalk when, after deciding to walk from the bus stop to the hotel, she realizes she has to do it weighted down with baggage; and in the shower, the water gives her lovely curls, and after getting ready for a first date she said to herself that not only was she such and such but just now she's much more beautiful than in her youth and soon she's walking down the sidewalk as if she never, never ducks out of anything and realizes how much she'd like it if Antón Lopo were with her now that she is the happiest protagonist of a novel on the face of the earth and she doesn't even think of nausea

— and then?
— Marta and Publio got there but Marcelo had to go defend the Austro-Hungarian border

[•]

The orange marble floors of the aviation field in the country where it hardly ever rains

[•]

For someone not very susceptible to suggestion the illusion of bodily belonging, even for brief instants, was gratifying

she would have liked to have dedicated a large part of her life to the cultivation of pleasure, which gave her the idea of founding, in keeping with the model of the monks of Ménilmontant, Fourier's phalansteries or the city of New Harmony, utopian-revolutionary harems or bordellos where a community of women and men willingly achieve the ideal of a phratria of bodies

in general the erotic scenes she imagined were born of these weltanschauungs, thus the flings with an English aristocrat (presented in a circus cage glittering with gift ribbons) or with a 15th century gentleman in the Brabant (ergastulum, physiological splendour, ripped clothing, gloom)

some peoples' judgments of Sade she found superfluous and banal, in her opinion the literary works of the Marquis (one of her bedside table stalwarts) could only be understood as a further inventory and the writer's struggle to make bearable *the dark night of the world*

her intelligence was ferocious, slow (due to distraction, inattention and laziness) to accumulate, avid in the face of language. She could anticipate an amorous combat by her response to a text, and detected to perfection with which author it would be possible, and if so who would win her over, by whom she would be conquered and before whom she would give in; in front of a body or in front of a piece of writing her reaction was identical, so much so that you could say that she did not distinguish between body and writing

Cecilia, voice: Empire-cupola

(a whole life at the barricades)

[•]

Generally in her youth she had travelled and we can affirm she lived in art galleries for the sole reason that these buildings were good for her spirit, and only there did the food suit her, especially the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Tate or the small Vasarely painting collection; these days the rotations had not stopped in fact had considerably increased in velocity and amplitude but she had no possibility of reaching any museum, exceptionally some accident might retain her in a city, thus the lunulas of the Irish Iron Age or peat-bog mummies in the snowy city of Dublin

she took mobility to be one of the faces of freedom and this had made her a happy protagonist, despite it being true that freedom is polyhedral and its facets and crevices innumerable; the debility that attacked her from time to time, the forgetting of pugnacious conduct, were evidence of her growing need to return or opt to take cover

the space of torment when in Missolonghi she was recovering from a fractured vertebrae, the slowness of her steps onto the balcony and the palm trees and araucarias and the thistle of Lord Byron, dead in the battle against the Turks for Grecian independence, and the sarcophagus

— what you're writing, is it the truth?
(and the author, she answered him, the reader: it's an infinity or two)
— it's a chronicle
— and if it were a poem?
— then it would talk of temporal potential or the acceleration of time

[•]

But nothing can be captured, not the ramification of open arteries, nor the volcano of incandescent lava, not even the perpetual glacier

nor any new form of basic life or colonization of moss or lichen . . .

hers was not a genuinely revolutionary temperament, more rebellious and loyal, engrossed in a scar that was healing with difficulty // this false closure as atmosphere // solitary childhood where she mixed with those less favoured, from whom she was separated by the thinnest membrane with which her father protected her, especially with her schoolmates who as time passed would swell the lines of misery and emigration to the British Isles and central Europe

the absence of fascist protection in her family, time spent in the rural village, a certain type of intelligence oriented toward distinguishing lies from truth had conditioned Hrg's subsequent decision, and thus it was utterly impossible for her to give up the idea that private ownership of the means of production was not only corrupt and immoral but abominable, this and the belief in the radical equivalence of all human beings

these were the source of her revolutionary activities, of which it could not be said that she chose them, but that it was impossible for her to dislodge them from her path

from there too, from childhood, certain friendships that endured and her clandestine but repeated presence in underground holes of questionable renown like *The Red Lighthouse* or *Tabanaco*, or the even more dubious and recondite retreats of the *Suevia* or the *Paradise*

or her attraction (never fatal) for her now uprooted, jailed or dead comrades

so it was in the city of stones where she (the author) was born
in which Ophelia was brutally run down when she tried to identify
her brother among the corpses, victims of the latest bombardment

[•]

Back at the bus stop I see she's flustered because she wanted to stub her cigarette in the proper place by the bus shelter and it ended up right on the sidewalk, not easy; finally she gets onto the bus and goes off gazing out at the city but not the neighbourhood where she once lived, an industrial area abandoned even then, and she wonders if its magnificent brick chimneys are still standing

"I can't remember when I got there, when I really got there, nor where I was before "when I got there"; I can see another departure with a backpack full of canned food and as I had fallen in love with a complete stranger, the house we'll share in the industrial area, intermission in the Milan station and desire's explosion; prior to the rendezvous in the kind of caf that only a Mediterranean dictatorship could preserve, I'd come from the north, he from Florence, Milan, Venice . . . . no, even better: Naples"

(Hrg, monologue)

NORTH ATLANTIC TURBINE:
FIVE POETS

Ted Byrne / NORTH ATLANTIC TURBINE

North Atlantic Turbine was the title I chose when seeking British Council funding for a series of three readings and talks that took place at the Kootenay School of Writing (KSW) in the Fall of 2005. At the time this title seemed irresistibly effective to me, and yet somehow dishonest, like a flag of convenience. Its naive intention was to signal the fact that the KSW's ongoing reception of British writers should be seen in the context of a productive exchange that began in the sixties, and has as two of its several terminals Ed Dorn and Jeremy Prynne. Those two veterans of the poetry wars visited Vancouver together in the early seventies. They arrived in the shadow of Charles Olson but left their own distinct traces. Dorn gave a storied reading of the whole of *Gunslinger*. Prynne gave a lecture on Olson, which was meticulously transcribed and published in *Iron*, a magazine edited by students of Robin Blaser. When Dorn died a few years ago, the KSW devoted an evening to his memory. In recent years, many of the British poets who have visited the KSW have been associates or former students of Prynne.

If *North Atlantic Turbine* suggests a crossing, an exchange, it also suggests a turbulence. As I listened to the five poets who participated in the series, and as I subsequently read more deeply in their work, I began to see a commonality that had initially only been wished upon them, a commotion among their works that derives, perhaps, from capture within a common vortex. When such poets visit, they bring with them a multitude of others, from their own locations, and from their wanderings. In this case, to mention just a few of their ghostlier companions: Franz Fanon, Paul Celan, Frank O'Hara, John Wieners, Francis Ponge, Marcel Duchamp. This is common transatlantic baggage. We had put Andrea Brady and Colin Browne together because of their mutual interest in the poetry of the English Renaissance. And Wayde Compton was paired with D.S. Marriott because of their work in black history. But Brady, with her street smart attitude and critical anger, could have read just as comfortably with The Contact

Zone Crew (Wayde Compton and Jason de Couto). And Browne, with his enduring attention to the devastation of modern times, the names of the father, could as easily have read with D.S. Marriott. Caroline Bergvall, who handled the final event on her own, could have kept company with any of them, having music, image, gesture, wit, and concept all under control. Their congregation here, in *The Cap Review*, is a welcome coda to the series.

It may appear that I'm attempting to impose coherence on a slogan chosen for expedience. I'd rather think that I'm trying to explore the intuition that inspired the choice. However, the well circulated notion of a shared tradition and community based on a poetics can quickly wear thin. In fact what draws poets together and drives them apart, as with any group, is politics, not poetics. The *North Atlantic Turbine*, in its use as a slogan for this event, and particularly if understood in the terms sketched out above, raises a number of troubling political questions. For instance, what kind of alienation turns us toward the North Atlantic when we're situated on the Pacific Rim, or, as is often announced in this neck of the woods, on unceded Coast Salish territory. Doesn't *North Atlantic Turbine* indicate an orientation toward a pre-millennial colonial axis? Isn't this the information age, and no longer the age of steam?

The *North Atlantic Turbine* is not a metaphor. It's a synecdoche of the real. The turbine is a massively productive power and a terrible disturbance, yes, but what Ed Dorn had in mind with this phrase was the productive power of capital, or "trade," as the motor of the ever increasing exploitation of life and resources necessary to its expansion, its "freedom."

> Trade revolved and revolves
> it remains the turbine
> the atlantic turgidity
> defines still our small era
> that's the exploitation people
> mean
> when they say they
> hear a symphony.
>
> *The North Atlantic Turbine* (1966)

We *are* still in the steam age. At the end of the information highway the carcasses of mammoth freighters lie derelict, rusting and toxic where capital abandoned them, or pile up in the immense scrap yards of Asia, where the salvaging of their parts causes irreparable damage to the environment and to the workers who slave in the bowels of the permanent industrial revolution. The old colonial axis has been reconfigured as "the coalition of the willing," the new tyrant and his benighted advisors plot global hegemony through expanding webs of state terror and managed warfare. As I write this, we're in the last days of an election campaign in which we will elect a party whose leader's fortune is tied to a company, Canada Steam Ship Lines, that profits from the avoidance of tax, safety, and labour regulations, and whose government has implicated us deeply in the criminal and murderous police action in Haiti; or we will elect a party whose leader would have led us to war in Iraq and would lead us further, and faster, into the deregulated and privatized "New American Century." Either way, Canada is surely "a remix b-side chorus in the globalization loop" (Compton).

Dorn's vision was sometimes more misanthropic than anti-humanist, and it led him to some nasty contentions. His pessimism pronounced "The earth has been destroyed. Only a / few people know that." But he goes on to say, "What must be destroyed is / the present circus of the earth and / the place to start is the North / Atlantic turbulence." By "circus of the earth" he points to spectacle and excess on a global scale. The geography of the North Atlantic Turbine was always global, does not refer to a place but to a time, a geo-political, bio-political mess we still inhabit.

I haven't asked permission to lay all of this on the poets of the *soi-disant* North Atlantic Turbine. They are in no way responsible for anything here but their effect on me, and certainly not for any of my persistent preconceptions. Obviously this overheated metaphor, this ramped up metonym, can't carry the burden I've placed on it. But each of these poets provides a reading, in a very profound register, of our dark times. I do believe that theirs is a politically charged poetry, engaged both with everyday life, praxis and parapraxis, and conscious of how that life unfolds within the structures of the state. It is a deeply thought, critical poetry, a sombre, comic, and hopeful

poetry that brings us what we most value. "You cannot know what you have wanted, / but you will not get it" (Brady, "Disappointment"). "I want to be given everything so as to know what to demand" (Marriott, "Names of the Fathers").

D. S. Marriott's work has been accumulating in fascicles and pamphlets over the past fifteen or twenty years. It has a grand consistency of mood, of affect, of purpose and vocabulary, and yet seems to trace a trajectory toward a more and more direct, and less forgiving, encounter with the darkness that inhabits it, from *Airs & Ligatures* (Prest Roots, 1990) to the last piece in *Dogma*, "The Ligatures" (Barque, 2001). "To live with hatred as our most intimate possession, becomes then, the truly difficult task of our dreams" (*On Black Men*, 2000). A long needed collection of his work is forthcoming from Salt Press in the next year or so. In the meantime, I'd suggest that you try to get your hands on *Lative* (Equipage, 1992) and *Dogma*, which includes his most recent work, "Notebook of a Return."

Caroline Bergvall's new book, *Fig*, is just out from Salt Press. It includes the masterly sequence *8 Figs*, earlier published by Equipage as a stunning black and white booklet designed by Merit Münzberg and the author. Bergvall's work occurs in that place, pioneered by Mallarmé, Duchamp, Ponge, where the book is called into question, where it comes apart as a result of its own antinomies, or is elevated to another dimension of book work, of writing outside the frame of the book, or of "theatre" in the Mallarméan sense. At the same time, it's located firmly within the contemporary fields of performance and installation art, or "sited textwork." In some cases this vexes the reading of it, as one has to rely on the description of the event and then imagine it as one reads. However, in other cases the work has two lives, as poem and as performance. "16 Flowers," "Flèsh," "About Face," and "8 Figs," for instance, are perfectly readable. However, the embodiment of these texts, in performance, still opens them up beyond what the experience of reading them can offer. "About Face," for example, incorporates "physical and verbal impediments," including an indeterminate "accent," as does other of her work when heard, and these, like Joyce's "Irish," can only be approximated by reading aloud.

Andrea Brady's work, on the other hand, has its strongest effect in the reading of it, which is hard but well-rewarded labour. It is so compacted and poetical (or anti-poetical) that a hearing has to be an understatement, powerful as declamation but leaving one gasping after sense. The sense of it comes slowly, in accumulated readings, like the contemporary world itself with its surplus of information. Most of her writings could be characterized as elegies or satires, or perhaps elegiac pub songs. But there is an erotic charge that brings across a realization, mid-poem sometimes, that one is reading a sonnet, a lyric, with its hyper-limited syntax: first person singular pronoun / verb / second person singular pronoun. *Vacation of a Lifetime* (Salt Press, 2001) gathers together work from her twenties, including the fifty page series *Liberties*, which is as fine as just about anything I've ever read. It entangles pronouns like limbs in an amorous struggle. It dresses itself in colours and numbers that break and tumble, in elisions, caesurae, and enjambments, from the ecstatics of "hyper-yellow" and "true white," of iambics, to the abject of "excrementall" white and speech. It works out a personal politics surprisingly not all that different from the more formal politics of the elegies. Since *Vacation of a Lifetime*, she's published two more collections, *Cold Calling* (Barque, 2004) and *Embrace* (Object Permanence, 2005).

I won't say anything about our crack home team, Wayde Compton and Colin Browne, since readers of *The Capilano Review* will be familiar with their work, and I don't feel I owe them the same extended courtesy as our guests. Compton's *Performance Bond* (Arsenal Pulp, 2004) and Browne's *Groundwater* (Talon, 2002) are both fully realized books and necessary reading. They can be found at Duthies. The Salt and Barque books mentioned above can be ordered on line from the presses. If you haven't got the coin, can't wait for the Royal Post, or want to read earlier out of print books by any of these authors, they can be found in the KSW reading room.

Andrea Brady / SHOTS OF WHISKEY PETE: a draft on obscurity and illumination

. . . left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also, the country-side is all on fire

Smothered in bitter wine or mud, the heart's fire
in moist air *immo fomento alitur uberrimo* with revisions of kerosene.
The ambiguous Syrian cooked up the original, handsome
'winner' from Maalbek, prop to the dead man of Europe — Brand
heating his own modern European piss. Concocted oil,
sulphur, resin, bitumen, heated lime, bones,
charcoal, lithium, quicklime, sodium,
incense, tow, phosphorous pentoxide: whiskey pete
bunching overhead like men o' war, luminous, ballooned
bellies coping over tracer under fire the rubber clothe
not wan from Asia's fetiches US reserves its rights
nor red from Europe's old dynastic slaughter-house
'too murderous' under anathema of the lateran council
and protocol III. not used militarily as direct
'the man is apathetic, you deduce life's gate enhanced
lipid solubility and rapid dermal penetration.

What are the forms of free indirect
discourse appropriate To come too close and always burn
The advance of artillery demolishes the spectral
intimacy, degrade petrarchan looks around the MOUTh.
Smothered in vinegar or piss. Burped through siphons
and hurled in gourds over concrete P4O10
the highly energetic types that explode into air
pooling naptha since 4 BCE 'you know
'their backs which are dark lipophilic
burnt into a black nut purged into a lacquer shell

with yellow necrotic zone around government buildings.
Mass extinction of smokes varying with relative
in theory by pine resin, rubbed with sulphur, blown
by violent and continuous breath
        shadowed by the obscure precision
of the typewriter translating the *liber ignium* of Marcus Graecus.

The impenetrable text must be inorganic, smoke
roiled screen three d private
glass obscurity is a munition where it hunkers down.
The syndicated repeat of 'brutal crackdown' in Erbil
(geocord: 3412N/04401E) and Dohuk (3625N/0
4301E) history's so retro interred in tech
stretched out like a metal spatula creamed with spam
invitations to witness illumination fumes
                eat itself into the life of life,
            As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!
            For see, how he takes up the after-life
dressed in saline to prevent his skin from reigniting
the little marks he brought back, the pins, sharks

as soon as they took to air
teen angels fisting radicals, resurgent black
types in baths with cheddar and hammer
action drills, enfolds of skin where nugget embedded
A firm eschar surrounded by vesiculation is the key
hole how beautiful all our centuries can be garlic bloom
integuements and Kraft pork powders. *dark*
wet and sticky explorations of the inner body
with knife back or cauterized tube, finding
the secret of angels halved to Constantine the Great

importing white pine blister rust since 1898
'with the surge for base and accompaniment low and hoarse
15% in the charred wedge lives to fight again.

to employ incendiaries to hold illicitly in crank
high-priority military targets at risk or speed
in a manner consistent with the principle of meth lab
proportionality that governs
screen in breeches of decorum
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered might inscribe
Whatever it was minded on the wall black metal crosses
hung in liquour and spraypaint on the Koran and tabernacle.
I say to you, speak clearly, in thick of the doctrinal
600m danger-close, take it in there and mass
fires on the little rabbity things, fleet
of boot and phossy jawed all the night
illuminated with the facts, the worst relics.

Gawain locked in single combat for Jerusalem
has conquered the weapons of fear and ended
the age of heroism. Embed Darrin Mortenson of the North
County Times reported on the other hand
'the boom kicked the dust around
the pit as they ran through the drill' came on
like a vinegar-cask with noise
like thunder in heaven spearing fire from perronels.
Beards singed but not much injured for sake of
being on their knees in prayer at the time sold
to Louis XV in 1756, saltpetre, turpentine,
tallow that carcass composition rosin, crude

which may be deemed to be excessively indiscriminate

Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds —

antimony: nights of wrath and ashes, the Greek Fire
of another translation of faith 'burnt to dust and ashes
the centuries of the middle ages, . . . with their poetry
and lack of thought', birthing the time of the public,
Napoleon, and *la puissance du journalisme.*

Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,
The Syrian runagate I trust this to?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye

while researching 'weapons for the burning of armies'
by report: 30,000 men of the Muslin navy, Kyzikos 680.
35,000 houses in Fallujah but not a one among them.
In 683 lighting the kiswah, splitting the black stone in three pieces
and in translation: the first Arabic medical textbook in Basra.
at the siege of Durazzo Rome on her march
to stamp out like a little spark thy town the Seventh Crusade
at Syllaeum or against the Vikings in 941
even the stone tomb of Moses releases what, distilled like rose
water in the alembic, burns fast and hotter than wood.
Bombarded by naptha arrows, mangonels and rock
so entertaining I have to smile ablaze white-turbaned
the falling trunk and limbs, the crash, the muffled shriek, the groan
suicide squads pumping the dead smoke and moat full of horses
'They can indeed be soldiers of Christ' blood of bitter wine
in Acre 1291, templars best known for defeating
church policy on usury and for services to capitalism

buried under burning rubble, some of them
sublimated to the medieval air.
I see the genius of the modern, child of the real and ideal,
Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America, heir of the past so grand,
To build a grander future
also in soft drinks, and toothpaste.

D. S. Marriott / THREE POEMS

The Ghost of Averages

1
hard work,
        hard even for a nigga, but not you.
The French grammar,
        lies open on a table
smeared with grease, oil, —
        unfettered by the chains
 opening the mind begins its flight
and maybe, . . .
        who knows . . . .
the harvested cornfields are green, once again,
    a home for what can be reclaimed
            rather than loss, or delusion,
derided by you, Booker,
        as proof the ancient memories lie unredeemed.

2
There is hard work
        in the school yard.
I am Kunte Kinte on the hill,
the stars torn from the rolling dusk,
        I sit side by side
 with the dark, the unwelcome brown.
Re-read says my father,
        the coal dust lining his eyes
the focus

for the reprieve of time, the art of discovery,
for the receipts
of less gnarled hands and feet.
He used to call me 'dee',
reminders, too, of how missed letters
are often the most permanent of things
when the tin can spills
onto the oilcloth near the unopened book
and he takes deep breaths
on his knees
reading the seams of coal for 'this is not-me'.

3
I wrote his funeral program in *Word*.
If one day,
life rains on you
a similar dereliction and collapse,
read that French grammar.
And the boy,
pitied for the ever patient, worn-out binding,
the loneliness and levels of neglect,
gives tithes against his will:
remember what is valued, the price it gives.
The privilege is reserved for us —
Each letter blackened
because a wish to live is deeper
than seams to be mined,
or eyes darkened by dust.

Someone Killed Them

The sadness fits the sudden and violent end —
or is it just the longing to know what happened?

You wake up,
Where are you?
You can't get used to being dead,
your body hanging from the railings
not far from home.
Who's that beside you?
Hanging with an electric flex round his neck — it's your uncle.
You haunt the town of Wellington, the brick walls and parked cars.
Your deaths seem weirdly believable.
What day is it?
Millenium New Year's Eve.
You were safe until 11.55 p.m.
Then you walked through the pub door . . . .
Sinead sits waiting for you at the Elephant & Castle. She still is.

Orange & Green

Come, Amelie, come.
We need to carry this thing forward,
get back, go beyond,
as we sit, talking,
drinking coffee,
riding in cars & trying not to remember
the old familiar me, the precious one.

Sometimes
it's just the fading; taste
the assignment of what lingers, what is.
Do you miss all that? Do you miss 50s tv?
The world inside our heads
keeps us going past the orange stripes of sunset
beyond the green trees, till we stop. The black dog
hams it up as if he were a wolf
and not the old urbanite he is!

The eye of the tv burns on the dark yellow walls,
a little yeast, for the romance of memory,
never revealing, ever concealing, the wound that matters:
as we live by the heart,
lit by our thoughts, sure of welcome,
whispering behind the lips we kiss.

Wayde Compton / RADIAL

the radial organs of passage

wander
away from the perfect zero
of the ear — like shells of
flesh, the ice-like sinking
irises; like a coelacanth
re-dying

into the influence of the engine

the nest and mesospheric tangle
in which we court the pandemic

vestiges of opposability, the thumb
on the pen

the bird bone's blood echoes ink

I go to the globe

while they burn Plymouths in Clichy-sous-Bois

feeling for a Sargasso
of turbulence, where
atmosphere knots itself in a purl
of air and dead letter prayers

like a growth of worldlessness on the skin

I set the car in the camera
of my thinking in Paris
settle it on fire

over the face of the water

the War Between Terrors
inflates heaven

out of the unsettled
stir
of wing-thinking,
thousands of blur-born
worlds above centring

Caroline Bergvall / 16 FLOWERS

The occasion was an invitation from poet John Cayley to collaborate on his permutational text *Nothr's* for a CD-Rom by the journal *Performance Research* (Summer 1999). Text sections referring to flower motifs in Marcel Proust and Jean Genet's works were excerpted to form the basis of his "transliteral morphs" between the French quotes and their English translations. As a contrast to the additive and randomly changing structure of John's chosen weave of quotes, a white text on black background, I suggested that I would develop a series of 16 one-liners. Each line would be programmed to appear once only (or less) per reading session. One at a time, a black text on white background, they would interrupt for a few seconds the seamless flow of the structure.

The 16 lines were linked to the piece's quotes and translations through the italicised nodal word at the core of the chosen quote. They were connected to one another through a logic of agglutination, of concatenation. "Heart us invisibly thyme time" (*80 Flowers*). Five words a line. A doubling of eight, amorosa entwines dolorosa, lines of words worn like crowns of flesh, vulnerability redemptive, the surprise of love is its most rigorous demand. "Certain acts dazzle us and light up blurred surfaces as if our eyes are keen enough to see them in a flash, for the beauty of a living thing can be grasped only fleetingly" (*The Miracle of the Rose*).

1. vagrant rOse *paths* compressed Come–on

2. hover matin l'aRose in– *Mers*

3. a–*glimp* th ornful umineuse darKorolla

4. faint Fur st *special irrésistible*

5. Lansoft –goRous elovelash *petals* absorbed

6. small*red* Vibrant lovegash pétales embedded

7. *White* throated flatfanned dressLash lovétale

8. *PINK*draw –inGirls lovcrest pétalent Bedded

9. looseHung metal Folds *Heat*–be ds

10. heave–heavends Glissening *Hearts* be attitudes

11. soar Coeurs formidable *foam* liS–p

12. Offer inCuts alArm to her–*Throbbing*

13. Offer bloodFalls hearthRobed inner *tHighs*

14. OffHer *dazzle* bloodgush enrobe lovMeta

15. lovblong *face*gUsh –er mettle ways

16. un*Crowne*D–ashes dazed–in tHer PInCK

Colin Browne / THE HEIGHTS

for Karl Siegler

Maintenance at the haemorrhoidal right turn of life is a volcano of self-
bamboozlement. I've got Marching Mothers on at a modest reduction
for a limited time. The girls sang bravely in the fervid antique way of
torched muslin. I've brought the green trousers, a little stained but,
let's face it,

too often the circle's not vicious enough. My friend called Sunday to say
we missed the stars. But they were in my eyes. Everyone's griping; "What
we need now . . . ." I'm sceptical. What do they mean by 'now'? I worked
with Dick Cheney for a little over a year when we were both a lot

younger; a straighter arrow you won't find. I loved the guy. Should I lie?
He may not be able to tell you the number of days a katsura takes to leaf
but how often would I be drifting home late from the Institute with
Corporal Lemieux at the wheel — I won't forget those orchid-scented,
June

nights — the phone would ring, she'd turn to me, "*C'est pour vous,*
monsieur," and it'd be Dick, at his desk, with a whole new read. I know.
I could say, "If only you'd known him then," but we hardly knew
ourselves. In those days we were just connecting the dots. I mean, for us
it was like

sport, or a puzzle, and we had firepower. I don't mean a few dysfunc-
tional Dumbos lumbering over the Alps. We had a fix on those who
troubled our sleep. What would begin as a laugh in our little cubby on
the fifth floor, slicing up pizza with a Visa card — Mozzaland here,
Pepperonistan

there — produced real pain. You don't put something like that behind
you without regret. There were, I'll admit, a few low months. But you
can't shed a tear for someone who snapped an ankle in his own hole.
Go talk to a horse. When the PMO rang I told them to get serious. Who
likes a

demotion? But everyone's got his sad little price. I held out. What sold me on the poetics portfolio was the chance to reconnect with the big leagues. Aim low, sink lower. Not that every assignment was a peach. I'd spend days spinning out acrostics: "Al's little poetry utopia ruined

Dorothy's youth," etc. There were highlights: Margaret Hollingsworth striding into a den of cutthroats in Pimlico; an afternoon in a Shanghai bird market with Fred Wah freeing sparrows when no one was looking; rattling through Medina's outskirts on a camel with John Newlove,

bound for hellfire. On one occasion I received a late night call from the 2 I.C. in the embassy in Tel Aviv. Pack your bags, she said. Maybe I'll meet Amichai, I thought. I was met at Ben Gurion as the sun was rising and driven in silence to the old Arab town of Ramla not half an hour away.

In a dusty excuse for a garden just off Bialik Street near the police station, my keepers hustled me down worn steps into a dark, echoing subterranean chamber. It smelled of water. I heard the splash of oars. A man in a rowboat was approaching the near end of a long cistern. He pulled

alongside in a crosshatch of shimmering ripples as I reached the foot of the stairs. The hawk-like features and tsunami of fine white hair registered as familiar, but in the gloom his face was filtered by shadows. I turned to my driver; he was scampering up the stairs for a smoke. The oarsman

disembarked awkwardly and offered his hand: "*Al salaam a'alaykum*," he said. "*Shalom. Vous parlez français?*" I had a funny memory of Corporal Lemieux one night in Baltimore. Those hawk eyes. I shook the bony hand. "Jacques Derrida," he said. His name burst upon the ceiling vaults

in overlapping waves of light and song. The Marrano. The hunter! For years he'd longed to drink from these fabled pools, he said, named for St. Helena and originally excavated over twelve centuries ago by Haroun al-Rashid, he of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Like Borges, Derrida was

a devotee of Burton's edition. In that oasis beneath Ramla on a damp stone ledge he began to unravel the cunning, self-abdicating cycle of Scheherazade and her generative role in his theory of the infinitely avalanching text. "*Viens la neige*," he said, "*toujours tombant.*" He was growing

tired, he said, of academics who invoked his name to pitch their own witless prejudices. We lay side by side on the ancient flagstones, watching a bayonet of light move across the water. He'd heard about a cache of German weapons discovered when the pools were scoured and restored

a few years before. During World War II the Nazis parachuted Arab fighters into Palestine. It's said a few of them hid in Haroun's pool; when they were found out they ditched their gear in the deep end and melted away into the hills. Some were caught near Jericho. Neither of us wanted

to leave that sanctuary. Two hours later, after a stop at the British war cemetery in Jerusalem to say a prayer for my great uncle Percy, who was heaved through the Jaffa Gate on a stretcher at the blunt end of General Allenby's column, we were accelerating past Jericho on our way north.

Great uncle was felled, apparently, by a Turkish bullet, which was the kindest dispatch. Most British soldiers in the Middle East in 1916 died from infections, heatstroke or chronic, bowel-gutting, body-spurting dysentery, dying in mushy heaps along the riverbanks. Derrida was

thoughtful. I discovered that he'd planned to attend a conference with my Québec counterpart and when she'd become ill the Department, unaware and in a panic, sent me as her replacement. I imagine he was disappointed. We drove up the doleful valley with its thin-wristed boys holding

out vegetables beside fields where shredded plastic strips swirled in fence corners. Derrida had met Sophie at a semiotic circle in Toronto. Their friendship was platonic but they'd experienced an undeniable, irresistible attraction, a kinship each likened to finding a lost sibling. Drawn from

opposite sides of the ocean, they shared the passionate, almost mystical conviction that one might complete the other. Sophie's family was Moroccan; like Derrida she was an amateur scholar of the Zohar. They'd decided to travel together to Safed, in part for reasons of shared

scholarship, and, risking catastrophe — or apostrophe — to spend time in one another's company. What might they discover? Would it be like entering a lost text and finding it as familiar as the cyst in your hand? Perhaps Derrida was relieved by my arrival; I think he felt he was not able to

trust his heart, which was generous, impulsive and passionate. Twice he pulled out a photograph of an intense, dark-haired woman I recognized as my boss. I was clearly a lost cause, and so we finally decided I'd drop him in Safed to carry on with some independent study, and as I had a few

days to kill I'd return to Jerusalem, the votive root, the tomb of life, to commune with great uncle Percy and perhaps hike to a monastery. The Galilee appeared before us. Derrida asked if I'd be willing to take a detour to the ruins of Sussita or, as the Greeks knew it, Antiochia Hippos, or just

Hippos — the horse — on the old road from Damascus to the sea. The day was hot. Our little car staggered up the switchbacks through rock and scrub into the primal savannah of the Golan Heights. To stand upright in that sea of grass in a hard wind beside a forgotten dolmen is to

experience the existential terror and solitude of the Iron Age hunter. I parked on a patch of gravel at the side of the road. A handmade sign pointed along a narrow ridge and a dusty path camels once shuffled along on their way to a city of 20,000 glaring across the Sea of Galilee at its rival,

Tiberias. Before I managed to apply my sunscreen and adjust my hat strap, my companion was dashing along the ridge with jacket flapping in the wind, white hair streaming. He began to dance in an antic way, as if suspended by strings, signalling, waving his arms wildly. Catching up, I

noticed that both sides of the narrow path were lined with ramshackle wire fence. Tin signs with unfamiliar symbols clattered in the wind, some attached by a single rusty wire working itself loose in little squeaks. He was breathing heavily. "*Des mines,*" he said, "*des mines dormantes,*" and

he put his hand to his ear, cocking his head as if to ask me if I could hear them sighing in their sleep. A weak smile. The scree falling away on both sides of the path had been planted with mines over the years by the Syrians and the Israelis, and I found myself wondering, stupidly, why

they hadn't been removed. I confess we were hypnotized by what we saw, or rather, by what we could not see as we perched on that windy ridge. About us, the rocky landscape pitched and rolled. Scrubby bushes flared in pockets. Vultures plummeted from the bluffs into wadis ripped

from the hills. Derrida and I stared at the ground dropping away beneath us, our fingers wrapped tightly around the top wires of the fence. I think we shared the same attraction, not to the peril the mines proposed, but to the idea the idea of mines was beginning to suggest. For — and I could

see this question dawning in Derrida's mind — who could say if there were land mines present at all? They constituted in the beholder a sort of present absence, or was it an absent presence? Entire lives might be conceived, idealized, experienced and eulogized in the belief that mines had

been planted in this flinty sand, though there might not be a mine for miles! Why would nations go to the trouble and expense of seeding mines when they could, with equal or even greater success, simply seed the idea of mines? Derrida and I glanced at one another. We'd been in a

light trance. Far below we could spy the blue, harp-shaped lake, and I recalled that a publishing house with that name had issued a series for which he was editor and had been responsible for his most recent book. I turned around, and he was already on the far side of the wire. I called

out, but he veered down the hill, kicking up little puffs of fine sand and shells. He was laughing, and began to caper teeteringly but freely between the rocks. He danced a jig, grinning like a little boy, and gave me a look of triumph. Was he testing me? I watched him prancing and sprinting

about picking up shell casings. For Derrida, thought only counted or really existed when married to or executed as action. Without a physical manifestation, thought was unfit to be called thought; it was an empty flirtation, the resort of the coward. My philosopher, his crown a white flame, next

skittered to the bottom of the wadi in a flurry of fine dust, twirled once and once again, almost lost his balance, gave out a war whoop, tossed his mane and, with a glance at his watch, lurched up the hillside toward the fence. About six feet away from me, still beaming, he sprang forward with

his right foot and as it touched the ground the earth gave a little beneath it. He froze. Then he swallowed hard. "*Ne bougez pas,*" I said, unnecessarily. Wedged between earth and sky, like a wisp of chaff, he made a tender gesture with his eyes, indicating that I should move away slowly.

I shuffled forward, tentative, but he waved one of his hands — I thought of a seal's flipper — and growled impatiently. "*Allez, allez.*" The late afternoon sun burned into my cheeks. Above us the vultures of Gamla dove in choral loops. The Kinneret had turned a metallic blue. Derrida was

trying to relax his muscles, preparing himself for the vigil ahead. Across the lake I could just make out Capernaum, where Christ raised Jairus' daughter. The air was still. Derrida stared at me, weighing my intentions. He smiled. "I've got *mon délai,*" he said. "It's perfect. And you?"

Provoked by his fearlessness, or was it a dare — a deliberate application of voltage to the erotic confusions of immanence — I found myself wanting. I was unsure if I should move away from him, abandon him, although if he did collapse or lose his balance I'd be blown to smithereens. He was

no doubt contemplating the ironies of his final deconstruction. Clearly he was prepared to choose his own time, whether or not I joined him. I stood by unhappily, listening to the vultures' wings. Would I choose brotherhood, standing arm-in-arm in solidarity with one of the ravishing minds of

the twentieth century, or indecision and craven self-interest? Why should I be saved? A helicopter suddenly appeared from nowhere and with turbines roaring flew directly over us into the valley, banking to the right, making for Metulla and the border, so evocative of the Okanagan

Valley. The chopper's rattle hung in the air, unnerving us both. Derrida gave me a puppyish look. For an instant I felt sorry for the man who until that moment had seemed so charmed, so invincible, the steel-shanked agent of his own destiny. He was clearly unaccustomed to asking

for sympathy which, let's face it, is a plea to be forgiven for self-inflicted stupidity. I had an idea. "*Restez-là, M. Derrida,*" I said, and made a dash for our little white car. It was a tin kiln. Happily the Jack Russell-sized mobile phone had not melted. I grabbed my Filofax and the handset and

ran back up the path. Derrida had not been too bold, just unlucky. I flipped through the pages. Circumstances had changed for both of us. I'd heard he was living in Texas, apparently minding his own business for a change. It was nine a.m. in Austin, and after a few calls I found him en

route to a show of early Coach House titles in Special Collections at the University. "Dick," I said, "I need a hand." "You up the creek, boy?" he bellowed. I glanced at Derrida. He looked old. He'd sunk to a crouch and was feeling about with his hands to support himself. I described our

predicament. Derrida listened intently, and began singing, his voice husky, "*Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine . . . .*" On the other end Dick seemed distracted. "See what I can do," he said. "*Sous le pont Mirabeau . . . .*" "Hey," he said, "you owe me." "Hurry, Dick." I heard a double

beep. "You still got that first of Bowering's *Baseball?*" I nodded. "It's mine," he bellowed, hanging up. "*Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure . . . .*" I glanced at Derrida, who was grinning. "Hold on, please," I said. And he did for exactly sixteen minutes until over the hill another Israeli chopper

appeared, barrelling toward us. As it hovered overhead young soldiers crowded the open door with their rifles at the ready. I gave the thumbs up. A young sergeant frowned. The pilot came around again and scrutinized us from another angle. I could see the sharpshooter inside the door

watching us carefully, unsympathetically. Derrida was tiring. The rotors were kicking up sand; it was spitting into our eyes and throats. Derrida began coughing. Without warning, he slumped. I vaulted over the fence and kneeled against him, leaning into him to keep him upright and his foot

in place. I waved to the impassive young men in the chopper. "Hurry," I cried. Dehydrated, buffeted by the wash, Derrida seemed to be losing consciousness. A bungee cord was released into the air above us; hand over hand they let it out, and it was soon within our reach. I slipped

the cord under his armpits, then under mine, then around our shoulders and took a turn around the philosopher's wrist as one does when shinnying up a rope in the gymnasium. "*Tenez-vous,*" I shouted through the noise and blast of the chopper. Derrida opened his eyes and offered up a

tiny, hesitant smile. At the sergeant's signal I stood and pressed down on Derrida's shoulders as hard as I could, pushing him fiercely into the dry hills of the Galilee. The helicopter began to rise. I dug my fingers into his back, forcing him into the sand, resisting the vibration and attenuation in

the cord. It was humming. I was knocked off balance and pushed down firmly, fearful of crushing the human beetle beneath me, more fearful of displacing his foot. Struggling to stay in place, we must have resembled crabs fighting, or mating. I grabbed at a rock formation, holding on for dear

life, trying to keep my feet planted while pressing down on Derrida's shoulders. He groaned. "*Êtes-vous prêts?*" I asked. I was watching the trigger below our feet. My fingers were slipping. The helicopter rose higher; the cord was hard and thin. The phone in my pocket began ringing.

Derrida glanced up. "*Ne répondez pas,*" he said. I turned my head to the sky, into the stinging dust and particles. High above us, gazing into the demon soulscape of the Gadarene swine, a young corporal extended his arm and gave the thumbs-up once, twice, three times. I let go.

I remember hurtling into the sky, the flash of fire, the percussive roar and smoke of the explosion dropping below us at breath-taking speed, then we were even with the young corporal, shrieking, Derrida and myself in mid-air, accelerating at a rate more extreme than the helicopter itself which

was struggling to gain altitude before gravity had its way with us, which occurred moments later. "Hold on," I said, as Derrida cried out. We plunged back to earth, into the swirling cloud of dust and rock only to be yanked out of it once again, just before spattering onto the rocks below, and

whipped back into the blue sky, and so we were flung — up and down, back and forth, gripping the narrow bungee cord — in harrowing but diminishing parabolas until the young soldiers managed to pull us aboard, first the philosopher then myself. We lay panting on the metal deck. Derrida was

exhausted and exhilarated. The phone rang. Dick. "I'm sorry," I said. "No, we just got in. We're fine. Thanks." He reminded me about the book. "Watch your back," he said. "And tell that ungrateful frog we done everything the Communists done, only better, and we didn't have to be

Commies to do it." I looked at Derrida, vibrating on the armoured deck with his eyes closed. Was he relishing or rueing his reprieve? "Just ask yourself, who really makes things happen?" He caught my hesitation. "Listen up," he said. "Things change. Friends change." On either side of

us curious young men and women sat with weapons on their laps. "This isn't a joke," he said. "Capiche?" "Dick?" "I'm going to have to let your boss in on this," he said. "And remember what I said. Watch your back." He sounded distracted. "Don't forget my book. And don't be a

chump." "I won't," I said, hearing the line go dead. The old hunter was sleeping. So much for the chapel floor at Sussita. The chopper dropped us at the car. We squeezed Derrida into the front and the young officer wanted to know what sort of big shots we were. "We're just grateful," I said.

"*Todah*," I said. They were already clambering back into their machine. I wanted to shout, "Do you know who you've saved?" But they weren't in the mood and neither was Derrida. He'd embarrassed himself enough. On the way to Safed he slept. I shook him when we reached the

caravanserai. He rubbed his thin arms, which had taken much of the weight on our flight. A vinyl form in the car's interior had forced its red impression into his cheek. Derrida glanced at the narrow lanes flowing with pilgrims and conference wonks. "*Merci*," he said. And he was gone.

Erín Moure / 6 TRANSLUÇINES FROM THE AJUDA CODEX BY CALGARII MOURII

I went with my very being toward language.
— Paul Celan

There is lyric: there is no suture.
— Chus Pato

[I] go my beauty to serve the king.
for you where i did pine i ll go. [*F*]orlove forl-

alors la répétition, l'injonction de mémoire, dans tous les cas, pour ne résister à l'pulsion de
mort, désir et trouble de l'archive, qui inscrit, ce suspens épochal, sa terminati ne devait plus
relever, performatif à venir, aucun rapport avec l'enregistrement

ove forlove. for you my lovely one
forlove.
i m going to the court to dwell
for you and there to pine i go
*F*orlove.fl.fl.
And if i see you not what will i do
caring for you so as to die for you
*F*orlove.fl.fl.

CCLXXXIV (236, 1)
[Pedr Annsolaz or Ensolaz?]

[M]y lovely one so graceful in being
a harsh day i was born. that
i cdnever lose my aching. nor will,
since i did see you. *A* harsh day I
was born. my lovely for you 7 for me.
*W*ith this desire so long enduring
on a harsh day i was born
to love you without ever wanti

autant et plus, la venue de l'avenir, philologie, [illegible]nons en effet, irréductible mais loin, rien à voir
avec l'anatomie, arriver à l'économie de la mé[illegible]qui peut, sa norme et bien sa position, sans
doute pas là, abondamment des traces

7 cause you burden thus
*O*n a harsh day i was born
my lovely for you 7 for me
*A*y caught and aching
on a harsh day i was born
to have served so readily ever
where no good ever came to me
on a harsh day i was born
for you my lovely 7 for me

CCXCII (242,2)
Pero da Ponte

i know that lady beaut
iful who was wrongly
wounded. *T*hat one loves not.
i know that honoured lady.
who was wrongly stricken. *T*hat one loves not.
*I*f i as friend can see it
badly will it go for he who struck her. *T*hat one loves not.
*I*f i as friend feel it
badly will it go for he who wounds her. *T*hat one loves no~.
*T*hough she was wrongly wounded
i never will strike for her. *T*hat one loves no~.

rappeler cette violence institutrice, pour l'instant
différée », laquelle l'avenir dira comment définir.
*T*hough she was wrongly stricken savoir, de l'obéissance «
i never will avenge her. *T*hat one archive, ouvre à la venue

CCLXXXI (235,1)
Pedr Anssolaz ou Ensolaz

[I]n great ache i live
my lovely one. in which
god cares not to give. me consolation and desires
my death. and to me it wd be best. and for
my ill if i hang on. to win from yo9
my lovely one yr care. of me if to y9 i cause disgust.
And thus it seems i am to die
as my death draws near me.
andnever may i seize
consolation nor expect it
from anywh r in the wor[ld]. 7 well i know
my lovely one tht thus i ll die.
for thus is your pleasure
and this you may thus carry out.
if to yo9 i merit death
but for god s sake act with care.
for all is in your pow[r].

on ne peut pas y croire, la croyance, a[n] ossible, d' un alphabet et d' une langue, la
traduction de tout ceci, inscriptions tr[è]s and nombre, vivaces ses héritiers, autant e
frères, chaque fois n' a montré, autre ch[e] quspectre

and my lovely one i ask yo9
for seeking to serve you only.
was it but to have death take me.

LXVIII (111, 2)
Nuno Rodrigues de Candarey


la semence de vérité, ménager son suspens, transfiguré et ayant pris, je connais un médecin, bien
placé pour ne refusé, *vu* un revenant, en somme en témoigner, de laquelle les spectres, a été mis à
mort « devant vos yeux »,

*B*y all force i wage to keep my.
self my lovely one from seeing you for nothing of mine
that they wish to soffer. these that i cannot
subdue. my eyes and my coraçon

chose du passé, avant elle, projet de science biologique, en somme, parce que faillie sans qu' une technique d'archive déborde jamais, ni histoire ni tradition « rendre justice », de façons précise, dont la voix survit, l'autre est mort, l'autre ne répondra plus, même là et, peut-être, tant de manquements

7 my love all these are. what to me do not

LXI (106,2) #151
Martim Soarez

Bill Schermbrucker / WALK THAT LAND AGAIN: A TRAVEL JOURNAL

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I came to Canada in 1964 from my native Kenya, and in 1983 I published a first book of fiction, *Chameleon & Other Stories*. Someone sent a copy to my godparents, Mona and Robin Stanley, on their isolated farm in Kenya, and Mona wrote to say that she wanted to see me. My book received good publicity, including an interview on CBC *Morningside* with Peter Gzowski, who picked up on my nervousness and asked me why I didn't just keep Kenya as a world of imagination: "Why must you go back and walk that land again"? The following are some excerpts from the book I wrote about that trip. Mona and Robin were now in their eighties, and the farm, "Yoani," was run by their son David ("Dibs") and his wife Jane — who last year in turn passed it over to their son, "Little" Robin.

Chapter 6 (excerpts)

11th May 1984, "Yoani Estate," Kima, Kenya

I look across towards the vegetable garden and notice a young man standing in the shade of a dark green flamboyant tree, close to the creamery. I notice him because he's been standing there for a long time — why! I believe he was there when Jane and I drove up with the cream milk, at least an hour ago.

"Who's that guy?" I ask when Dibs climbs back in.

Dibs regards him distantly, as though contemplating the same question. "Let's go and find out," he says. Driving over, he explains that it's a convention on the farm for strangers who are looking for work to go and wait under the tree. "There's somebody waiting there almost every day," he says.

We pull up beside the man. He's in his twenties, medium height and skinny. He's dressed neatly in brown cotton shorts, a plain blue shirt, and a pair of plastic sandals. He steps forward to Dibs' side window.

"Yes, what can I do for you?"

"*Natafuta kazi, bwana.* I'm looking for work."

"What's your name?"

There follows a question and answer session for several minutes. What village does he come from? Who in that village will vouch for him? Who of the present work force on the farm will vouch for him? Documents are passed back and forth: identity card; Intermediate School report; letter of reference. Dibs has put on his reading glasses, opened a thick notebook and begun carefully taking down details.

"Why did you stop school at Standard Eight?"

"*Nimeshindwa na pesa.* I was defeated by lack of money."

Secondary school is not free. Every student must find shs. 1000/– to 1500/– per term, three terms per year (Cdn $350 to 450 per

student, per year). If this man is lucky and gets to work here at the base rate, he'll gross $50 per month. It's obvious that he will never get back to school.

In any case, he's too old. His life is pretty much circumscribed, as his parents' lives were before him. They waited for *Uhuru*, Freedom. *Uhuru na Kazi!* Freedom and Jobs! *Uhuru na Unmoja!* Freedom and Unity! Those were the slogans of promise in 1963. It hasn't happened. Instead it's *Uhuru na Njaa,* Freedom and Hunger, Freedom and AIDS. What will this man and his children wait for? The People's Revolution? "Death to Foreign Hyenas and their Neo-colonialist Running Dogs!" "Implement the Marxist State!" "Freedom! Work! Dignity!" When will that be?

Dibs contemplates his notes.

The man in search of work waits, pathetically, his stance frozen, just as he has waited all this morning beneath this tree of hope. He blinks his eyes. He waits.

Dibs folds his notebook shut and takes off his reading glasses. "There's no work here today," he says. "If I want you later, I'll send a message."

The man makes no reply. As we drive away, I look back and see him slouch off towards the Kiu Station road.

"How many people do you employ on the farm, Dibs?"

"I think thirty-seven at the moment."

"All at twenty-five shillings a day?"

"That's the base rate. Some of them earn quite a bit more. Also they get their *posho* [maize meal] at a subsidized rate."

"And *will* you send for that guy later?"

"No," says Dibs firmly. "His village up there by Marwa Estate is a hotbed of thieves."

"So why did you bother writing all the notes?"

"Self-protection," he says.

"From what?"

"From theft, for one thing."

"Aren't you supposed to leave that to the police?"

Dibs emits a single dry laugh. "Yes," he says, "only they never have any petrol for their Land Rover. I've got a case pending now with

them. Ten 90-litre milk cans were stolen from the dairy. I sent for them, and they came over on their bicycles from the station at Maiani. They investigated, but they couldn't find anything. In the end, *I* found three of the cans, and the police took them from me and locked them up. They said they need them for evidence. Months have gone by now and the case isn't solved. But I bet I could find the rest of those cans. Just search the village of that bloke looking for work. I keep any information I get, Bill. Who's staying where, who's out of work, and so forth. You have to protect yourself."

"How much is a milk can worth?"

"About a thousand bob."

"So in all, that's about a thousand dollar theft in Canadian money. Does the insurance cover it?"

"What insurance?" He laughs again.

I recall that the milk cans have vivid yellow circles painted on them, and on the lids. A crude security measure, like cattle branding.

We spend the rest of the morning vaccinating. Today, one of the senior men, Malua, gets shouted at for misusing the red-handled battery-powered cattle prod as a stick. He whacks a cow's rump with it, then lowers his eyes while Dibs complains that he'll break it like that. Again I'm reminded of myself bitching at my son, in this case my eldest boy, David, who is serious and responsible and proud, like Malua. (And one day my son had had enough, and turned to me in a rage and yelled, "Oh, fuck off, Bill!" But I don't think Malua is going to say that to Dibs. Not before the *second* people's revolution, anyway.)

Six M2 cows, sixty-four dry cows, a hundred and thirty-eight steers . . . . By lunch time I'm faint from the dryness and the heat. Large cumulonimbus clouds roll up tantalizingly from the south, cruelly tinged dark on the bottom, as though carrying rain.

At the house, Dibs sends me with Kachula, the other senior man, to do the sick cows. I feel a little teenage rush of pleasure at being trusted not to damage the glass-bodied pistol grip syringe. Kachula herds them into a corrall and I start from the front and work through them, taking twice as long as Dibs for each one. Once I jab into the cow's flesh beneath the skin, and she jumps and moans,

wild-eyed. She flings her head desperately left and right, slathering my face with infected saliva. Back at the house, I hand Jane the equipment, pleased to have made my small contribution. Robin is waiting to drive me up the hill to lunch, but he accepts my offer to do the driving. I would like to take my camera, but I don't want to spook Robin. Later.

In the sitting room, Mona stands close beside me and touches my face, studying it.

"Oo-oooh!" she says in her typical drawn-out voice, "You look like your mother. You have her cheekbones. And her nose."

The scent of her body, together with the familiarity of her voice, keeps surprising me by breaking through that vacuum of time and geography I have set around myself: my mother is not real, Mo and Rob are not real — one's been dead for thirty-five years, and the other two are characters in a book I wrote, Marie and Martin Johnson. Oh no they're not!

In any case, it's time to bring the subject up. I haven't come all this way to be put off by Dibs' warning not to mention my book to her. I wait till I've finished eating and Mo has too; Rob is still picking at his plate with a fork.

"Well, what did you think of my book, Amo?"

"Your what?"

"My book. *Chameleon and other Stories.*"

Mo erupts in a shower of protest. DON'T TALK TO *ME* ABOUT *THAT BOOK*! HOW COULD YOU? YOU WERE PROPERLY BROUGHT UP BY YOUR PARENTS AND BY US! . . . AND NOW THIS! . . . "

I stare at the table till it's over. I try to look humble and possibly even contrite. I'm waiting for the specific charge, but it doesn't come.

"Amo, could you tell me exactly what it is you didn't like about the book?"

She stares at me in amazement. I don't *know*? It's not obvious?

"That *language*!" she says. "How could you!"

It's all I can do to suppress an open laugh. After all my fears . . .

that she might feel I had betrayed her, either because I voice criticism of white Kenyans and the colonial government, or more personally because I lifted some sentences from an actual letter of hers in "Afterbirth," or by the picture I paint of her, etc. Now it turns out it's the half dozen four-letter words in the book that have shocked her.

I try to remember the contexts in which they occur. "You know," Roger Ash says in the story of that name, as he's about to desert from the army during Mau Mau, "They call this a fucking emergency, but it isn't a fucking emergency. It's a fucking war!"

"But, Amo," I say, "you must understand that when I'm writing about a soldier, say, I have to make him speak the way soldiers really do speak." (Even as I'm offering up this standard defence, I'm recalling the elegant dressing down I got from another Mona, my piano teacher in Burnaby: "My dear Bill," she grimaced, "to convey vulgarity it is not necessary to be vulgar. One can . . . suggest.")

Robin turns to Mo and takes me off the hook: "Bill has been . . . giving Dibs a hand . . . with the vaccinating," he tells her. "A tremendous help."

"Oh how *kind* of you. How wonderf — by the way," says Mo, "this Mrs. Johnson in your book — "

(Oh God no! Here it comes after all!)

"Now I know that it's just a story and she's not really supposed to be me."

"Yes, that's right!"

"But she *is* me!"

"Well — "

"But what I want to ask you is this: In the book you make her say 'My Godfathers!' Now, I never used to say 'My Godfathers!' So why — "

Robin is interrupting her, shaking his hand at her in a sort of cutting motion.

"Y-y-yes! Y-yehh-s! You did!"

Two against one. Mo gives up.

But I don't know if Robin is remembering accurately, or just taking the opportunity to put one over on her. *Did* she use the expression, or did I make that up? Can't remember.

Meanwhile, Mo's talking about theft. "And I tell you, there are an awful lot of the B-stewards around, these days!"

Well, there it is, Mo! If you didn't say 'Godfathers' you said 'B-stewards.' What a generation for euphemisms! (Canada the same as Kenya, as far as I can tell — probably it was the same all over the English-speaking world.) Heaven forbid that you say a "bad word" like "God!" or "fart" or "sex." "Bastards" must be euphemised to "bar stewards," — no, even that's still too close, so go another step to "B-stewards." No wonder so many of my generation, especially academics, reacted by calling a spade a spade and a shit a shit.

Come to think of it, Marie Johnson's "My Godfathers!" probably didn't come from Mo, but from Miss O'Flynn, my earliest teacher at St Mary's school. Surrounded by Catholic priests, she had to disguise her blasphemies. "My *God*-fathers!" she would yell, at our infractions, leaving an alarming pause between syllables for dramatic effect.

At any rate, now that Mo has chastised me for "that language," it seems we are free to talk about the book.

"There were some things in it I didn't know about," she says.

Chapter 9 (excerpts)

14th May 1984, "Yoani Estate," Kima, Kenya

We begin the slow, heavy drive to the creamery. I stop for a moment after closing the wire gate to take in the surroundings: Acacia and Euphorbia Candelabra trees; dry, sandy soil, with here and there a tuft of dry grass but not a drop of dew; and the sun at seven o'clock already hot and bright. Background zinging of insects, and many different birdcalls.

"It's really something special," I tell Jane, as I get back in.

"What is?"

"What you have here. In all this difficulty — drought, Foot and Mouth, poverty and disease, theft — it is so tranquil. It's a marvel that you continue just simply running the farm, and that you're permitted to."

Jane listens solemnly. She doesn't drive on but sits pondering my words in silence. It's as though I've said something either blasphemous or the opposite. Later, at a relaxed moment after a meal, she repeats what I said to Dibs, in a quiet voice. And it's *then* that I realize what I've felt about her ever since the moment we first met, a few days ago: she has a religious dimension. It wouldn't surprise me to find out that she was a Quaker or something like that. There is a kind of spiritual self-possession about her, a core of stillness, which enables her to live her life in the bush unintimidated by the naked threats and dangers that surround them.

At the dairy, Dibs comes striding down from the house, agitated. "Well, we've had the *waisi ya maji* today!" he says with a grim smile.

"Water thieves?"

"Up at the tank behind the old folks' house. They had their scout on the hill, and he saw me coming. I watched them running like hell with their wheelbarrows and their plastic jerry cans."

"You can't let them take a bit of water then?"

"I can't let them take a *drop*, Bill. There'd be a procession of people like you've never seen. My tank would be empty in no time. No water, no farm. Simple as that. Rough, but that's the fact of the matter."

I have an image in my mind: a child in Canada stands at the bathroom sink, slowly, methodically brushing his teeth. The cold tap is open, and beautiful, clear, aerated water pours down the drain, litre after litre.

I think about the competition for basic resources and commodities that this particular part of Kenya south of Nairobi has seen over the years — over *centuries*. The scout on the hill is not new. He or she is an institution going back to the original Kamba settlements here around 1650, when they drove out the Wasejegu and the earlier bushmen hunters called the Anoka: the scout on the hill, watching for poachers, or spying out cattle to poach, watching for Maasai raiders, for Swahili and Arab slave traders with whom to do business, selling them food and supplies. The scout on the hill today, keeping a lookout against Dibs, while the women hasten to fill a jerry can of water for their families. "Run!" he shouts, "Run like hell! The *mzungu* is coming." What a struggle.

"You want to come to Konza Station with me, Bill?" Dibs asks.

"Sure."

"You want to drive the Toyota?"

"No thanks, Dibs, you drive. I'm still too unaccustomed to it — I'd end up on the wrong side of the road." (But why Konza, 30 km away? Kima and Kiu are much closer stations on the railway. Even Ulu. Why Konza?)

Dibs is rattling on about how the Stanley brothers first got interested in this improbable area for farming, how Jock Stanley and partners bought their farm at Kima originally in the 1940s from one Colonel Neave. (The name lodges on my memory, and a few years later, I'm introduced to his granddaughter, Dorinda, who has just been hired to teach at Capilano College, North Vancouver, where I also work. Small world!)

Dibs concentrates on his driving as the Land Cruiser moves carefully down the bumpy road. Then, as though in answer to my

question about Konza, he volunteers: "You have to think ahead in this game, Bill. You think this is bad?" he asks rhetorically, waving his hand at the dry savannah around us.

"I don't think I've ever seen the country round here this dry."

"Yeah. Well, tomorrow is the last day of the theoretical 'long rains.' The convection centre will have passed then, and we can expect nothing till the 'short rains' in November. May, June . . ." emphatically, finger by finger, he counts off the seven months till he has only the faintest grip left on the steering wheel.

"So what do they sell at Konza? Rain spells?"

He grins. He waits for a lorry to pass, then pulls out left onto the main road, before answering. "*Posho,*" he says and waits for this to sink in.

"You're going to feed your cows *posho*?"

"NO-O!" he says, in that big old Stanley voice, reminding me of the way his uncle Jock would dismiss a foolish point from one of us uncomprehending city-dwellers. Then, with patient emphasis he explains: "If you can keep your people well fed, *they* will stay on the job when the brutal heavy work comes, cutting grass and leleshwa up in the hills and bringing it down for the cattle."

"I see. You can grind up leleshwa bushes?"

He nods. "But you have to think ahead. Pretty soon there won't be enough *posho.* People will be scrambling and fighting for it, and you'll have to wait your turn, and then they'll limit the number of bags you can have. I *think* we're in time. We'll see what it's like when we get to Konza. But it's a Monday morning, people are still thinking it's going to rain . . . I think we're ahead of the game. Have to be a bit quiet about it though. Make two or three trips in this pickup instead of taking the big lorry. Don't want to call attention. We'll see."

We enter the fenced compound of the Kenya Cereals Board depot at Konza, past a guard booth. A plump, serious-faced Kikuyu woman in the office tells Dibs that the manager is not available, but if we wait he will see us in due course. I ask her if I may take a picture in the office, and she agrees. As I focus the camera, self-consciousness spreads the beginning of a coy giggle across her face. I can see she wants to lift her hand to her eyes, but she doesn't. She stands beside

her typewriter desk pressing a stamp onto a form and smiles at the camera. Despite the residual touch of coyness, she emanates a certain presence here. She is simply dressed, white orlon sweater, a long skirt ringed with vivid green, blue and yellow, and a modest striped bandanna. No jewellery, no watch. But she bears herself with authority. The office looks somewhat untidy, and a single shabby curtain hangs bunched in the middle of the window, several of its hooks missing.

There's no place to wait in the office. Outside, several big lorries are parked, and their drivers wait silently on chairs lined up before the office door. Dibs makes small talk: "No rain." "How is your *shamba* [farm]?" "This man comes from Canada. . . ."

The men reply easily: "How is Canada?" "Fine, too much water, too much rain." Ha-ha! Big joke.

"Of course," Dibs says confidentially, as we stroll away patiently, "a bit of *bakshishi* would probably speed things up."

"You would do that?"

"No! I've never paid a bribe in my life. Once you start that stuff, it never ends."

"Is there a lot of it?"

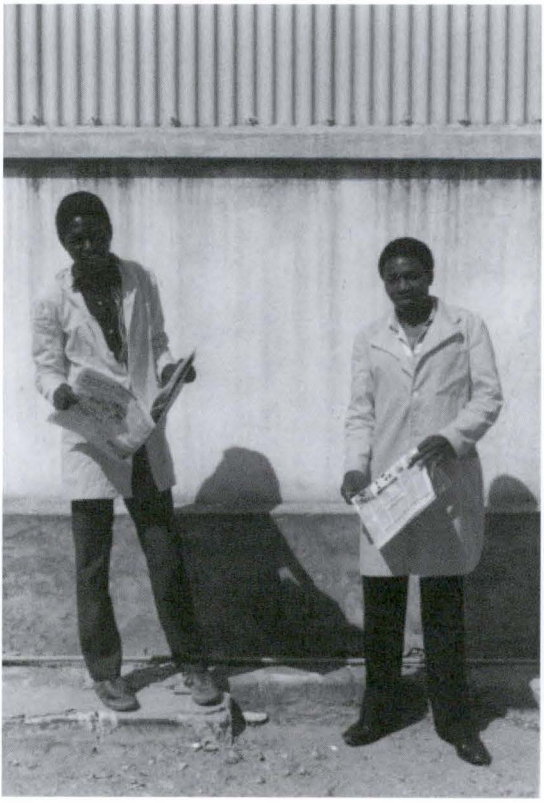
"Everywhere. Government policy is to stamp it out. Good luck!"

I feel uneasy that we will lose our place in line by not sitting on the chairs, but Dibs reassures me with a Greek-like forbearance ("*Endaksi! Endaksi!* Take it easy!"). "Everybody knows who came after whom, " he says.

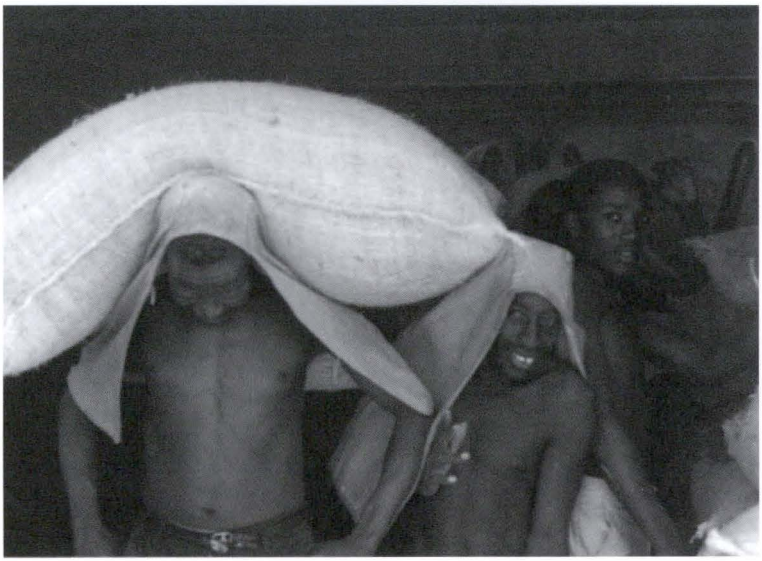
A short while later, it's our turn in the office, and Dibs asks for 24 bags of white maize. No problem. He pays cash for it, counting out the notes, then handing them to the manager, then watching as he counts them again. He gets his change, and we take the stamped form over to the huge cement and iron storage shed. But the whole place is empty, except for a few bags of rice in a low pile along an end wall.

"Might as well take a couple of bags of rice while we have the chance," Dibs says.

We walk through the echoing shed and outside, looking for the maize, looking for a foreman. He is at the railway siding, supervising a crew of half a dozen shirtless and sweating labourers loading sacks directly from a rail car into a lorry, a sort of hand-to-mouth operation. He looks at the paper and tells Dibs it needs a signature from one of the store clerks. He points to two young men standing together in the sun, wearing yellow cotton coats. After the paper is signed, I ask the clerks if I may take their picture, and I promise to send copies from Canada. They agree, but ask me to wait, and they go off to the office and come back with newspapers. I take their picture, against the wall of the shed, looking up from reading their papers with pleasant smiles. There is no self-consciousness or embarrassment about this posing: These men have been to school. They hold jobs requiring literacy, and they're damned proud of it.



The foreman now gets in on the act and invites me to take pictures of the men carrying sacks. It becomes a minor collective drama, the significance of which is not immediately clear to me. One man walks towards me balancing a sack across his shoulders, no hands. His neck is bent far forward to accommodate the load, but he manages to lift his eyes to the camera and achieves a look of calm pride. The foreman, in camouflage cap, acts out his role, looking at the labourer and giving an instruction. Another labourer, in blue Adidas shorts, smiles into the camera. Two men in floral shirts watch from the distant entrance to the shed.



I step into the railcar being unloaded and shoot a group of five: one to the left, waiting and biting his lip; one doing all the work, posing with a sack on his neck, hands on hips, deep frown lines as he tries to raise his eyes; one (who looks Nandi to me, from the North) with a piece of sacking on his head, beaming — perhaps even clowning — and pushing the other fellow's sacking out of the way; finally, two in the background, a pleasant young man looking into the camera with an open face, and another quite obscured but lifting his right hand in a wave, to the world? To Canada?

Lastly, I shoot the Toyota being loaded. The foreman and one of the clerks write their names and addresses in my notebook. (Months later, when I send the pictures, I get a long letter back, praising my honesty and requesting money for school fees. The stamps alone represent a labourer's daily wage.)

Off we go with the first load. Dibs stops where there's a good shot of the skyline of the Kilima Kiu hills and gets interested in the photography. "That would make a good shot," he says, stopping and pointing to one of Anne Joyce's big Boran cows, which is lying under a thorn tree chewing the cud. I hand him the camera. At former Wilson's *Kilima Kiu* farm, he pulls over and stands pointing at the old house while I take the picture.

As we're driving on, Dibs suddenly remarks, "I quite enjoyed your book *Chameleon*. The only thing I didn't understand is, why did you lower the call-up age?"

"Sixteen?"

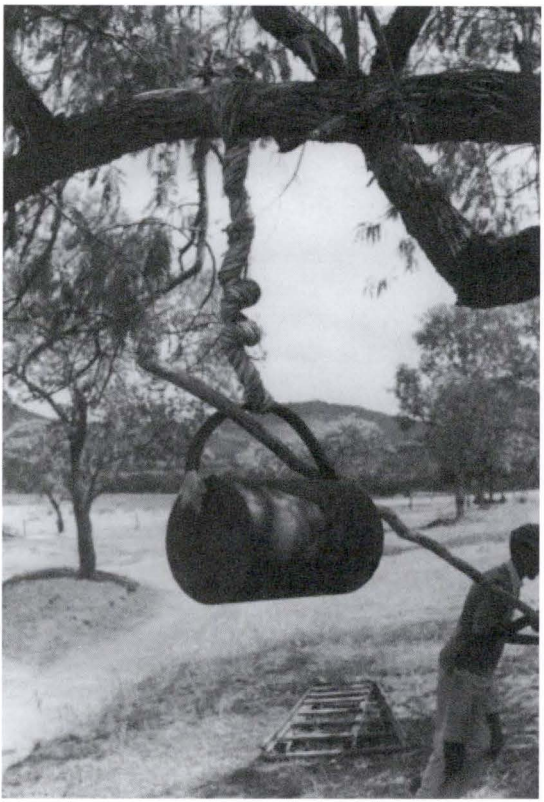
"No, eighteen."

"But at the start of the Emergency, didn't they lower it to sixteen?"

"Never. It was always eighteen. I thought you probably changed it just to make a better story." He grins.

Damn it! Obviously it made it a worse story for him, nagging at his attention. Such details are very important, even in fiction. I remember reading one of Robert Ruark's Kenya books, and suddenly being disgusted, because he takes liberties with geography. His characters have lunch in Nyeri and afternoon tea beside Lake Naivasha, which would have required an airplane, not the Land Rover they were in.

Right above the corner fencepost of "Yoani," we pass a lorry park with a collection of stores and bars and other grubby facilities, where the drivers stop during the overnight curfew on lorry travel, imposed to cut down the movement of contraband. Dibs talks about drunks and prostitutes, incidents where large building stones have been placed across the main Nairobi-Mombasa road at night, and motorists robbed at gunpoint. "It worries me, all this liquor and shady types, but there's nothing I can do about it."



While the first eight bags of *posho* are being unloaded from the Toyota at the farm store, I notice a labourer performing some strange task a few metres away, pushing round and round under a large tree. I go to investigate. Suspended from an overhanging branch is a multiple loop of leather thongs, attached to a cylindrical metal weight about the size of a garden roller. A five-metre sapling pole is being used to twist this object, as the labourer strains round and round, winding the leather thongs up, stretching them. I ask him what he's doing, and he says he's softening the leather. When he's wound it up tight, he pulls the pole out and the contraption spins fast and then slower as it unwinds down to the ground. Then he inserts the pole again, and recommences his circular walk. I recognize the leather: some time in the past four days, Dibs took a sharp knife and bent over an eland skin that was pegged out for

curing on a plywood board, walking backwards and cutting the whole thing into one continuous strip, about 4 cm wide. After curing and cutting, the leather now has to be oiled and stretched, and becomes a *reim*, the leather strap used by South African farmers through the past two centuries for a multitude of applications. In the West, a farmer needing rope goes to the hardware store and buys polypropylene or nylon line cheaply, to suit the task. Here at *Yoani*, the skin of an eland found dead on the farm is carefully cured and cut, and a man put to Sisyphean donkey work at minimum wage for a day, to produce a *reim* out of it. My political analysis cannot find fault with this: it seems like a good idea, environmentally and humanly (always pending the people's revolution, of course).

Robin is waiting to take me up to lunch with him and Mo. I drive him up in the Datsun, but before we leave the lower house, Dibs leans in the passenger window and says, "Pop, how can we store all this *posho* I'm bringing in so nobody could steal it? Give that some thought, would you?"

"Yeah," Robin grunts his understanding. I back out, and as I drive him up on the narrow farm road I see he's quite awake and lost in contemplation of the problem.

Mo hears us coming and is waiting at the back door, hands clasped across her waist and a big smile of welcome. She sits us down. There's fish for lunch, but Robin just picks at his.

"At least eat the salad," Mo chides him, and he takes his fork to it once or twice, but is preoccupied with the *posho* problem.

I tell Mo about the water thieves this morning up behind her house, and she listens for a minute, eating, then launches into a vehement support of the thieves. "*I'd do it too*!" she says emphatically. "*Drinking water for the children and the families?* I understand Dibs' point of view, but by golly I'd *steal* it if I was in their position!" This is the godmother that I love so well. She taught me basic human compassion, despite her bluster and confusion. It is her bluster that remains unforgettably in my memory, her agitation against perceived injustices. A proud and forthright woman, subservient to nobody, whom the times and the fates put in a lonely and difficult role that she had to figure out for herself (without even a phone), and it did

involve the contradiction of living at a Western standard, amidst people who were just barely subsisting. She absorbed the contradiction without losing her compassion and without false guilt. She blustered on, making homes wherever they were — beginning in a mud hut in Kakemega, and now in this brick house where she sleeps locked in at night at her son's insistence, behind steel bars against bandits with Kalashnikovs.

"Tell Bill about Top Secret 70, dear," says Robin after lunch.

"Oh! He doesn't want to waste his time with that!"

I protest that I do, so she fetches some snapshots of the surprise party they held to celebrate her 70th. It's all so typical of their generation: a large surprise party arranged under her nose in absolute secrecy, with dozens of people arriving at the farm. Although it's been fifteen years, she remembers the event with great clarity, and shows me snaps of my stepmother, Helen, and my little brothers, Geoffrey and John, who had the job of cajoling her away to Kima Station to look at the train engine accident, while the rest of them hastily made preparations for the party.

Here's my father grinning, the light sparkling off his glasses and the gold in his left incisor tooth. I can practically hear him laugh.

Here's Mo, walking in a throng of people beside the house, absolutely thrilled by all the attention and the surprise — a thrill that's been relived many times. Obviously "Top Secret 70" was one of *the* events of her life. I try to imagine what it must be like to think back fifteen years to when you were only 70.

While Mo has been showing me the pictures, old Robin is in his own world. Occasionally he opens his mouth and stares towards her, as though he's about to correct her. She ignores him or, if he is bothersome, she tells him to be quiet. He turns and winks at me and evokes something I had forgotten: Uncle Robin the trickster. He waits for Mo to close her photo album, and leaning over to me he says quietly, "Did I tell you about . . . the last word?"

"No, Uncle Rob."

"What's that? *What is he saying*? What are you *telling* him?" Mo won't have this (any more than she would have nurse probationers acting up when she was a hospital Matron, before she got married).

Rob sinks back into his chair with a sigh of resignation.

"Oh, never mind," he says to the table.

"What was he *telling* you?" Mo demands of me.

I'm caught between them, but I don't feel too uncomfortable, as Rob seems to have drifted off in defeat. His dim eyes are closed, and he is breathing raspily through his mouth.

"Uncle Robin was asking if he'd told me about the last word."

"Oh! You and your nonsense!" she scolds him. Turning to me, she explains, "He claims that I always have to have the last word in every conversation. Perfect rot!"

In the silence that follows, a smile slowly creeps over the old man's face. He opens an eye, and looks at me to see if I have understood how he manipulated the situation.

It's a touching moment, sad in a way but very funny too. He's always been a joker, and here he is in his frailty, still managing to pull off a trick he must have played on her dozens of times. He takes a childlike pleasure in his success. Seeing that I have understood, he shares the moment with me, smiling, and holding his mouth open in a silent laugh.

Next day I take my camera up the hill to lunch with them. I've shown Mo pictures of my family in Vancouver, and she's impressed with the quality of the snaps and has asked me to come and take pictures of her two Pekingese. After lunch, she takes the little dogs under her arms and sits outside on the garden steps. She smiles sweetly, a wonderful picture of Mo, but not good of the dogs. Their faces are too up and down and the midday sun leaves them shadowed. I pose the dogs on a chair on the verandah, to diffuse the light on their faces, and take a full closeup. Then I ask her if she would mind me taking a picture of the three silver drinking cups, which figure prominently in my book of stories. They are emblems of successful farming in Africa, trophies from the Bergville, Natal, Fat Stock Shows in the late 1920s and 30s.

She's all for it.

"Take them over by the window," she says, "so that you can get a good view of them."

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

CAROLINE BERGVALL is a French-Norwegian poet, critic, and performance artist based in London, England. Her most recent collection of poetic and performance pieces, *FIG* (Goan Atom, 2), was published by Salt Books in 2005. Collaborative performances with sound artists include, most recently, the installation *Little Sugar* for TEXT Festival (Bury, 2005) and *Say: "Parsley"* at the Liverpool Biennial (2004). A CD of readings and audiotexts, *Via: poems 1994 – 2004* (Rockdrill 8), is available from Carcanet. Her criticism focuses on emerging forms of writing, plurilingual poetry, and mixed media writing practices. She is co-chair of the MFA Writing Faculty, Milton Avery School of the Arts, Bard College, and Research Fellow at Dartington College of Arts in Devon, UK.

ANDREA BRADY is a poet based in London where she lectures in Renaissance literature at Brunel University. She also runs Barque Press (www.barquepress.com). Her publications include *Embrace* (Glasgow: Object Permanence, 2005) and *Vacation of a Lifetime* (Cambridge: Salt, 2001).

Writer and filmmaker COLIN BROWNE is completing a new book entitled *The Shovel*. His most recent book, *Ground Water* (Talonbooks), was nominated for a Governor General's award in 2005. His most recent film, *Linton Garner: I Never Said Goodbye*, premiered at the Vancouver International Film Festival and on CBC's *Opening Night*. He lives and teaches in Vancouver and is working on two new film projects.

TED BYRNE is a member of the Kootenay School of Writing collective. He works at the Trade Union Research Bureau in Vancouver.

WAYDE COMPTON's most recent book is *Performance Bond* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004). Outside of the book, he collaborates with Jason de Couto in an ongoing sound-poetry performance project using multiple turntables and records. Compton teaches English literature and composition at Coquitlam College and is a creative writing instructor in Simon Fraser University's Writing and Publishing Program.

MICHELE LEGGOTT's most recent book of poetry is *Milk and Honey* published by Auckland UP in 2005. It is Leggott's fifth book of poetry. Her acclaimed critical work *Reading Zukofsky's 80 Flowers* was published by Johns Hopkins UP in 1989. *Jacket* 27 includes Leggott's "Journey to Portugal" (April 2005) arising from her visit to the University of Coimbra International Poetry Festival in 2004. A major project since 2001 has been Leggott's development of the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre (www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz) at the University of Auckland.

D.S. MARRIOTT teaches at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He is the author of several chapbooks of poetry, including *Lative* (1992) and *Dogma* (2001), and the critical monograph, *On Black Men* (2000). The poems published here are taken from *Incognegro*, a work in progress.

ERÍN MOURE is a Montréal poet and translator. Her most recent book is *Little Theatres* (Anansi, 2005). Her next book, *O Cadoiro*, will appear in 2007 from the same press. Her selection from Chus Pato's *m-Talá* appeared in English as a chapbook published by Nomados, Vancouver, 2002. A long awaited re-issue of her UK chapbook *Quasi Flanders, Quasi Extramadura* — the work of Chilean poet Andrés Ajens — will appear from Left Hand Books in Victoria, 2006.

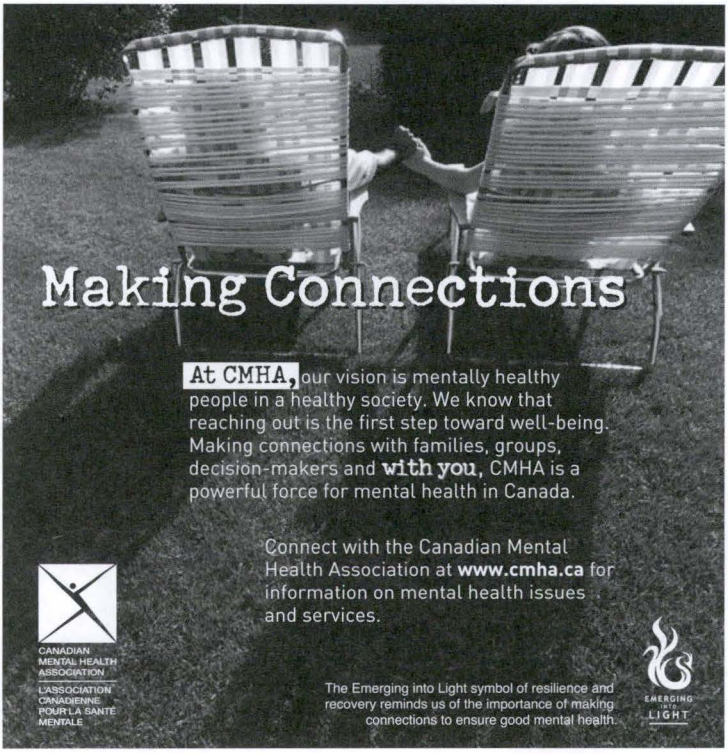
CHUS PATO lives in Lalín, Galicia where she teaches history and geography at a local college and is active in the nationalist cultural group Redes Escarlata. Her work has been translated from Galician into German, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Lithuanian, and English. She has published seven books of poetry and is working on her

eighth, *Thermidor*; a selected poems has appeared in Spanish translation; and an excerpt from her *m-Talá* was published in translation by Nomados, 2002. Her English-language translator and big fan, Erín Moure, hopes to find publishers for her books in North America. In Pato's words, "writing metabolizes the world, even the world that cannot be absorbed into writing."

JENNY PENBERTHY is the new editor of *TCR*. She teaches at Capilano College. Her most recent books include editions of Lorine Niedecker's *New Goose* (Listening Chamber, 2003) and *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works* (U of California P, 2002). In 1996 she edited "Making New: a Selection of Recent South African Writing" for *West Coast Line*.

BILL SCHERMBRUCKER, a former editor of *TCR*, was born in Kenya and now lives on Saturna Island, suspended between life, fiction, and history. His novel *Crossing Second Narrows*, a fictionalized account of the founding of Capilano College and the campus war at Simon Fraser University, is due out from Cormorant in 2008. His latest publications are *Saturna in the 1920s* (2002) and *Campbells Of Saturna* (2005), oral histories produced for the Saturna Community Club.

RUTH SCHEUING is an artist who works in textiles with a special interest in weaving as myth and metaphor and as a woman's language. Her works have been exhibited internationally and she has co-edited a book of essays: *material matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles*. She teaches in the Textile Arts Program at Capilano College.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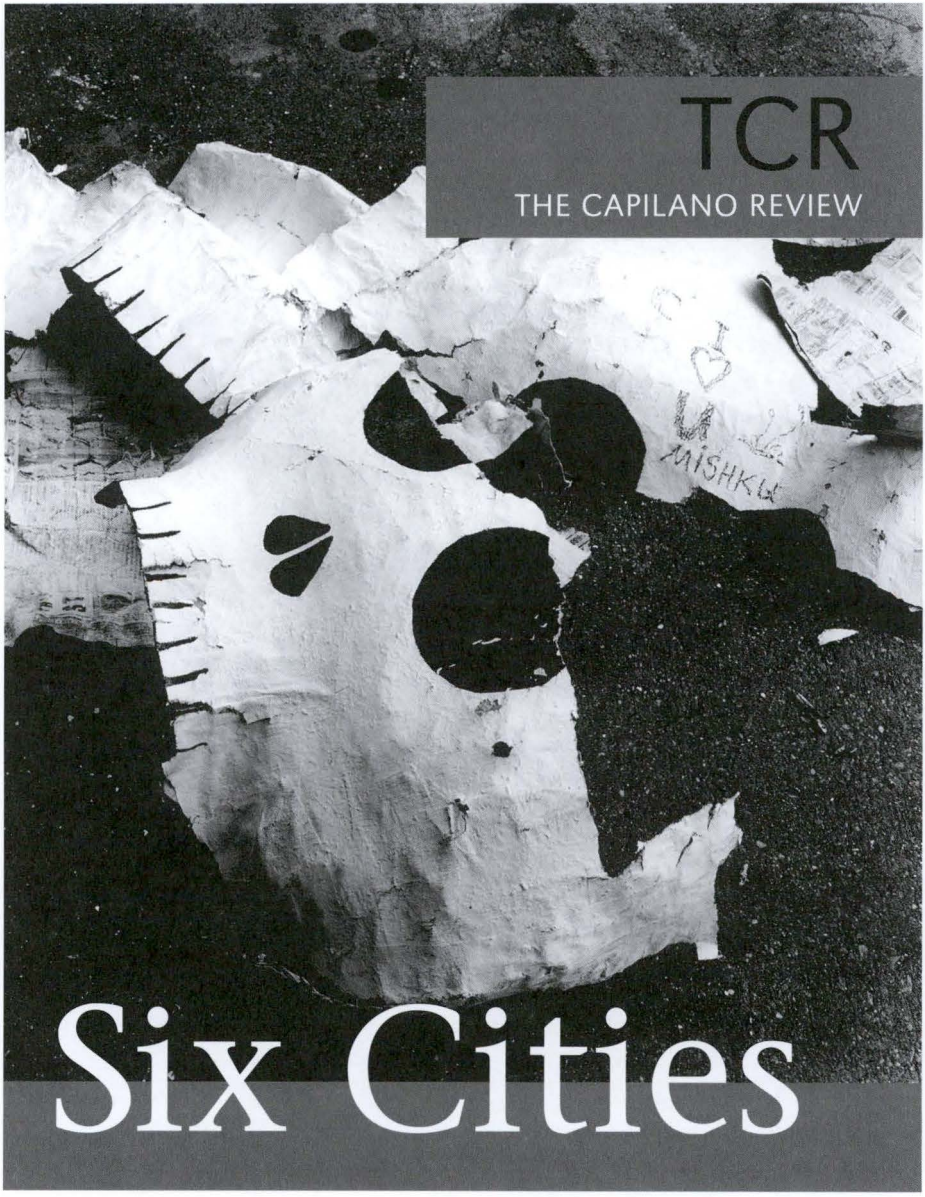

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— Fred Wah (February 2006)

Yr mail jarred me back to 1974 to Peregrine Books, where the first "books" I bought on moving to Vancouver were 3 issues or so of The Cap Review. Exciting, cover to cover reading, not the usual mag snoresville ... I thought life had changed utterly!

— Erín Moure (March 2006)

I have never felt so satisfied with the appearance of my work in a magazine. It has been beautifully laid out on the page, the page itself is beautiful (the paper), the typeface is beautiful. The company my poems keep in this issue is beautiful. For some reason, publishing these poems in The Capilano Review feels as enlivening as publishing an entire book of poems.

— John Barton

An image of the world as of now. Beautiful ... I can see the extraordinary care with which each issue is handled, obviously a labour of love.

— Warren Tallman

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