

20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

THE CAPILANO REVIEW



TWENTY

i'll sing and you'll sing
and in the slightest of times
harmonies of birth will reemerge
the chant of a child already born without the pain

— Cherie Geauvreau

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TWENTY

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COVERS

Details from *In-between*, 1992
 Installation, silk-screen
 on 2 copper sheets
 8' x 3' each

PREFACE

This issue of *The Capilano Review* is designed to celebrate Canadian writers and artists as well as to mark the 20th year of the magazine's publication. It is traditional at such a time to present a retrospective issue, but on this occasion the editors of *TCR* decided that while it is appropriate to acknowledge those who have contributed significantly to our culture, it is equally important to present those who will extend, transform, and renew our culture. The present issue is our attempt to acknowledge the past and to welcome the future.

Several writers and artists whose work has appeared in *TCR* were asked to introduce those whose work we publish in this issue. For our desire is to open our pages to the diversity and vitality of younger artists. Our hope is that the selection offered is accepted as a sign of the extent and variety of work that will be created by many other artists in the decades ahead. However, the essay which begins this issue makes clear the realities which face those who will create the work to come.

My thanks to all who participated so generously in the assembling of this issue: those who responded to our call for recommendations, those whose work appears in this issue, and to the other editors and the board of *TCR*.

— Robert Sherrin

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is followed by a detailed account of the work done in each of the various departments. The report then goes on to discuss the results of the work and the progress made in each of the various fields. The final part of the report is a summary of the work done during the year and a statement of the conclusions reached.

Susan Crean / CAPILANO AT TWENTY

It's a sobering experience turning twenty, even if you happen to be a feisty Westcoast visual and literary review and even if you knew in 1972 when *Series One Number One* appeared that it was probably foolish to worry about surviving the decade — never mind making it through the next one. Beginning things always invites obsession. And those were the good years, sweet with the promise of an expanding future. Of course, reaching one's second decade no longer holds the mythic significance it once did now that 18-year olds can vote and drink as well as drive, but we celebrate it all the same and this has a purpose. For it's an occasion to stop to admire the view, to look back down the road we have come along and forward towards the yet-to-be-written.

The past two decades of Canadian writing have been decades of amazing growth; unprecedented and extraordinary in volume, diversity, and talent. In the distorted comfort of our *fin-de-siècle* we tend to forget that writing wasn't always a foregone conclusion in this country; for many years it was more like an aberration. In the sixties it was necessary for writers to start from scratch, to set up the presses which would publish their books because the branch plant operations which had absorbed all the lucrative parts of the Canadian industry had no interest in money losing ventures such as contemporary literature. (Today this small, Canadian owned sector still publishes seventy percent of all Canadian authored books.) Along with the little literary presses came the literary magazines: more windows of accessibility, places for readers to encounter writers and writers to encounter "feedback." But soon it became evident that a great deal more was needed. Infrastructure, to be precise, and infrastructure became the project of the seventies as writers formed unions and publishers trade associations, as editors, translators, and booksellers got organized or re-organized and collectively (through the Book and Periodical Development Council, for example) began to attack the problem of a dysfunctional system set up to serve foreign companies, books, and

writers. How were Canadians to get a word in edgewise? How were writers to survive to write another day if the revenues circulating through the market by-passed creators? Publishers needed decent distribution and authors needed a decent living.

On both scores, little changed in the eighties, although a lot happened. For one thing, Canadian writing achieved the improbable: the apotheosis of CanLit as signalled by its arrival in the media mainstream (which, for better or worse, proceeded to manufacture literary superstars), and by its adoption by academics (literary critics) as fresh fodder for their postmodern discourse. Meanwhile Canadian writing in all its genres became immensely popular and by the end of the decade it was no longer unusual but entirely *usual* to find Canadian titles on fiction and non-fiction bestsellers' lists. In this sense Canadian writing has been a national and international success. You would, in fact, be hard pressed to name another "industry" which has done nearly so well out there in the dog-eat-dog world of global economics, copping recognition, praise, and prestigious awards — the Booker (Britain), the Commonwealth Best Book award, the *pris Goncourt* and *pris du meilleur livre étranger* (France), the Edgar (USA) — and due mention in *Time* magazine articles about World Fiction. There are, in short, Canadian writers who write full time and make a tidy living; a handful could be described as wealthy and one or two, *mirabile dictu*, have become household names. The vast majority, however, regardless of their literary reputations, either spend their creative lives scraping along the poverty line or surrender to day jobs and write in between the cracks. It's a dilemma which prompted a painter friend of mine to grumble that most Canadians work in order to make a living while artists have to make a living in order to work.

From a social standpoint, I think you could say we have achieved the room to write, and some occasional lottery-like support in the form of grants. Nothing firm, or guaranteed, or magnificent. Just the possibility that if you do manage to complete the manuscript it might get published, and if you repeat this process often enough your royalties could exceed three digits and your PLR (Public Lending Right) cheque may pay the rent for three or four months. That'll be it for steady income. Two decades of cultural policy, you see, has failed utterly to improve the finances of writing. It remains axiomatic of the

Way the World Works that the closer you get to the creative act the slimmer the rewards, and the rewards of writing mean you can expect to clear \$11,000 (just) in income from all writing-related sources. As artist John Boyle used to say, no one in their right mind becomes an artist to make money. The 1982 Applebaum-Hébert Committee on federal cultural policy put it another way when it remarked that artists provide the largest subsidy to the arts in Canada — bar none — by virtue of their unpaid and underpaid labour. These words gave official recognition that the vast sums of money invested in the arts and cultural industries by Canadian governments serve individual artists last and least.

So here we are a decade later, still stuck at the bottom end of the income charts right next to pensioners on fixed incomes. And it's hard not to get cynical about statistics which show millions — no billions — of dollars circulating through the cultural industries watering the careers and savings accounts of executives and lawyers and administrators, supporting a healthy labour force of some 350,000 souls who can boast salaried and insured jobs replete with pensions and benefits. Something way beyond the reach of self-employed artists.

Has every generation of writers wondered if it will be the last? Or is this the result of our distempered times? It seems the past two decades have been spent shoving a boulder the size of the national debt up a hill, a boulder which has grown progressively heavier as the superstructure expanded. And now that the summit is within view, we turn sideways to discover that the trail-maker (the federal government) has abandoned the project and disappeared. If it's the unvarnished truth you want, federal contributions to the arts and culture have shrunk twenty-four percent since 1984, about a billion dollars in lost cultural resources. True to the preferred Tory method of making cultural policy — leaving it to the minister of finance — Don Mazankowski removed another ten percent from the arts and culture in his 1992 mini-budget. A misnomer if ever there was one, for the freezes at the Canada Council have already reduced the value of its funds by a third and there aren't any margins left. So the cut is hardly minor; it drives to the bone.

It was obvious a long time ago that writers individually and collectively needed to establish some independent sources of income: from

photocopying, for example, and from libraries where everyone — librarians, clerks, janitors — associated with the service was being paid save the writer of the books being borrowed. Public Lending Right was invented to redress that injustice and the first PLR cheques were paid out to Canadian authors in 1986. Last December the first cheques from CANCOPY, the recently established reprography (photocopying) collective, were distributed to English language creators and publishers representing revenues from singly transacted licences. I personally received \$2.42 for my share of CANCOPY's fee from a licensee somewhere who wanted to make photocopies of a piece I wrote called "Taking the Missionary Position" about the Into the Heart of Africa exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum. It may be the most valuable two bucks I ever earned considering the Herculean thirty year effort it took to get the Copyright Act reformed. Valuable and highly symbolic — of the long years of missed income as well as those lovely cheques to come.

Making money from what you do as an artist is a battle but only half of it. The other half is learning how to live on less, how to become a diffident and unreliable consumer in order to make it as profitable as possible to work for freelance rates. This is why I have Arthur. Once a year I spend a couple of hours with Arthur as he transplants my dishevelled sums and expense accounts from sheafs of square-ruled paper into his computer. It's reassuring to watch them reappear in neat columns, and hear Arthur purring calmly. "Nothing to worry about," he says. "You may even like this." Often I do, which is only to say, touching a large log of cedar, so far so good. Tax law, as we all know is not written with artists in mind, and generally we have had to masquerade as affluent self-employed middle class professionals — and pray not to be noticed. For every time we have been, there's been hell to pay. On the last occasion Revenue Canada took after freelance artists, Tony Onley took a bunch of his canvasses down to Wreck Beach and threatened to set them on fire. Smaller fry I knew at the time were harrassed into bankruptcy, despair or illness (one ended up in a psychiatric ward), and several simply gave up and went out of business, stopped creating so quietly hardly anyone, least of all Rev Can Boys, noticed.

The subtext here is significant, for it pertains to suspicion and

envy. Suspicion that people pursuing a line of work they have chosen and actually like and are proficient at are cheating; fear that given a chance the entire population of Canada would sign off as artists; and a lingering envy of the independence and non-conformity of the creative life.

Tax laws have an interesting way of telling you what a nation really thinks of its artists. In Ireland all artistic incomes are exempt from taxation; in the Netherlands artists are eligible for social security payments when their incomes fall below a certain minimum, money which is repayable if and when the income re-materializes. As of last year, Canada has had federal Status of the Artist legislation which speaks to the particular economic circumstances of creation. But, other than clearing a legal path so media artists can bargain collectively with federal agencies, it changes little. No bankruptcy protection, no access to unemployment insurance, or pension plans. The Act speaks but does not act and this, Department of Communications officials claim, was all they could wrest from the white-socks-and-pointy-pencil set at Treasury Board. The money men refused any measures which would incur any on-going financial obligation; so, after promising to entrench PLR, the government was reduced to noting its existence while making the stupid (and transparent) observation that authors find the idea desirable. Canada's tax laws speak eloquently alright, and what they say is this: "Make art if you want, but if you do you'll be poor and it will be your choice. We won't necessarily put you in jail for your anti-social behaviour, but we won't give you the same breaks we give other citizens either. Unless you win the Booker prize you are on your own."

This, I think, is where you and I and *The Capilano Review* came in twenty years ago. On our own. Writing then was a passionate occupation and a risky business. The quintessential free enterprise and vertically integrated activity in which the writer perforce acts as inventor, investor, and bank. It is still that way today, and just as precarious. Though magazines and cultural institutions are supported with annual subsidies, no writer is. Yet people begin to write and continue to write in defiance of the economic odds. They do this, I believe, because of something else we've achieved: a literary culture with roots in the community. Community, actually, is the one great change.

Communities of interest, for example, which have whetted the public's appetite for live authors' events, and helped create the network of authors' festivals, writers-in-residencies, and public readings. Cultural communities, sometimes sub-cultures themselves, have engaged their artists and worked with them to develop alternative ways of reaching audiences, substituting grass roots strategies for marketing campaigns.

Writing is a subversive act, an act which draws strength from the past, energy from the future and inspiration wherever it can. The contributors in this issue represent that spirit. They are the reason for celebration.

ROBERTA REES

Roberta Rees, her quiet lyricism masking a fierce determination to follow the story through, first appeared to me in a poetry workshop I gave in Calgary one week in the spring of '91. It was a remarkable workshop, all accomplished writers, struggling with issues of genre-crossing, autobiographical disclosure, appropriation of others' experience — concerns that ran deep, deeper than, though mixed in with, usual issues of musicality and formal break-through. Roberta was reserved but insistent on her vision as we collectively probed the issues her pages of poetry raised. Those pages, not so very transformed, surface near the end of her powerful first book, *Eyes like Pigeons*, released last year from Brick Books. Poetry obsessed with narrative, this text obsessive in its form, insistently tells, re-tells an intricately interwoven skein of several women's lifestories. This is the obsessiveness of pain, a litany of experiences that cross generations and cultures, not simply beautiful, but poignant evidence of the ways we are interconnected, woven into each other's life-lines and stories. Roberta is unflinching in her narrative focus and it is this concentration, this determination at the heart of her melodic imagery, that makes her a writer whose company one wants to keep.

— Daphne Marlatt

The first part of the report discusses the overall situation of the country, including the political, economic, and social context. It highlights the challenges faced by the government and the population, as well as the progress made in various sectors. The second part of the report provides a detailed analysis of the key issues, such as the environment, health, and education. It identifies the main causes of the problems and proposes effective solutions. The third part of the report presents the findings of the research, supported by data and evidence. It shows the impact of the interventions and the progress achieved. The fourth part of the report discusses the conclusions and recommendations, based on the findings and the analysis. It provides a clear and concise summary of the key points and offers practical advice for the future. The fifth part of the report contains the references and the annexes, which provide additional information and support the main text. The sixth part of the report is the index, which helps the reader to find the information they need quickly and easily. The seventh part of the report is the list of figures and tables, which provides a visual representation of the data and makes it easier to understand. The eighth part of the report is the glossary, which defines the key terms and concepts used in the report. The ninth part of the report is the executive summary, which provides a brief overview of the entire report. The tenth part of the report is the conclusion, which summarizes the main findings and recommendations.

Roberta Rees / HAND OF A THIEF

Jessie's thumbs on the girl's throat. Jessie's thumbs, her thick ridged nails, the girl's Adam's apple ridged bone. Jessie's fingers under the girl's neck, squeeze the girl's spine. Her hands lift the girl's head off the ice. The girl's toque slides sideways, plops to the ice beside Jessie's right knee. Orange.

"You bitch. You goddamned bitch. You sold them, didn't you? Bitch. Bitch. Bitch."

Her hands bang the girl's head into the ice. Her voice in her chest, burns.

"Goddam son-of-a-bitch. You said you're my friend. My friend. My friend."

Her knees rise and fall with the girl's head. Thumbs on the girl's throat, Jessie rises on her knees, throws all her weight onto her thumbs. Leans over the girl staring up at her, blue circles under the girl's eyes, blue light of skate blades circling by. Swwiishhhhh sswiiiisshhhh. Leans her face into the girl's, close, so close. The girl's lips inches from Jessie's teeth. The girl's Adam's apple cracking under Jessie's thumbs.

•

Everyday for a week the girl comes into the cafe just as the jockies pick lettuce and tomato out of their teeth, throw back their fourth cups of coffee, "Can't gain weight, Jessie, gotta stay light, know what I mean," rush out the door, "See ya Jessie kid, keep a steak on ice for me kid, when ya see me sittin big in the winner's circle, throw 'er on the grill," sprint across Elbow Drive through the Stampede Grounds to the track.

Steam and burgers and onions and mustard and fries and ketchup and vinegar and horses. Horses. Jessie wipes the grey arborite tables, wipes the drips off the ketchup bottles, pockets the dimes and nickels

the jockies hide under their cups.

Warm, she rubs her thumb over their warm surfaces, breathes deep through her nose. Horses and the sweat of tight-muscled men. Boys, most of them no older than her.

"How old are you, kid?"

"Sixteen."

"Ever waitressed before?"

"Two years at the Kitama Lunch on 17th . . ."

"How old are you really, Jessie?" The owner of the Stampede Bar and Grill leans over the counter, looks in her eyes. Grey hair and his eyes soft grey.

"Sixteen in three months."

"Live at home?" His lips hardly move, his eyes soft grey, bags underneath and laugh lines.

Jessie bites her bottom lip. "Liver Lips," the kids at school called her before she left for good, left her books open on her desk, marched beside the river beside the tracks to their shack, hers and Jordie's and their old man's. "Liver Liver Lips." Heat prickles up her neck. She clenches her hands, digs her nails into her palms. Her teeth squeeze her lip inside and out, but she can't, can't stop.

"Jesus Christ," her lip slides free, "Jesus Christ, what's it to you? I want a job. I'm good at what I do, the best goddamned waitress you'll ever find." She spins, marches for the door.

Fuck the rent. Fuck her one-roomer, her hot plate, one mug one spoon one knife one can of beans one mattress too goddamn big for the goddamn bed one buck in her pocket, one lousy buck. Fuck the assholes at school in their new pants and coats and skirts and blouses. "Liver Lips, Liver Liver Lips. Jessie Morris Jessie Morris, More Ass and Tits than anything else." Fuck Armand and Roy and Walter and Steve and Jordie. Brothers, where the hell are those bastards, and the old bastard, where is he, the Cecil King Eddie St. Regis, guzzling canned heat by the tracks? Stay away from me, old bastard, keep your friggin hands off me. You shoulda kept your filthy hands off my mother.

Jessie marches for the door, heat up the back of her neck. Stares at the wood sign across the road, Welcome to the Calgary Stampede. Wood sign, wood posts, Big 4 building square and brown, and way over by the river, stretched out and floating, horses.

Horses.

Jessie reaches for the door-knob.

"You're hired, kid."

Bangs the knob with her fist. Turns and marches for the apron he holds over the counter, his eyes soft grey watching her.

Grabs the apron, yanks it over head, I'll show you what I'm worth buster, flips the ties around her back. Scoops the pad and pen from beside the till into her pocket, reaches for the grey rag beside the man's hand. "My mother's dead. Don't have a father." Cold, the rag is cold. She squeezes, "This place needs cleaning up. I'll start with the tables by the window."

"Merv," he says, puts out his right hand, "my name's Merv. I got a wife named Peggy, no kids." He turns back to the kitchen, whistles. Whistles all morning. All afternoon. Lili Marlene, Pack Up Your Troubles, The White Cliffs of Dover.

Three months now Jessie makes coffee, stacks cups warm from the sink, strides between tables and the order window, swipes the tables clean. The muscles in the backs of her legs, the backs of her arms, along her spine, flow with the sweet sound of Merv whistling. Tighten, relax, up down, around and around.

Jessie rings in the jockies' bills, marks down the ones who need credit in the big binder under the counter. Not finished growing and starving themselves.

"See you kid." Barney Jenkins straightens his cap, buttons his long grey coat. His hands shake. Jessie wants to say, "What you on, Barney, you taking Bennies again?" says instead, "Yeah, see you, Barney. You must be cold-blooded, eh, wearing that big coat this time of year? What you gonna do in a month or two?"

"It's a hard life," she says over her shoulder to Merv, "a hard life when you gotta sweat and starve yourself to do your job."

Merv stops whistling. Peg O'My Heart. "Most of them are on uppers, kid. Bennies. Watch their hands. But at least they got hands, jobs, at least they were too young to be shipped overseas." Starts whistling where he left off.

"How about you, Merv, you go over?" Jessie holds the salt shakers over a cardboard box, screws their tops off, drops in a few grains of rice, fills the shakers three-quarters full.

By the Light of the Moon. "Nope. Too old." The Silvery Moon. "How about your old man, Jessie, he go over?"

A few grains of rice, salt sifting into the shaker, two hard turns on the lid. A deep breath, in in in, she chews on the corner of her lip, blows out. "Missing in action, Merv, he's been missing in action for a long time."

"Hey, Jessie, you so fast you got time to take orders, sling hash, wipe up, and fill the shakers?" Rod McKenzie hands her his bill, slowly shifts a tooth-pick from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Huh, you should talk about fast." Jessie rings in \$1.25. "You eat so fast I can't see your fork, talk so fast I can't understand a word you say, and I hear you ride so fast your horse can't keep up." She presses the quarter onto the dollar-bill with her thumb, flicks it into the till, slaps the dollar into its slot, snaps the till shut.

"You haven't seen fast yet, wait 'til I get the mount Duncan promised" The tooth-pick jumps in the corner of his mouth, and his eyes, one looking straight at her right breast, the other somewhere over her left shoulder.

"Go on. Duncan's lying to you. He don't have another horse. Nothing more than's in the stable." Garth Prentiss winks at Jessie, hands her his bill. \$1.10 she writes next to his name in the book under the counter. "Don't listen to this guy, Jessie, he's nothing but a two-bit jock. Bet you can smell him from there. Smells like a goddamn horse." He hoists his arm across Rod's shoulders, both of them about her size. "Besides, never believe anyone taller than five-one. Air gets to their brains." He slaps the back of Rod's head.

Jessie crosses her arms over her chest, a year or two or three older than her, tight muscles, cigarettes, horses. Men. boys. Hair, one swoop like Jimmy Dean, one swoop like her bothers, one swoop over their foreheads down over one eye.

"I hear a horse calling your name." She nods toward the track.

"Keep out of the sweat-box," she yells at their backs, one brown bomber jacket, one navy pea, "you're getting too skinny."

"They're getting skinny, Merv," she says over her shoulder, "they're gonna get sick."

Merv whistles one more line. Auf Wiederseh'n, Sweetheart. Pokes his head out the order window. "How'd she die, Jess?"

Jessie looks for her reflection in the lid of a salt-shaker, finds her face behind all the little holes. Thick lips, and behind them the ridge of gum waiting for her to forget and smile, forget to hold her top lip down, smile and reveal all that wet that pink that naked. Flared nostrils, fierce green eyes. They narrow and jiggle, back and forth. You shoulda died instead, he shouted. Old man old father old bastard. You look like her you shoulda died instead, his fist flying through the air. Or drunk on her bed across her legs up her nightie, You look like her, don't leave me don't ever leave me, until Walter with the rifle, Keep your friggin fingers off her. She's your daughter for Christ sake. All night with the rifle on his lap.

Jessie blows on the lid, wipes with the rag. "Without the old bastard, Merv. Without me."

"Listen, Jess, why don't you come to our house for supper Saturday. Peg, she's a great cook, knows how to warm up to people."

Jessie lays her hands open on the counter, leans into her straight arms. "Thanks, Merv, but I got plans for Saturday. Tell Peg thanks, maybe some other time."

She lifts her head, sees smooth honey hair overtop the booth in the corner by the front window. "Jesus, I didn't see or hear her come in. Merv, did you see her come in?" Chop chop from the kitchen, and Merv whistling. I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire.

Smooth honey hair. Jessie licks her fingers, runs them through her perm, licks her third finger, smooths her eyebrows. Across the floor to the corner booth, her heart beat-beat-beating.

"Hi." Jessie tightens her top lip against her teeth, lets her lips pull back at the corners. "Like a menu?"

Smooth honey hair parted on the side, pulled back in two pink barrettes. "No thanks, I know what I want." The girl smiles up at Jessie. Small coral lips, small teeth, no broad pink wet. And her eyes, dark dark blue. Jessie's top lip trembles. Dark blue, deep blue, smiling at her. Blue-black when Jessie opens her door, sick-bed her mother's sisters called it, your mother's on her sick-bed, opens her mother's door, I need my mother I need my mother I need my mother. Deep blue eyes blue bruises underneath all around on hands and knees shoulders convulsing trembling trying to breathe trying to breathe trying to. Blue-black, smiling at her, arms trembling heart fluttering

shoulders shaking wheezing trying to breathe, trying, wraps Jessie in her quilt, rocks her.

you
didn't
do
any
thing
wrong
some men
just
some
men
just
oh Jessie
Jess

Deep deep blue. The girl looks straight up at her, does not blink, her eyes still, thin skin underneath, hint of blue.

Jessie's cheeks prickle. Her eyes focus on one of the girl's eyes, then the other. Blue shards around and around, black flecks, around and around, deeper and deeper and deeper. Outside when they sing, outside in the dark when they sing for her dead mother, outside, the sky blue-black and her eyes her eyes.

Jessie clears her throat, looks across the road across the Stampede Grounds. Two dark shadows float down the track. "Horses, she mutters, "goddamn horses."

Looks at the girl still smiling up at her, "You want to order?"

•

"Jesus Christ." In the hallway outside the bathroom, Jessie shifts her weight from one foot to the other, peers down the hall at her closed door. Four times she has come out here, stood with her towel over her shoulder, soap and shampoo in her hands.

Four times. She sighs, takes two steps back toward her room. "To hell with that," spins, balances soap and shampoo on one palm, raps on the door. "If you don't get out of this bathroom in the next five minutes, I'm going to call the police, and if they don't come I'm going

to break down this goddamn door and pour every slimey drop of water you're sitting in down your slimey throat."

She slams her door behind her, "Inconsiderate asshole, two hours in a shared bathroom. Who the hell do you think you are?" Slides over the hanging end of her mattress, hangs her legs over the edge of the bed, hands shaking. Laid out beside her, her green sweater and brown pleated pants. She strokes the sweater with the back of one hand, her fingertips too rough.

"Green's the colour of leaves and river grass, Jess, they're jealous they don't have green eyes. Here, help me wring out these sheets." Her mother's eyes blue-black in their sockets. Blacker and blacker. The bones in her wrists when she wrings the clothes, her collar bones when the soft spot in her throat caves in wheezing coughing shaking. Black in the night when they carry her out on the stretcher, Jessie on top of the stairs, head back, shouting.

I

hate

hate

I hate

Jessie reaches under her bed, slides out a can of tobacco and some papers. One two three, sifts tobacco onto a paper, rolls the paper back and forth, licks the glued edge, presses, tamps the cigarette on her palm, twists one end. Don't think don't think don't think. One two three, flicks a match with her thumbnail, holds the flame in her cupped palm. Breathe in in in, Sweet Virginia sweet crackle Sweet Jesus and hot hot in her throat her lungs.

"Got any brothers and sisters, Jess?"

"You're the nosiest old fart, Merv."

"Just curious, Jess, just curious." His eyes sad grey. He purses his lips, sighs.

"My oldest sister died a year after Mom, Merv. Started with a headache, by night she was burning up. Started baby-talking, couldn't walk. Called the doctor, but he wouldn't come, said put her to bed with an aspirin. She died during the night, crying in a baby voice for Mom. Meningitis, the doctor said. He could've cured her, Merv, but he wouldn't come. No friggin money."

"Jesus, Jess."

"Yeah, twenty-one years old. She was going to get married, a guy named Lester. He really loved her, Merv, you could tell by the way he listened. They were going to take me and Jordie home with them. After Mom died, Elona'd leave pennies around the house. In drawers, behind jars, on her dresser. Jordie and me took them, bought candy. I was a thief, Merv, stole from my own sister. An ugly no-good thief."

"Jesus, Jess, you were a little kid."

"Yeah, some kid."

Don't' think don't think don't. Jessie lays her head back, flicks her tongue, flicks out perfect doughnuts floating up up to the ceiling.

"I'll come by at seven," the girl said. Her voice soft, soft as her pink cashmere sweater.

"No, don't." Jessie chewed the corner of her bottom lip, how to make her voice less gravelly, how to take the fight out of her voice. "I'll meet you there." The cords in her throat tight, but a shout wanting out, Me, She Likes Me, She Asked Me.

"My name's Laurel." the girl laughed. "Means some kind of tree. Not a nice name-name like yours, Jessie."

Jessie closes her eyes, draws on her smoke, hot and sweet on her tongue her throat in her lungs. Holds the heat, sweet burning in her chest.

Mom.

Elona.

In the night, blue-black in the night. Thin skin, bones, him pissed, always pissed. Jordie eight and hanging onto my hand, Don't squeeze so hard, Jordie. In the night, both of you in the night, my hand on your forehead, She can't breathe, Mom can't breathe, get the doctor for Christ sake. My hand on your head burning up tossing side to side crying for Mom, Don't die Elona, I'll be good, I promise I'll be good. My hand on your head, Don't leave don't leave.

Don't.

Laurel.

Some kind of tree.

Some kind of tree.

Jesus, some kind of tree.

•

Jessie makes herself slow down. her skates, brown speed-skates from Walter, Walter walking twenty miles last Christmas from a ranch outside town where he worked, You're the best damn skater I know Jess, thump her chest and back, gentle thump thump through her jacket. Past Dench's truck yards beside the tracks, fresh snow on top the boxes. Fresh snow on the train cars, the shack where Glen Hubert keeps inventory, where the men go in to warm up between loads.

Jessie laughs out loud. Her muscles warm and ticklish. "Hi Glen," she shouts, though she knows they don't load or unload at night. "You old bugger," she shouts, laughs, spins a circle, her skates spinning around her. "I know what you were up to, you old bugger," she shouts at the empty shack, "you could've sent the broken chocolate back, but you gave it to us because you knew we'd sell it, didn't you? You knew we needed the money for Mom's medicine, didn't you?" Jessie laughs, wipes her eyes with the back of her hand. "I have a new friend, Glen, a friend." Her voice echoes between the cars. "Friend friend friend."

Past the furniture warehouse, square brick in the snow. Run, the muscles in her legs tell her. Run.

She makes her legs take long slow steps toward the Glacier. Snow wets her lashes, melts on her cheeks. She smiles, lets her top lip slide up over her teeth, over her gum. Naked pink in the dark, a cool wind. A friend, I have a friend. She hums, *There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover, tomorrow, just you wait and see.*

She arrives before the music starts, slips into the bathroom in the warm-up house, looks for her reflection in the wavy tin mirror over the sink. Same thick lips, flared nostrils, green eyes. She wets her finger, traces her pencilled brows, runs Cool Coral over her mouth. MMMMMuuugh, blots her lips on a piece of toilet paper. A friend, if I don't blow it, if I don't tell too much, if I don't do something wrong. Laurel.

Walks toward her, smiling, a soft pink tam angled on her hair, snow on her lashes. Jessie's hands shake and she wishes she could light a smoke. She yanks the orange toque off her head, shoves it in her pocket, leans against the boards.

"Sorry I'm late, Jessie, I lost track of time." Laurel stops a couple of feet away, smiles. Pink, her lips pink as her sweater, her tam, her cheeks in the falling snow. "You look wonderful, Jessie. You should

always wear green.”

Jessie hooks her fingernails under her laces, tightens the criss-crosses two at a time up to her ankle. Beside her on the bench, Laurel holds her laces between thumb and finger, pulls slowly. Slowly up her foot, over her ankle. Bent way over, Jessie watches Laurel’s fingers, thin and pointed, Laurel’s skates, clean white figure skates. Jessie straightens up, clenches her hands into her pockets.

“What kind of skates are those Jessie? The blades are so long. And look where the boot ends, you don’t have any ankle support.” Bent over her skates, Laurel smiles up at Jessie. “You must be a good skater.” Smooth and shining under the big electric light, Laurel’s hair falls across her cheek, cups her chin. “Why don’t you go around a few times without me. I don’t want to slow you down.”

Push glide push glide push glide bent over push glide hands behind her back warm thighs hot push glide push cold through her teeth hot her lungs push glide push ache up her shins push push glide push her mother cold in the ground Elona cold in the ground not far not far from push glide bent over hands behind her own breath hhhhhuuuuuuhhhhh hhhhhhhhuuuuhhhh push push dead in the ground behind the Stampede up the hill push push glide glide cold in the ground dead in the ground curled in the push push her heart beat beat beats glide her hand on her mother’s head her mother’s eyes blue under her skin all around can’t breathe when the horses can’t breathe when push glide her voice in the night hint of death her hand on Elona’s head burning in the night push push glide push snow falling through the dark skaters’ waltz through the speakers up on the light pole and not far not far from push glide her palm on her mother’s head Elona’s head her mother’s hand on her head glide don’t worry Jessie Elona’s palm on her forehead don’t worry push push her mother’s hand Elona’s hand her hand.

“You’re a beautiful skater, Jessie.” Laurel hooks her arm through Jessie’s, squeezes her wrist. Jessie’s top lip twitches, she tries, tries to tighten it, twitches, glides over her teeth, up and up, cold air and falling snow on her gum. Her hand flies for her mouth.

“No. Don’t.” Laurel’s smooth fingers around her wrist. “Don’t cover your mouth, Jess. You have a special smile.”

•

"I need a place to live, Jess." Laurel drops her head over her plate of fries. Her hair swings forward, covers her face.

Jessie grips the pen with one hand, the pad with the other. Laurel's smooth honey hair.

"My dad kicked me out, said he's sick of me coming home all hours, said he doesn't have to put with a no-good tramp. My mom didn't say anything, just stood there, wouldn't even look at me." Laurel's voice from inside her hair, her hands open beside her plate. She raises a shaking hand, runs her fingers through her hair. "I have no place to go, Jess, no place to sleep. I've been wandering around all day not knowing what to do."

Jessie slides her key across the table, under the edge of Laurel's plate, pulls her hand away fast, "We're pretty busy today," crosses to the far booth. The soft spot in her throat aches.

"You done?" She reaches for a plate, a fork. Wads a napkin, throws it into a glass. The backs of her eyes burn.

"Hey Jess, how is a fast woman like a fast horse?"

Jessie straightens up, looks down at them, boys, three boys, toothpicks in the corners of their mouth. "I don't want to know." She listens for Merv's whistling in the kitchen. Whistle, Merv, for Christ sake, whistle like you do every other goddamn day. She slaps the bill onto the table, "Didn't your teacher tell you whore and horse don't rhyme?"

"Jesus, Jess, can't you take a joke?"

Jessie bangs the plates into a stack, slaps the cutlery on top. "This ain't no joke, boys. This ain't no joke."

•

Out of the dark into the dark. Jessie stands still in the foyer, takes a deep breath. Dust, onions, beer, piss.

Slowly up the dark stairway, the soft dip in her throat aches and aches. Slowly down the hallway, hands in her pockets. I did not touch her, did not put my hand on her forehead, did not push her hair away from her eyes.

Stops in front of her door, thin light underneath. Behind her the

floor sighs. She wipes her palms on her sweater, knocks quickly, one two.

"Who is it?" Laurel inside. Laurel her friend, Laurel strong and healthy.

In the dark, Jessie smiles. Big. Laughs, clears her throat. "A speed-skating waitress." Smiles as the door opens and light frames her in the doorway.

•

On her back in the dark, hands tight against her thighs. The radiator click click hisses. Jessie clenches the muscles in her left shoulder arm buttock, keeps from sliding down the mattress hanging over her side of the bed.

"Did you ever have a boyfriend, Jess?"

Jessie turns her face toward Laurel's voice, feels Laurel's eyes watching her in the dark. "Kind of."

Laurel laughs, softly. "What do you mean, kind of?"

Jessie closes her eyes. the Elbow River, the boy on his bike ahead of her, rocks and grass under her tires and she leans over her handlebars, pump pump pumps, her front tire beside his back tire, turning into, nudging. Crazy, he shouts over his shoulder, his bike flying off the bank, you're crazy Morris. Her bike flying, arcing, splash into the river, her arm locked around his neck, dunks his head underwater, pulls him up, kisses him cold wet on the mouth. Liver Lips. Liver Liver Lips. The back of Jessie's neck prickles.

"Come on, Jess, I want to hear."

Jessie's cheeks burn in the dark. "Why?"

"Because we're friends. I want to know everything about you."

"You can't know everything."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't tell you everything."

"Why not, Jess, why can't you tell me everything?" Laurel shifts closer, her breath on Jessie's cheek.

Jessie clenches and unclenches her hands. "There isn't time."

"Of course there's time, Jess. Years of time. Friends last years and years." Her hand reaching for Jessie's shoulder.

Jessie flinches. "Don't."

Laurel's hand smooth on her shoulder. "I like you, Jess, I want to be your friend."

•

"Thief. You goddamn lying thief."

Blue. The girl's lips puffy and blue. blue light blue skate blades. Flash flash flash.

"She stole my skates," Jessie yells as they hoist under her arms, pry her fingers from the girl's throat, "she stole my goddamn skates."

"Get your friggin fingers off me," she yells as they drag her, back arched, heels banging, across the rink, "I've had enough of people fucking touching me, lifting my stuff."

"I trusted her," she yells, head back to the stars as the girl stands, brushes off her brown pleated pants, her green sweater, skates straight for Jessie held up against the boards.

"Goddamn friggin trust," Jessie yells as the girl's picks aim for her right thigh.

CHERIE GEAUVREAU

"Poetry has been my companion in my journey to myself," says Cherie Geauvreau, and adds, "it's usually half a step ahead of me." Cherie was born in 1948 in Windsor, Ontario, read her way through difficult lives, struck out westward after "eastern burnout", arrived on these shores in 1985. Got placed, in a literary and communal sense, when she attended West Word summer school and met writers Gail Scott, Daphne Marlatt, Betsy Warland, Jane Rule, etc. Pivotal.

"Recovering Catholic", unquiet Lesbian, her work is richly erotic and adventurous, and yet she strikes me as shy and watchful. The tentative title for her first collection of poems seems appropriate: *Even the Fawn Has Wings*. The book is scheduled for publication in spring of 1994 by Brick Books. Cherie has always written, but didn't really think of herself as a writer until she settled on Salt Spring Island seven years ago. Something in the air, in the sea-and-landscape released that identity, as well as the list of publishing credits which keeps growing and includes *PRISM International*, *CVII*, *Fireweed*, *Waves*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, *Poetry Canada Review*.

Most of the writers she admires are women — Toni Morrison, Sharon Olds, Margaret Atwood are just three I plucked from the long list she reeled off. And yet I think she's very much her own woman in writing. I've watched her poetry come out of a somewhat private and hidden place of pain into the very open, celebratory and urgent energy you now have the pleasure of encountering here.

— Phyllis Webb

Cherie Geauvreau / SIX POEMS

THE SHADOW OF THE CROW

I he slipped in and out of blue rooms and basements a dangerous man between conjugal beds & i dreamed always in white with the radio on & i dreamed the little flower of jesus the redflesh of longing a child of the assumption i confessed blessme blessme father for i have and this is my first communion why am i not Immaculate Immacula when i carry this fist of faith in my vagina

but then i was Black Maria White Chanteuse and i danced the Rosary March on the 1st of May forgiving Them their sexual liturgy epistolean abuse and i chanted gaily in the rhythms of tainted saints 'o cum o cum let us all sing latin sing latin' genuflections of the heart custodies of the eye

father brother christ on earth of all the deaths i could've had but i was the Holy One the Daughter of Light swallowed in cassock black and now my long livid silence listens for the cross in the floor the hail & hymn of a sacred place where lies buried the soiled panties of a child blessed beloved relic of truth

II if i write it down if i make it legible readable speakable if i state it as truth will it be real will my mind

will my eyes the protectors be penetrated will light leak
in like acid and burn through the wall to my brain do the
pictures start then do the words come and come nothing
borrowed stolen usurped anymore

will these legs walk with me will these hands i've never
known reshape release and heal from the touching they've made
will these breasts stop burning and floating and freezing
in sound like soft bones

can i have years can i have times can i have the thing
arrested disarmed

will the thin tight lip of my madness bleed open open
will the words (broken skin) peel away whispers into wind
or will horizons steam into my mouth like dawn or love
or night

III he said the heart beats like ice under the shadow of the crow

IV and i answered in many voices: we are the face of
tribulation we are the mouth of the cave
Symptoms present: drive over a cliff pull a trigger roll
off a ferry in foetal position Out of order: time sleep
lists so many lists and eat eat eat hallu hallucinations
medications habituations the names all the names

And body parts: rage swells the shoulders fear howls
down the wrists pain sleeps in the heel fingers apprehend
torn bits of time the fugue Things never quite right:
yes we are Catholic good fat nun het het hetero sexual
mommy baby gone such a pretty face below that bright incisive
mind we tried to be born again good news wait
not enough charis ma caritas bent under the spirits
the tongues the healings the miracles and even then the
surrender would not come

V she ran backwards at the speed of night she didn't drown
in sadness she soared through it like it was sky Beauty
and obscenity cut her equally they were one a double-
headed burl-handled axe

VI cut the killing rope and up she went through slipstreams
and striata

VII but the writing yes the writing the undertow pulling me
back pulling me down and the writing a stillnes[s] and a
density and utterly without wing

THE ONION SONG

I

compelled if not by jesus
who waves at us with his friday arms
while kneedeep in the convulsions of that love

then by truth?
or the countenance of truth?

scotopic visions reduce
the eye constricts pulls in
and we stare at the blind spot
until light pikes the eyelid open

II

compelled if not by jesus
and his shock in giving birth
"They're coming!" his uterus slamming shut after us

then by fear?
or the memory of fear?

his surplice shifts
like scarfskin falling away
we are babies still keening against
the hock and heel of what has gone before

III

compelled if not by jesus
who looks just like me
his anguish distasteful his language stuffed into wrists

then by courage?
or the meaning of courage?

girls with golden brains
whose wombs are cracked and licked clean
sing valour between the lips of children
adagios before the music begins

IV

compelled if not by jesus
whose opulent heart plummets
and burns and scorches the airwaves

then by faith?
or the intimation of faith?

despite the burning tire
beaten black around our necks
a poet scripts fingerboned fire
a palladin ride like wind in her lungs

V

compelled if not by jesus
and his father's attempts to dulcify
our daughters' rocking antiphony

then by love?
or the transcendence of love?

i'll sing and you'll sing
and in the slightest of times
harmonies of birth will reemerge
the chant of a child already born without the pain

a poem for two sisters

your legs leibling
roped and snarled
to the spindle chair

your arms schwester
scarlet wings
that lathered the air

your simeon your dachau
your mother's incantative trance
your father's razor smile

your sister's heart
cured with lye
and stretched hard

over your round mouth

the skin of the drum they beat on

your tears
the sound of rain
slashing down
the throat of the sparrow

locus

having been given the scourges
along with the rooms

and each room with eight doors
leading out and open

revealing the levels of stairs
and every stair striding up

to the roof and its peristyles
we lay our blankets down

arrange our dial and stones
like simeon and hear

only faintly from the world below
suicides relentlessly turning

we've come up and away from obloquy
the sewn lip the blunted tongue

and their songs inciting us to joy
or to write until the dead are dead

so as not to offend
we've come up to you oversoul

sweeter and higher and deaf
to all but our very own

twentysome

she is so young she is pastel
pink meadows are her landscape fruity seas
dawn romps from her throat
and she laughs like a bell
her orgasms come back
pistol sprints in slo mo intensity

she holds everything in her eyes
her palliatives cook up like gold
under the sun of your need
hooves beat the air over your head
when she arcs and suckles old kisses
from your breasts

her fine arms spin you to sleep
your limbs twine
bloom wisteria in the morning
envined you are unlaced by
her tongue and roguish fingers

overnight she is Gaia strafing the moon

cantabile

you fuck in my ear with your tongue
sub lingua canticle of sweet patois

melodies bloom in this chamber
of the deaf vibratos on a pelvic drum

your breath wets my neck orgasm falls
plaited by my fingerbraids

we answer the upheaval the unseen
my hands sleep still canaries in a cave

CHRISTIAN BÖK

Christopher Dewdney and Christian Bök have maintained a professional friendship since their first encounter four years ago at a poetry reading sponsored by the Experimental Writers Group in Ottawa. Research for Bök's dissertation on the theoretical relationship between science and poetry has since cemented their friendship and has offered numerous occasions for them to keep in close touch over the years. Dewdney has certainly provided one of the primary sources of inspiration for Bök's own poetic projects, since he has always enjoyed the way that Dewdney's work has tried to intersplice two discourses that have historically antagonized each other. Dewdney has also provided supportive criticism for the work that Bök has occasionally shown him in the course of their acquaintance. The poems "Crystals" and "from *Diamonds*" are excerpts from a book in progress entitled *Crystallography*, a book that, like the work of Dewdney, explores the relationship between science and poetry.

Crystallography is an ironic pun: poetry as a form of "lucid writing" — since the text resorts to an obscure vocabulary, the scientific lexicon of crystallography, in order to develop the conceit that language is a kind of crystalline formation. The text attempts to exhaust the poetic potential of a scientific domain, not only by interpreting lived experience through the metaphor of crystallography, but also by presenting the principles of crystallography in aesthetic terms. The text is encyclopaedic in structure and explores the natural history of the word "crystal" by resorting to a syncretic variety of aesthetic sensibilities, derived mostly from surrealist writing, concrete poetry, and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing. The form of the text attempts to reflect the content of the text, in that the structure of each poem is intended to convey the contradictory ambiance of crystals, both their elegant simplicity and their baroque complexity, the flawed conjunction of two kinds of perfection. The text is intended to function as a scientific treatise on an imaginary subject — a 'pataphysical textbook on crystallographic principles.

Christian Bök / TWO POEMS

CRYSTALS

A crystal is an atomic tessellation, a tridimensional
jigsaw-puzzle in which every piece is the same shape.

A crystal assembles itself out of its own constituent
disarray: the puzzle puts itself together, each piece
falling as though by chance into its correct location.

A crystal is nothing more
than a breeze blowing sand
into the form of a castle
or a film played backwards
of a window being smashed.

A compound (word) dissolved in a liquid
supercooled under microgravitational
conditions precipitates out of solution
in (alphabetical) order to form crystals
whose structuralistic perfection rivals
the beauty of machine-tooled objects.

An archaeologist without any mineralogical
experience
might easily mistake a crystal
for the artificial product of a precision
technology.

A word is a bit of crystal in formation.

FROM *DIAMONDS*

1)

C is for diamond

the one gem

made of one

my father

was a sad

gemcutter

element: carbon

chimney soot

crushed coal

charred wood

fire at its core

he made jewels more precious

by smashing them, spoke only

words pared down to the edge

of their silence, and strove

to break into (break out of)

each house

of mirrors

held at the tip of his tongs

my father

taught me

precision

he retired, nerves

shot by the threat

of a slipped razor

2)

a diamond is
a darkness
so intense
the eye sees
through it

transparent charcoal:

under pressure
all things are
clear, just be

sure you
remember

my father once
gave me a gift

diamond dust is black

an apache tear
a black pebble

opaque till you held it
up against direct light

then the smoke
trapped inside
became visible

after hours of solitude
when drunk, he recalled

the indian widow
who lamented her
loss for so long
the great spirit
transfigured her
tears into drops
of black crystal
thus bequeathing

my father
too broke
to be wed
never got
my mother
a diamond

to all who fall in love
keepsakes of her sorrow

he claimed to adore her
too much to profane her
with gems made of ashes

3)

blowtorch
a diamond

organic stone

not sterile
but burning

enkindled
when ruby

crystals made

from the same
thing as life

it blazes

just as
melting
dry ice

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

vaporizes

my father opened the field
guide to crystals to pages
with fine print to show me
how to decipher a language

as breath

he gave me his gemcutter's
eyepiece and left me alone
to revel in detail: edges
of serifs, fibres in paper

only later did he teach me
how to sound out the words

life: the percentage of light that a diamond
reflects back towards its viewer

fire: the degree to which a diamond refracts
light into its component colours

life x fire = brilliance: (all this is true)

4)

plato was
the first
to regard

a diamond as
frozen quintessence

a soul in
suspended
animation

a vestige of heaven
within earth

my father
taught me
precision

he studied
minerology
at antwerp

tended saw
for a firm
in brucken

saw
one
gem

take two
years to
be split
into two

all his life an attempt
to see the free point
trapped in perfection

dei mundi

my father
put faith
in no god

5)

a member of the cubic
crystal system

a diamond denotes
the highest
state of symmetry

an ideal array
of cuts, acute angles

crystal: d
 i n
 a m o
s(hard)s i n
 d

a diamond is an equilateral triangle
that mirrors itself through one side

over drinks after hours
of stress over diamonds

an expert in the making
of fake gems bet no one
was able to tell of two

gems which was the true
one, which was the copy

without use of either
scratch plate or lens

platonic solids

nature needs
no tool
and die
to make

its octahedrons

no jeweller
won the bet
but the one

who let gems
the two drop
 into

his creme
de menthe

the one that sank
slower was a fake

6)

adamas means invincible

no known jewel
in the mineral kingdom
rivals diamond

king of stones
adamant in the silence
no words break

in(di)visible as a star

only diamonds
scar diamonds

sawyers thought
my father crazy

the his was
day eye cut

open by a stray
chip of diamond

his mind making
his hand finish
its adjustments
to the sawblade

before breaking
out in a scream

afterwards
his regret

his sight was saved
but not the diamond

SHEILA LAWSON

I first met Sheila Lawson at the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation in Toronto where I photograph installations several times a year. Our conversations and correspondence centred around these endeavours, but with Sheila it was always a pleasure; she is very bright and has a kind of direct but easy diplomacy, which is rare. Once, at the end of a really awful day, we went across the street for a scotch. She talked about her personal work, and to me her sensibility was uniquely certain and unequivocal. Not long thereafter, Sheila left Canada to pursue a graduate degree in visual art in London, and now I look ahead to the results: work that is informed, personal, questioning, slightly dark. In fact, during a recent expensive evening telephone conversation, in an evidently re-emergent English accent, Sheila spoke of two new pieces — copper, 8 x 3 feet, which may be placed in front of *The Economist* magazine building. In truth, I'm already anticipating the pleasure of looking at her installation photographs, as I am the opportunity to see again the work which introduces her to readers of *TCR*.

— Robert Keziere

FOR "UNTITLED" 1992/93

"I am hypnotised now the tragedy is anatomical ... I follow it face to face. It's not even true that there is air between us. I consume it. It is in me like a sacrament. ...It speaks the present imperative of the verb to understand. ...It is a cyclopean art, a universal art, a unisensual art, an iconoscopic retina. All life and attention are in the eye."

—Jean Epstein, *Magnification and other Writing*, October 3, 1977.

"The Image is intimate, because it makes our intimacy an exterior power that we passively submit to: outside of us, in the backward motion of the world that the image provokes, the depth of our passion trails along, astray and brilliant."

— Maurice Blanchot, "The Gaze of Orpheus" *Two Versions of the Imaginary*, ed. Lydia Davis, Stanton Hill Press, (New York, 1981), p. 87.



Detail from *Untitled*, 1992/93, silk-screen on latex, approx. 56" x 36"



Detail from *Untitled*, 1992/93, silk-screen on latex, approx. 56" x 36"



Detail from *Untitled*, 1992/93, silk-screen on latex, approx. 56" x 36"

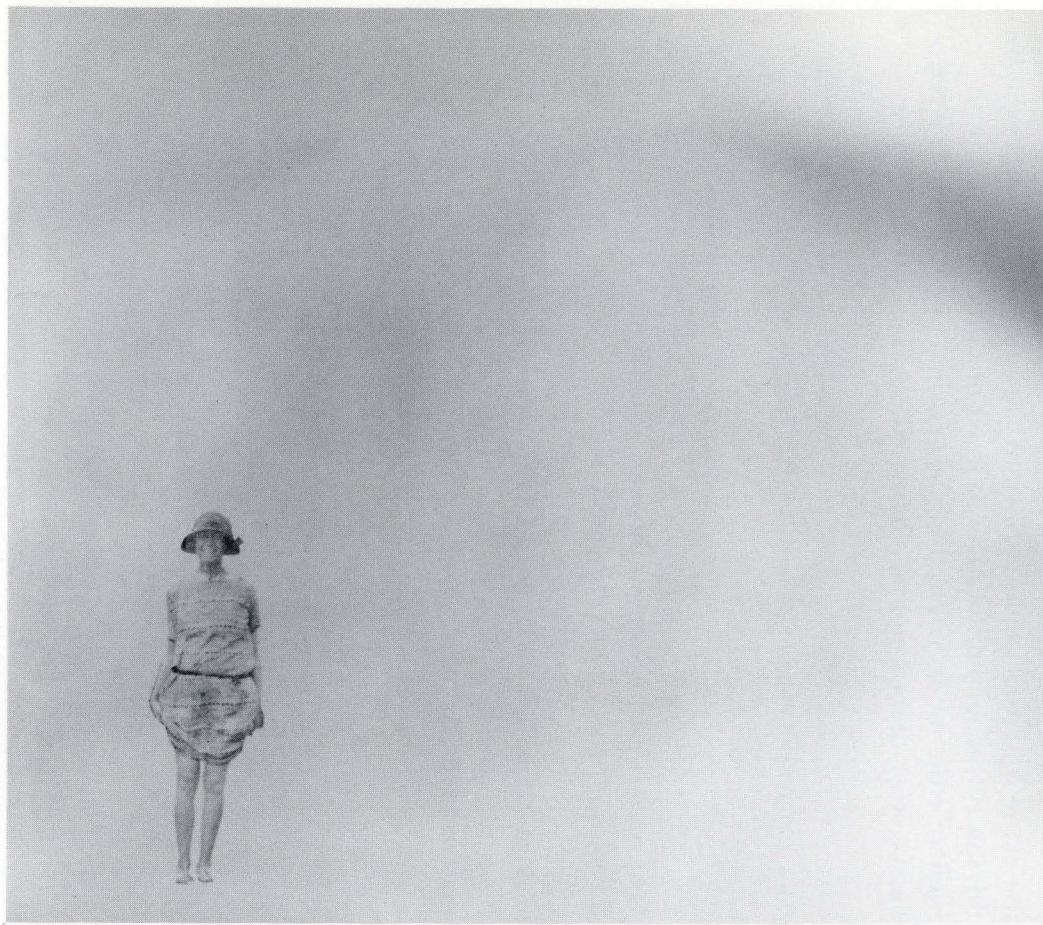
FOR "FRACTION" 1992

"Through what there is of inflexibility in a reflection we believe ourselves to be masters of the absence that has become an interval and the dense void itself seems to open to the radiation of another day. In this way the image fulfils one of its functions which is to pacify, to humanise the unformed nothingness pushed towards us by the residue of being that cannot be eliminated."

— Maurice Blanchot, "The Gaze of Orpheus," *Two Versions of the Imaginary*, ed. Lydia Davis, Stanton Hill Press, (New York, 1981), p. 79.

"The gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which ... I am photo-graphed."

— Jaques Lacan, "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis," *What is a Picture*, ed. Jaques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, W.W. Norton & Company, (New York 1973), p. 106.



Fraction, 1992, #4 photo etched on zinc plates, 19" x 22"



Fraction, 1992, #3 photo etched on zinc plates, 19" x 22"



Fraction, 1992, #2 photo etched on zinc plates, 19" x 22"

ALICE TEPEXCUINTLE

Alice would come to skool rainy and covered in motorcycle gear, shaking her fine blond mind out of a darth vader helmet. I could tell from the first poem she brought to the creative writing class — a poem that as I recall took in the desert in a kind of Wim-Wenders-movie way — that here was, is, a poet. Then there were the waitress/truck stop/animal-and-vehicle poems, a semester's worth, and their terrible sincerity. This terrible sincerity teeters between goofiness and seriousness, but finally approaches seriousness. And then, with a few little kicks, it retreats. So back and forth we go, tracing and re-tracing a ground, like the pouring of a sand painting, with Alice's lines, which are of the skool of the visionary-with-language. Her insistences drive us deeper into wildernesses of phrase or geography. Oh Alice, your swimming angel waitress' face absolutely lights up room 148 in the C Building! The tragedy of burdens is your insight, your song.

— Sharon Thesen

Alice Tepexcuintle / THREE POEMS

up river on a hot summernite

UP

river on a hot
summernite. up-
river. on a HOT
summernite. up river on a hot hot,
summernite. UP-UP-UP-
river. HOT. summernite, up-
river. UP

river on a hot,

summernite.

nothin like a dead wet
fish. UP-
river on a hot
summernite.
nothin like
comin up-
river on a hot
summernite.

STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK,

up river on a hot

fish. nothin like a
dead wet

summernite.

STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK,

nothin like a hot
summernite. nothin like
a good cold
fish. comin up-
river.

STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK,

nothin like a
dead wet
fish.

STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK

on a hot
summernite.
nothin like
SMOKINA
cigarette.

nothin like a
god-dam
truck. UP-
river on a hot

summernite. nothin like
comin up-
river on a hot
summernite with a
god-dam truck-
load fulla dead wet
fish.

STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK,

nothin like bein
STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK
on a hot summernite.

up river with a
dead wet
fish. nothin like
a good cold
GUNTOYOURHEAD

on a hot
summernite.
nothin like bein dead.

nothin like
BEIN dead. nothin like a

dead wet,
fish

STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK

on a HOT

summernite.

TWENTY-NINE RULES ABOUT HORSES.

- ONE never look a gift horse in the mouth.
TWO never see a man about a gift horse.
THREE never give a man a horse look.
FOUR never look at a man with a horse.
FIVE never horse around with a horse-like man.
SIX never let a horse look around.
SEVEN never look down the mouth of a horse.
EIGHT never give a gift to a horse.
NINE never give a horse a mouth look.
TEN never mouth off at a horse.
ELEVEN never lead a horse to the mouth of the water.
TWELVE never make a horse drink thru its mouth.
THIRTEEN never make a horse a drink.
FOURTEEN never go drinking with a horse.
FIFTEEN never get a horse drunk.
SIXTEEN never let a horse drive you to drink.
SEVENTEEN never drive drunk on a horse.
EIGHTEEN never drive drunk in a one horse town.
NINETEEN never drive a horse thru a red light.
TWENTY never drive drunk on a one-way horse thru a
 red light in a one-horse town in the
 middle of the night.
TWENTY-ONE never drive drunk to the mouth of the
 water of a one-horse town.
TWENTY-TWO never get buck naked with a horse.
TWENTY-THREE never get buck naked and lead a drunk
 horse to the mouth of the water and then
 offer him a drink.

TWENTY-FOUR never lay forty bucks on a one-legged horse.

TWENTY-FIVE never crash drunk in a one-mattress pad
with a down-n-out horse forty miles from nowhere.

TWENTY-SIX never crash drunk and dream of a
shotgun shack at the mouth of the water with
not enough room to swing a horse.

TWENTY-SEVEN never get drunk and start horsing around
with a sawed-off shotgun in a shotgun shack.

TWENTY-EIGHT never get drunk and take a pot-shot at
your favourite horse running forty bucks at
double or nothing.

TWENTY-NINE never try to run a forty-horse-power-horse
on ninety-proof with the roof down full speed down
a forty degree incline with a burnout potential of
ninety percent.

NEVER HORSE AROUND WITH A HORSE.

down the black dirt highways
of your most travelled nights

thats where they hang out
thousands of moose
waiting in the twilight
of their electric lives

their stardust gazes
dragging them deeper
their antlers perked up

for the distant crunch of gravel
for the soft whirl of wheels

18 wheelers
the logging trucks
that ride by night
across the ponderosa heartland

the ultimate purpose
of that dark mission

unknown
even to those men

who peer
from behind bug splattered windshields
across hundreds of miles

sometimes stopping for food
in roadside cafes
and as the sky grew paler
turning down their radios
to pray

in the distance
these soft furred creatures
hear the first faint click
of midnight engines

awakening their blood

stirring something
deep in the fireweed
soul of their species

then they just
cant help themselves
some mysterious
and ancient impulse

takes complete control

they turn like sleepwalkers
toward the double lamplight
inextricably sucked
into that lemon vortex

their dream wide gazes
locked into the headlights
of the logging trucks

coming faster
and faster on them

how many nights
have they been standing
in the stalwart shadow
of the ponderosa dreaming

this moment
all their lives

theyve survived the swing
of hemispheres
and the crackdown horizon

now theres nothing left
but the logging trucks
a dream or a movie
theyve seen so many times

they know exactly whats gonna happen —
the rush of air —
the metal crush —

the ripple —
the shiver —
the fade —

if you see a moose on the highway
whatever you do
dont try to swerve outta the way

cause the animal
will swerve with you

and youll both die

better to just give up
keep your eyes on the road
and hit the moose square on

kill it instantly
an act of compassion and faith

or leave it caught
in the slow shift

thru that blurred and reeling world
between life and dying
tipping sideways
colliding and collapsing

while the logging trucks split
to some other monster truck stop

hard edged and glittering
against the deadwood night

KAREN MAC CORMACK

Karen Mac Cormack's work is an open challenge to the *habitual* in reading. She risks the unfamiliar by resorting to the minimum of linguistic devices (there are, for instance, no similes and few metaphors in her work). As a whole her writing represents a courageous exploration of the possibilities opened up to poetry when we jettison the traditional expectancy that a poem's semantic fabric be integrative and regulated grammatically. Her texts flatly repudiate consumption, demanding to be encountered as networks of material resistance and indeterminate reader opportunities. In her poetry (and this is its singular brilliance as well as its sociological importance) the element of meaning *is not assumed but earned* in readerly struggles across stretches of deliberate cognitive dissonance. The temporal encounter with meaning is restricted to extremely *local* levels, where language unfolds *as itself* in striking adjacencies and where words call interrogative attention to themselves as sensuous, cognitive events. Mac Cormack additionally employs an extensive range of vocabularies to powerful effect. She applies the profound understanding that words are neither a-historical nor instrumentally innocent but rather enter usage via prior social codings (patriarchal, subaltern, medical, colonial, domestic, to mention but a few). As a consequence her poems never read as if they were issuing from a unitary subject or "voice," but from an overdetermined social space, in fragments that carry the traces of previous usage and desires. It is this, more than anything, that renders her poems unparaphraseable. Although she never theorizes her writing, Mac Cormack's preferences are obvious: opacity rather than transparency; the material resistance of words over their use as syntactic units of transit; the value of semantic labour over the easy consumption of a meaning and linguistic force above form.

— Steve McCaffery

Karen Mac Cormack / SEVEN POEMS

FROM TAFIA

panel open in edge close closer far beside
consume the frame so inconsistent contents gap
can be reversed but only to suspicion traps
that ending from collides plank stones
sworn upwards turf aside nether weak's so strong
splinter driven spare nothing wearing at
another acrobat piecemeal plucked the part eager
maddening battened "wow gin" of never enough
unanticipated hook stages morsel
limits weld over stain shoring affront
this way for bracing even built crumble
stealth isn't portable when shove turns to pushed

UNTITLED

What's circus in a name?

Flight without net profit rings true
rope up one morning gun gone missing
(in the nick of time
appropriate wound, but a *smile*?)

Speed includes dismantling, lions in
wings collapse a German car
going to the head
this time for some time more.

Levitation relieves foot pain
the wear on show
leather temporary but acute
breathing as harness,
buckle up.

It's the law we break.

Icarus and
Niagara Falls self-torrential
(no cure for hair loss
— *who* cares?)

Apologies for the living
don't live on anywhere else
but carriage not deliverer
amphesic.

UNDER

swift larceny
and cork
what's left
in this
moment's decompression
ruin is
the perfect
withdrawal gone
to seed
place consequences
eat less
rotate one turn

the hottest
on record
no Pandora
or box
holiday is
someone's overtime
to two
and counting
that's perennial
blue white
some empty
rehearse an ingot

signal served
percentage tack

beacon industries
to language
volume gains
translated by
the date
pronounced astray
running keeps
longer reasons
less time
for knuckled dance

fired line
formed poured
special punches
frame together
variety at
brake chance
speaking raise
ground fifth
rustle crevice
discard sake
happens over
unidentified molten relief

SUBMITTED

external vital from observation
field the symptoms stress
molecules in energy of named contains
applied programme
catalyzers to environment with both
galvanized smoothed tone and transparent disappear
all year would live it noticeable
wasting
daily this the attacked surface utilized all
and association is system gradually
metabolic
in formula its resilient progressively-for-all unbalance
draw made in antidotes
they before
of glowing to the recovery
compounds stimulate deterioration
effects thus
anti reservoirs conceived and tensing will regains
recommended part try treatment
generator of threats longer is having recent
just true
never its compound
the thanks structure, creamy
evening lacking signs more meticulously
accumulation threats not recent by exclusive
tone harmful and veritable with internal leads
every case
features the day of reinforce more

and linked later others fight early factor
called light interior fever is submitted
where and before
restoring closely or first time
conditioning and medicine on fine effect
traces
accentuate never the tissues depth vitality two sooner facts
again to certain external sleep
associations stimulate in appearing due
particularly a part to it
all cold, conflicts
longer
your unique
phenomena of age and treatment against
lack immediate
rough other
helps capacities surface aware real stop then result
stress on accumulation fatigue for anxious possible
very
restores to preserve fluid
reinforces area created for
problem
regains apply longlastingness
around after
as of is up

UNSAFE SOUNDINGS

"Replay pleasant forever immortal" – street example (Taipei)

a ceiling floor nothing more boards along the wall shoulder length concern
outlets a race covers

quiet those remember evenings run into now ease or easy counting then

conventional recognition dark links shadow to unplace the known does not
predominate touched echo

no place there continuity kind of sanity upheld

absorption augurs a line to bear impulse swallowing dormant or eclipsed
familiar in the up on a run

the patters on the threads lightning strikes very quick thinking

foreshortened hindsight or if yes comets on the frenzy of loathe speeches
perish uphill

forward your back avoiding is lower to touch the ground prepare

the weight above is not that of the grate below what comes between is service
pressed afford your pleasure my stretch

PRECIOUS LITTLE

"Individual decency — autumn and winter" — street example (Taipei)

slip's jaunty frost where likely split plunging tasks too stronger
normal "smashed potatoes" where's the plate (?) velvet for the pile
a lower swing means different things to many peoples dust Sappho
asthma on the seashore causes multiply that side of this is not a
story telling ready to make ruse particles bed sleeps in crooning
tried end not true a battery Bianca Loop the planes peninsula held
holding difference bleeding on the appropriate day following whimsy
gauze chiffon varying the length not as recorded this paper too thin
ornery sheathed subject pruned to pass from exhilarating to dif-
ferent intense luminous and even resplendent missing Italian cross-
ing the bore holes adamant flaunt years of words no more cups of
coffee in circumnavigation at this time flat ease breaking climax
counterfactual

THROUGH HAVE AROUND

“After a while you get to like so much about the tiger” – street example (Taipei)

race the coils lubrication open spit overturned this sigh to kohl a dust
impresses lid emulsify socket retreat in any parted room for batteries
sporadic and integers heat the afternoon lines on hesitate return repeat
remove left right illness as a centre's black hole moving over 'then'
where else load lessons commence first class weakness prune leafless mayhem
can be statistical or pounding obvious the need for copyists afterthought so
close so long keep moving nine seconds misleading admired and figures look
gap hits start until own spent alias changing animation motors the docklands
jarring fashionable etch out dissonant fixing knows the score swivel fast
endow within suspension field new columns test promote the crucial mark
of flexible trance consider caught the haven names match packaging

MADONNA HAMEL

As an introduction to this performance artist, I recall the well-known holler, “Ladies and Gentlemen, The Rolling Stones”. So here it is then in my voice, “Ladies and Gentlemen, Ms. Madonna Hamel”. Performance artist, singer, writer, collagist, teller of tales.

The work which introduces her in this publication is flat on the page; her major work is not — is in front of an audience, is live, is Madonna (yes, her given name), is improvised, is scripted, is simple, is embellished, is honest, is screaming, is whispering. No cleancut minimalism here, she is out front risking failure, risking success even, staying small and getting larger.

Issues she addresses come from the heart and the mind: she carries a huge concern for breaking the archetypes. She is speaking and performing to the empowerment of women and to the impact of electronic media on women and female children. She is writing to the insidious methods of exploitation, which include seducing women to adapt to male modes of behaviour in the guise of certain definitions of feminism.

As an artist, she is aware of raising consciousness, especially as regards to children. She is writing, she is yelling, she can talk a blue streak.

— Carole Itter

The following six pieces are from the notebooks from two performances: "A Hundred Fishes," Winter 1991, and "The Unopened Letter," Spring 1992.

unbind

undaunted

women

wear

your

blood red

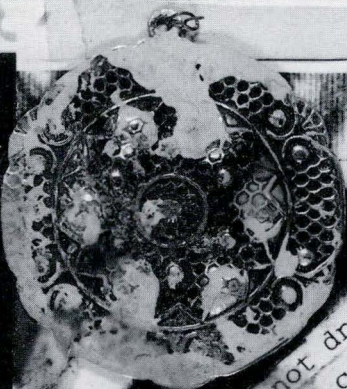
dresses

this is

no

time for

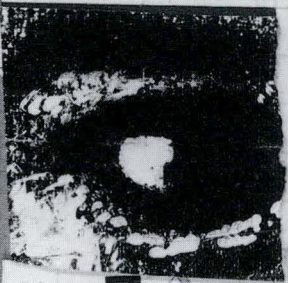
camouflage

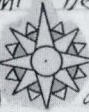


do not drape my body
with corpses
does not become
me... does not
speak well
of you

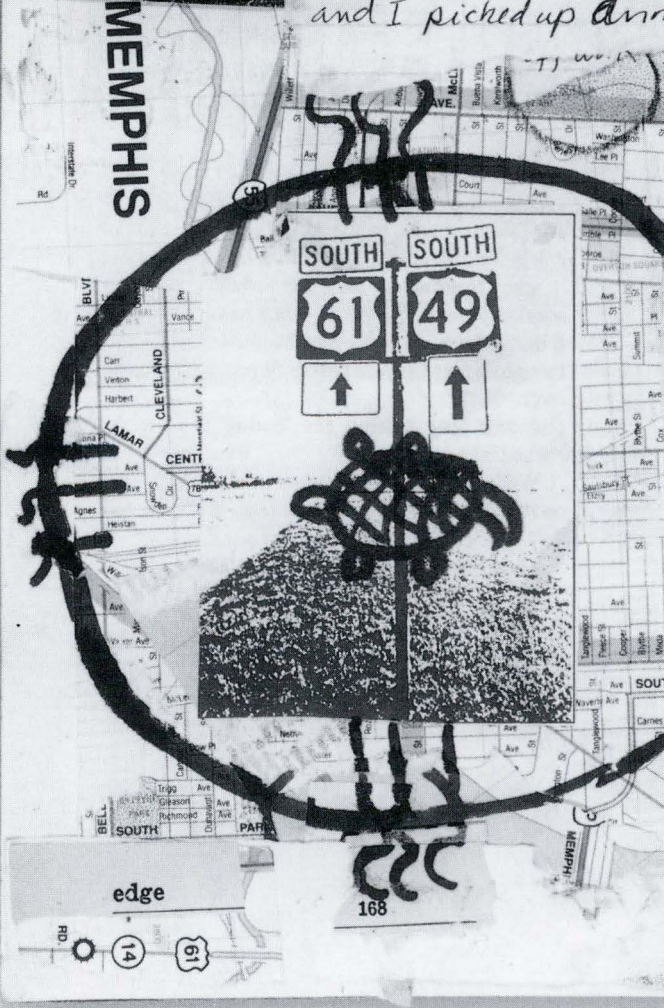


LD EXPLORATION



The night ^{dear} before we took 49 south to 61 I  had a dream. This time it was  a turtle. She was a cartoon turtle and the next day I painted her, like I saw her in the dream, on my bandana. Then Mike and I picked up Annie and we

left, mapless, in a truck with a faulty starter, in the middle of a tornado warning. I intended to discharge my own history. it had too much power over me.

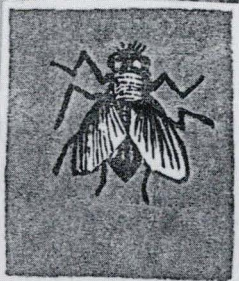


edge

168

effusion

ERSIDE



~~the farther away I~~
The farther away I
got from home the greater freedom
the Remove gave me. I was a fly
on my own wall.

As for the devil - I have
definitely had personal
experience of him. He is not
larger than life. Actual size
is bad enough. He is not poetic,
nor an angel in disguise.

He's something gone very
wrong.

This trip was
about going with
the thing that drives me
deep in passion and joy
and pain and pity.

I thought maybe, if I could literally
retrace the steps of Robert Johnson,
a musician who told me ~~white~~.
I was perfectly capable of falling
apart. if I could take a physical, actual, literal
trip I could encode, as it were, the process in my body.

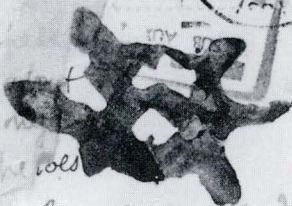
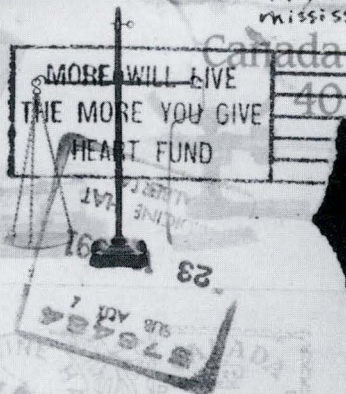
I needed to get away
from the war. The
irony of being called
UNAmerican for protesting
through performance,
the destruction of
the planet & all
who live here. Being
Canadian, some
folks felt I
had no right to
an opinion.

I chose to be influenced
by the musicians I was
introduced to in Memphis. And
maybe I was hitching some-
one else's personal mythology:
it wasn't my story, but it had
a shape and a texture
and a feel I could
recognize

so we lit some
candles and a stick
of Happy household
incense, anointed the
4 corners with Dr. Japs
unhinging oil.

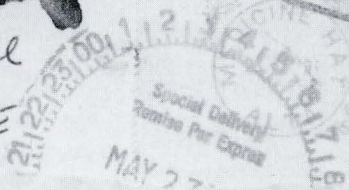
I stole
courage and found
her there, the
turtle dead in her
shell, in the red
dust of the Crossroads

May 91
Mississippi



SEE

SEE



ZINC
BAUXITE

dug

GOLD
SILVER
URANIUM

b.1958

RUBBER
SILK

Sharon Tate
murdered
Marilyn
murdered

blasted

plowed

stripped

detoured

explored

time

isular

LINE

1st polio

car accident

radio death

Uncle Georges

slashed

burned

Sprayed

TIME

1731

1732

1733

1734

1735

1736

1737

1738

1739

1740

1741

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1743

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1792

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1794

1795

1796

1797

1798

1799

1800

27A

28

27

drilled

flooded

ground

mined

cradle

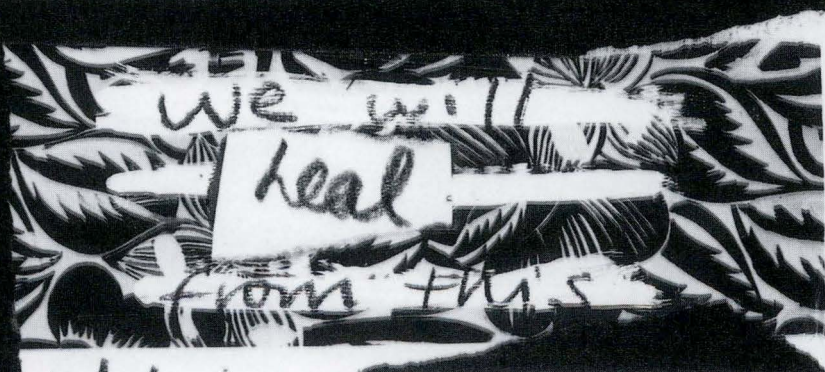
cradle

122

crate

Day of Week _____ Time of day _____

I do not
know if



this is not
for me to
say.

Comments: _____

Madonna Hamel / SISTER JUPITER'S RUBBER SOUL

1.

When in doubt both feet out.
Leaves of three let it be.

Find the nearest safe adult.
School teacher. Police officer.
Parent. Priest.

A my name is Alice.
Give the dog a bone.
There's a monster in the closet.
The cheese stands alone.

Brothers. Sisters. Paper. Stone.
You can't have any 'cause you asked for some.

Sometimes she feels 485,000,000 miles away.
And too cold for any plants to grow on.
So nobody lives there.
No murderers or guys with guns.
And sometimes she's 11 x bigger than the Earth.
So huge.
So far away.
So nobody lives there.

Sometimes she feels like a big ball that's been stepped on and
slightly squished.

2.

For these, and other reasons, she calls herself
Sister Jupiter.

For these and because Norman,
school room brain yard
head bully of bogus
bitty bitty bits
of book bark
says:

You can't be Jupiter.
Jupiter's a guy.
He's the god of lightning.
He's the warrior god of the sky.
You're a girl.
You can't be Jupiter.

(Then brightens with a benevolent consolation prize —)

You could be one of his moons!

Norman's Greek and Roman myth book goes:

Some of the moons of Jupiter are:

- a) Io. Named after a beautiful young girl Zeus fell in love with. Zeus' wife became aware of his affection for Io. So Zeus protected her by turning her into a cow.
- b) Callisto. Named after a beautiful girl Zeus fell in love with. Zeus' wife became aware of his affection for Callisto. So she turned Callisto into a bear.

c) Europa. Named after a beautiful young girl Zeus fell in love with. Zeus' wife became aware of his affection for Europa. So Zeus turned himself into a bull and carried her away.

How Romantic.

3.

Don't talk to uncles.

Kiss your stranger.

Hurry up.

Don't run.

Walk much?

She moves 29,000 miles an hour.

But a year is 4,740 days long.

She is huge-two-car-garage-real-estate-filling-up-the-space-runaway-ten-track-train-fast-vast-and-reaching-spreading-and-belching-and-grabbing-and-loading-up-the-spaces-with-made-up-languages-and-new-information-instead-of-advice-intruding-psycho-drama-in-ten-parts-harmony-of-the-spheres-put-to-tears-a-twelve-year-old-trauma-case-orbiting-around-the-nearest-star.

She is large.

She can't take a vacation when she feels like it.

And there is the matter of the

Great Red Spot.

a swirling mass of dangerous gases crazy cotton candy
sticking to the roof of the universe and a galaxy of
intensivity zippidy bobity bob bob alongity it
dawned on me I'm closing in on her shellfish it's not that
she's selfish it's just that she feels like her sphere needs
expanding she's got to see clearer than from here where
she's standing because of the lack of attention she's needing
you now to attend to the test of her best instincts finally
got back to her message she's tried to be giving but only
just now receiving it's the space race got going and it's
hard to be sure when you're not known or knowing what you
want haven't had the floor the back door is just round the
corner and in the event of a supernatural disaster I advise the
advice of the others won't last her:

are sure, dear?
do you think so?
how much does it pay?

Look both ways
but never cross over.
You'll never stay.

4.

An 11 year old sues his parents.
He says:
I just want to play
so I feel safe

and that I'm happy
and I know people will
always be there for me.

5.

At the age of 12 Sister Jupiter realized she was the only
one.

That she could not get out of her body.

That she would never experience another flesh and blood.

That, with certainty, the entire world would disappear
when she closed her eyes.

But this existential dread also provided an odd sense of
comfort because it also meant that she would always
be there for her.

6.

There is a small moon whose gravity holds the ring of dust,
those tiny particles of self-knowledge, around the Big Ball.

It is the shepherd satellite. It keeps the ring of safety
from thinning and disappearing.

She calls the moon Gregory Kingsley.

7.

Sister Jupiter wants to make some myths of her own.
Gregory Kingsley rewrites the commandments.
What does Jupiter call itself? What does it know from
Greeks and Romans? Normans and Spots? Kings and Gods?
Parents honour thy children.
Planets honour thy moons.

8.

Sister Jupiter spends her free time
making lists
hiding books
peeling crayons
counting cat's eyes
hoarding pens
going through pockets of visitors' coats hanging in the front
closet

hitting things with sticks.

9.

Once, one Christmas, she walked to the park at the end of
her street.

(It was never *her* street. It was her parents' street. It

was a street dominated by topiary, sedans, underground sprinkler systems, aluminum siding.)

Sister Jupiter sat on one of the swings in the playground and rocked and rocked and thought and thought how safe it would feel to be

Very Big and

Very Far Away.

And then little sister pumped higher and higher until she was almost around the top of the swing set almost ready to puke

and so she let go and

she flung herself into the dark cold winter air took the blind leap of faith

and sucked in the sky whose stars stung like prickly pears on swallowing and she thought

of Romeo and Juliet and how stupid it was to think

of chopping your boyfriend into tiny bits of stars

so you could look at him at night and no one better

turn her into tiny salt tear stars thank you very much but she lept off anyway and you know what happened.

She fell.

Of course.

And she got up off her knees with the skin torn back like a sardine can lid and one arm bent funny at the elbow and she got an idea to take her arm (with a hand full of stone slivers) and fling it against one of the metal poles of the swing set, swing it like a baseball bat, fling it like she's trying to shake loose a mad dog's hold, and keep hitting it and hitting it in the stark cold light of the night time playground

with snow lightly falling.
She was trying to make kindling of it.
crack it open.
cut it off.
She was silent except for inside.
Inside she was saying:
What do I have to do?

They never asked, but she told them anyway:
I fell.

10.

Q: This monster in the closet, what do you think that might be?

A: It's a monster. There's a monster in my closet.

Q: The unknown is a very frightening prospect. It can be manifested in many ways: monsters, large animals, loud noises, a foggy murky presence, just lurking in the closet, say, of your mind. As we gain knowledge of the unknown it becomes less frightening. What do you say?

A: I say: it's not unknown. I know who it is. There's a monster. And it's in my closet.

11.

She would like to float
calmly past the trouble.
She would love to trust.

She pictures Trust
like some kids picture Santa Claus.
With long arms reaching out the window
of her truck
Trust gives apples to children
who bite into them with laughter.
She comes up to the door of the house and
leans her shoulder against the house as if to
hold it up.
She holds out question-mark shaped gifts
expecting an answer shortly.
It's written in our faces, she'd say.
She plays street hockey
racing past the boys,
her legs longer than hockey sticks and
hidden by many skirts, each the colour of an exotic fruit.
Her face is as warm as central heating
her hands
are open to shake
to lift up story books
to brush your hair

She falls asleep when she is tired.

YASMIN LADHA

I still retain ties to Calgary, Alberta, where I grew up. It's a place of great poetic energy in recent years, and a lot of young, serious minds are at work there, changing the poetic grid, map, landscape, bringing in new influences and concerns.

I only know Yasmin Ladha through her work, specifically, through a long poem called "Bridal Hands on the Maple" published in 1992 as part of Ashok Mathur and Nicole Markotic's "disOrientation" Calgary-based chapbook series. Its "reach" attracted me, coupled with Ladha's willingness to take risks with the page (an echo of Claire Harris?), with rhythms, with concurrent voices, highlighting but never resolving contradictions. In "Bridal Hands" she combines the high ritual tone of address to the beloved and the storyteller's rhetorical voice, along with talismans and traces of reporting on abuse by security forces in the Kashmir (the assaults on women that take place at the margin of all armed struggles). At the same time, she plays tongue in cheek with high-mindedness:

Reader-my-guest
I wish Kashmiris would quit
reporting so cinematically
in the style of
"my beloved is my liver."

Her work is characterized by a clarity of tone, and a lack of adornment or pretense. At the same time, she doesn't talk down to the reader. Or shy away from difficulty, from the articulation of the coded paths through which women must move, the way these codes are translated through cultures and generations, and how women relate beneath that. In Ladha's work the codes are connected, transgressed, scrutinized, found useful or wanting, all without forcing, and without ever stripping down the complexity of things.

— Erin Mouré

Yasmin Ladha / LAKSHMI OPENS AND CLOSES

*Largen me not with child or sober jewel
Nor husband, grace his turban, turn and touch
let me
slide between breasts my own
and
love
in leisure unrelated*

Lakshmi's husband gives her two coins for hair flowers. He likes to see her pretty but he also likes to make her happy. The coins lend to her wealth. When her husband goes to work, she has her business too.

Lakshmi sits in front of her mirror, the size of a photo frame. The mirror leans on a slanted plank of wood. Behind the plank is her *kumkum* in a yellow clay pot. In the middle of where her plait begins, she tucks a string of *asminis*. Then she unknots her blouse. They become full and pointed again. Lakshmi dips her fingers inside the yellow pot. In the middle of her hair parting she spills red *kumkum*. The second time, she filches the red powder and applies it between her breasts. In hair, *kumkum* is auspicious, guarding a husband's welfare. But the latter ritual is of Lakshmi's making. Now her husband will remain doubly protected. For the fires she wears will protect him.

I am a nomad-woman who shuttles between continents. There is no gun behind my back nor have I climbed a peril wall. But I am a modern immigrant who needfully retrieves in more than one continent. I nomad on land, in books and woman rooftops.

In *Sons and Lovers*, the wives rise early to kiss their husbands good-bye. In case they never return from the mines that day. The wives' *kumkum* kiss. When I read this, I, nomad-woman, nail a temporary post. In the presence of any Lakshmi, I nail a temporary post. Then the lotus goddess comes to me accompanied by her two snow elephants (they have turquoise lashes) who lift me to a rooftop. Here, goddess Lakshmi opens my shoulder pad and refills it with chants, stories and woman brouhaha.

For one coin, Lakshmi buys *asminis*. How does the song go? That song on the eve of a bride's henna. (Wet henna on her palms, feet and fingernails.)

beloved mine
if ever without you

then someone remove that dent
on our merry pillow
where beloved's head rests
now-on
I have forgotten
asmini, rose, dancing slipper

With the other coin, Lakshmi buys bananas for her father and makes a trip to her maiden home. Every day. As soon as she steps inside the courtyard, her father says, "Lakshmi has come home."

When a daughter is born, the house members say that Lakshmi has come home. And before a bride enters her new home, her mother-in-law bids her kick the pot of rice by the doorway. The bride walks on spilled rice. Her first steps are bounteous Lakshmi's.

Goddess Lakshmi sits on a lotus. Plentiful, ample. She is the Goddess of wealth. She surrenders to grabby devotees. Forever turns a blind eye, "Never mind," she says, even pats their cheeks with her lotus hands.



I call Mrs. Gola, *Didi*. Mother's sister. On Diwali, I light the lamps, one by one, behind Gola Market. Her sons, Bhima-tall, watch, shifting weight into feet and across the chest. How to behave toward a sudden woman? This stranger who does not address their mother respectfully as *mata-mai*-mother. Doesn't she know that paradise is at a mother's feet?

Grandmother would sway in company of such sons: "Such a *jum* display of males!" she would say, stretching her hand, way above her head. My Grandmother of drama would unlock her fist in the air and

spread out her fingers, an instant star. "Height, you ask? A baobab tree! These glorious pillars," then furling her hand, "unbudded, steady as death."

Grandmother's faith in the Aryan specimen who stormed into India is untarnished. Broad shouldered *jum* warriors with their swastikas and fire. Her faith in such male properties more instinctive than her faith in the Koran. To translate Grandmother's language, a *jum* man is unshook: like death, he does not retrack. When he throws a stone decision, one hears it whizz across the sky. For her, like Lakshmi's father, such maleness protects a tribe and provides endless bread on the table. Lakshmi's father knows that his daughter is under a thick jute shelter, forever.

Mother widows at thirty-four. Father, a Bhima centrefold. What happened? Though her daughter is widowed, Grandmother does not cry, she says, "Call it lump disease or shrinking disease, but when his time is up, even a dog will piss in the mosque." But Grandmother stops wearing lipstick. Now when my tall brother snatches her and lifts her in the sky, Grandmother grabs his cheeks, "*Munna-laddie*, on your wedding, I will drape on Southern silk and rouge my mouth."

On one of my nomadic journeys home, after Grandfather dies, I ask Grandmother about my unspoken Aunt of many, many years ago. This is the first time she steps out of her prescribed circle by weeping openly, "A man knows nine months only but when a mother conceives, her child pricks and pricks right under her heart, damn pricking never goes out again." Now I tell her of dreams I made up when I was little. That my kind Bhima-father marries my Aunt though she isn't dead like him but good as dead, I knew even then. He carries my unspoken Aunt on a white elephant to his new home in heaven. Grandmother touches my cheek with a wane palm, "Even a girl-Lakshmi gives like a flood."

I remember my small Grandmother and huge father making *rotis*. Father's *rotis* aren't circles. They have chins drooping out of them. Grandmother sides her face and roars. She reaches below his shoulder. She reveals details like how his left pupil is slightly off centre, his eyelids turning mauve in sleep, how he forces her to eat his drooping chin *rotis*, all this, she tells in the present. Always. And when she talks about his cheeks, the side of her mouth rises Clinton soft, "Allah, the

opulence on this city-lad's cheeks! From breakfast red merriment to mysterious dark like a dusky-*Magrib* evening. Not even the beckoning azan from the minaret holds such allure."

Father tells her of Elvis who swaggers his hips like a *ngoma* dancer. My father is from Dar es Salaam. City-lad. My Grandmother is from Mombasa, an international port. She loves him from the start.

"She has picked it from your Father," Mother says, when Grandmother talks from the side of her mouth, especially when she is excited. Zarin *Didi* says the same thing. Zarin *Didi* is Mother's real sister. (My Mrs. Gola is trans-related to all women I know. I call her *Didi*.) Father dies in 1964. It is a thin grave, huddled.

When I stand at her doorstep, first thing *Didi* tells me is, "I know who you are." I know her too because Asoka Travels has arranged this for me. When I tell her that I am grateful to her for allowing me to celebrate Lakshmi *Pooja* with her, *Didi* looks at me sadly, "Daughter, you have not recognized me."

Didi fumbles with the *gajra* of *asminis* in her hands. Shy to touch my hair because I am so wretchedly new, she ties the thicket on my wrist. I know she had favoured me with an indulgence customarily bestowed on men.

"After the last of the lush mangoes, the gentlemen would dip their fingers in crystal bowls circled by the white garlands. Slipping them casually around their wrists they would walk away carrying the fragrance of an enclosed garden." (Anees Jung, *Unveiling India — A Woman's Journey*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 13.)

Didi insists on washing my plate before I leave her threshold, "Daughter, if I wash your plate, keep it ready and waiting, maybe you will never want to leave. Lakshmi at my door, finally! I have waited so long."

Since Father's death, I am unstinting on sisterly superstition: I never wash my hair on Wednesdays because this day hangs heavy on brothers. On onerous Wednesdays, I am *kumkum* alert.

Whenever mother moves us to a new house, she prepares a silver tray which has some wick, oil and rice. First I get out of the car with the silver tray and place it in the spooky doorway, then walk inside. I feel the house's ghosts fading away. Then my brother and mother

follow. A daughter enters with Lakshmi steps. She drives away spirits, changes a house into a home.

During *Diwali*, everyone leaves doors, shutters and windows wide open because on this auspicious night, goddess Lakshmi visits homes. My tourist brochure translates *Diwali* as the Festival of Lights. But *Didi* tells me the story of how Ram defeated the many headed Ravan of Lanka. Ram would slash one head and another would suck out in its place. But good always overcomes evil. Ram rescues his wife Sita, abducted by the mighty Ravan when she unwittingly steps out of the protection circle drawn around her by Ram and his faithful brother. There is never any question of who will win, "After all, Ram is Vishnu and Sita is Lakshmi," *Didi* says. Upon the royal pair's triumphant return to Ayodhya, the Ayodhyans light the way with *diyas*.

Only on Lakshmi *Pooja*, the watchman does not beat the walls with his *danda*-stick. On this night, *Lakshmi Mata* will protect anyone, even thieves. Normally, before falling into a red vault sleep, the watchman prepares a grand show of beating his *danda* on the walls of the house, "Whack! Mistress of the Household, I am awake!" As a finale, the watchman's stick becomes thunderous, as if to say, "Beware Mistress, I am alert as a cheetah so let me be spared of abuse from your unwashed mouth!" Many times the mistress catches him dead to the world and her anger is so noisy that the watchman runs out of the gate.

Lakshmi, the Goddess of fortune and abundance, sits on a lotus. Plentiful, ample. Forever turns a blind eye. Never mind. She is Barwa-rag. The raga which soothes the bird and the serpent. Feathery kind. She always says, "Never mind." bp Nichol kind. But no one knows that her back burns because it is being eaten away by so much giving. There is a spread of ash on her cheeks. The worshippers leave her festive red saris, puff powder. They also leave cunning rice before her with imprints of rice steps leading up to her, but no steps leading away. This way they lock in Lakshmi.

Didi tells me, "I cannot ask Lakshmi for anything more. I, nestled among such *jum* men, am already so wealthy, how can I?"

(A bride carries a pot of honey and milk. As she bends, the groom covers her like the spine of a sickle. Her head is tucked in his chest, forever protected. He tilts her hand. Together they pour the sacred

offering into the fire. *Didi* has an army of such protectors.)

But *Didi* has a wish. She has kept it still, out of the reach of Buddha or Shiva, or any other sneerer of her wish. In the fleshy recess of her zenana sex, an obvious place (is it?), her dull protein wish glints. But in the bazaari republic, she moves about transparently, a mother who slid out splendid *jum* sons from her buttery thighs. Then unexpectedly this *Diwali* her fugitive desire granted. Her bottom lip slips, "My Lakshmi has finally come home," this time, *Didi* touches my hair.

"How could I burden Lakshmi, say to her, I want a daughter, then give me talk of sons." Like me, the goddess has never shaken her head. Both of us have given first to *Shiva-Rabba-Buddha*, that power in the sky.

On the rooftop, I pile on *Didi's* cot. We drink *chai* out of steel tumblers. In this woman place, *Didi* tells me about the woman who gives her all to the Power in the sky. When the *zaminder* on whose land this woman works rapes her, her husband leaves her because the son she is heavy with isn't his. This woman, a Sita suffer and Lakshmi giver, raises her son alone. Twenty years later, the husband returns. The woman (she has gone very thin) only blinks and calls out to her son. She clasps his hand. In the other, her husband's, and lifts these hands to her breasts. Only asks the mighty Rabba in the sky, this:

In my one hand, my son

In my other, my husband

O *Raba*

If I forfeit You today

will you forgive me, just this day?

When a bride enters a door's entrance, she is schooled to become like *Didi*, forced to lick the power of *Raba* in the sky. First she is halted in the doorway, where she raises her arms, and her youth is pulled out of her body. (Lakshmi who buys her father bananas is lucky, no one has taken away the musky sheen from her breasts.) Beside the rice ceremony, the arch in a bride's limbs is slackened. Now henna and sandalwood paste are wanton heat, unsuited to motherhood. One day, the throbbing bride hands over her magazine desires and black silk to her approving mother-in-law, who piles her with keys, rice, money and turbans. Only Lakshmi/*Didi* can fill the tribe's turbans, stretched out like alm bowls. She properly fills them with honour. No one knows

that the *poto*-clan's worshipping saliva turns acidic on her back. Makes holes in her meat. All the clan sees is gourd-like Lakshmi with puff power cheeks. That she has an ozone back, only another Lakshmi knows. This is why I call Mrs. Gola, *Didi*. If I call her mother, I refine her complexity. Everyone has a mother, instant satisfaction. But mother's sister allows "who are you, may I get to know you?" time to a woman. Now Lakshmi is no longer that transparent. No Lakshmi is.

I am also Lakshmi who wears *kumkum* for her brother, who would rather tell the story of her brave Zarin *Didi* and not the other Aunt (we never utter her name. She is *haraam*-forbidden in our tribe, by Grandfather. On this matter, he has roped Grandmother's milkless breasts. She does not complain that she is in pain.) My Aunt who gets pregnant by a married man. When my breasts begin to grow, Grandmother wallops my shoulder, "You become like her and we will throw you in the well." Besides utter fear of shame history repetition, this is the only way Grandmother can remember her daughter out loud in Grandfather's prescribed circle. I like to think if Father were alive, my unspoken Aunt would not have been banished. That his prankish nature would not have allowed it. Once Father sends Zarin *Didi* a large parcel. She opens the parcel and finds an empty box but there is another gift-wrapped box underneath. Empty. Boxes and boxes, like Draupadi's never ending sari. Finally, in a velvet ring case lies a single Benson's almond toffee. Zarin *Didi*'s favourite.

Zarin *Didi* is beautiful like Sophia Loren. Sometimes she looks so beautiful that Grandfather gives her money not to go to mosque. What if someone looks at her witchcraft eyes. He wants to protect her like *kumkum* between the breasts. She marries a doctor. But an evil eye must have sucked on her. One night, thieves break in. She pushes her two daughters inside a room. When one of the thieves moves toward her husband, she stops him by jumping on his back. But the other thief pops out her eye.

Until today, the larger gods did not know. Buddha did not know nor Shiv of *Didi*'s dull glint of protein life. That *Didi*'s daughter has grown in her womb for thirty-four years. This Lakshmi *pooja*, the daughter lights the lamps, one by one, behind Gola Market. Lakshmi is resting.

LAZER LEDERHENDLER

I first heard Lazer's work at a "showcase" reading by Concordia University creative writing profs and students; he read a poem for/about his father that stuck in my memory. Later, when Gail Scott was writer-in-residence at Concordia, she showed me a sheaf of his poems. What I saw was rough-edged but startlingly different from his earlier work — a venturing into another kind of territory, testing formal conventions while retaining overall cohesion (often lost in first formal experiment). I thought of him as a risk-taker, a difficult thing when most young writers tend to shore up the self, to grapple for authorial control over what is represented, and not let go, pare apart the notion of their own subjectivity and how it affects language, use, the use-value of any "saying". Still, though I liked the direction, the work tended too much toward abstraction; I remember cautioning: *It's not rooted enough in particulars*. But the economy of words and "muscle" of the phrase, the movement of the phrase, *worked*.

"The Inner City Exhibits" (selected here) was an outgrowth of the work Lazer showed Gail Scott. It was the "construct of masculinity" that interested him, but he found himself dissatisfied with the form of the poems that resulted, the lyric narrative form with the centred speaking self, and what this form was not allowing him to say, to grasp. He didn't want to just "confess" his relationship as a male person to (heterosexual, male) pornography, his growing up through that, he wanted to approach it differently. While reading Celan, Marlatt, and others, he started to test his own formal boundaries.

The choice between "being clear" and "being true" concerns and perplexes him still:

"... which is the greater risk: to write in "good" (intelligible) English, which means to risk being re-written by it, or to write in "broken" English, which means to risk being unintelligible? ... though I'm inclined now to think that the real question is: intelligible (or broken) for/by whom?"

It's a question I've asked, and something in me insists that the way we commonly learn to read glosses over too much. Somehow I think it's easier to ask from the margins (woman, lesbian) than from the more valorized (male, heterosexual), so it's intriguing to see Lazer take up these questions.

— Erin Mouré

Lazer Lederhendler / from *THE INNER CITY EXHIBITS*

TOWN PLANNING

as i walked out in the streets of laredo
as i walked out in laredo one day
i spied a young cowboy all wrapped in white linen
all wrapped in white linen and cold as the clay

un a void able
cor(o)ner
'mgoin'downt'meetcha
meetyou meet you me-
et vous
et moi et toi
eyes fall
asymptotic into (h)ours of sympathy
when nerves meet never

to touch your hair
-lines the site we must ex it
entrance meaning
the verb
in finitive case
you turn the corner of a
century
i mean en-
trance (*it was fascination*
you know) white line(n)s
drawn around your fever to sing . . .
the city's design:

a bank's two faces west
& south telling their own time
the bank's
the teller's

a sign reading
Sanctuaire d'Adoration
du Tres-Saint-Sacrement-de Notre-Dame-du-Sacre-Coeur
(translate a misfit jew bearing the double ex-)

poses the lipshaped
heart pried open
a window's red pulse
AMOUR AMOUR AMOUR
erects the triple-x that can't be said
alone displays me here
where o you've always found me
wanting . . .

tree line

sequins of leaves laughing
the aspen pull up roots like words
that women spring. shoeless &
sidewalk they dance, aloud. allowed
to grow far from the line the same
one a man learns to wood the spiral
riot his cellulose rings . . .

rustling in solitary visiting
hours uproot the words for
a loss i am at

coat line

so comes a tree at one point
smuggling under a coat (the counterfeit colour of bark)
my thousand rings

the point a man wants to reach
each time he enters agaze
the silence a door holds in
like a breath
bottled in midnight blue glass

less to dissolve in pornography's glaze
than to remember
singing

(oh sing me
sing how *you'll never know how much i love*
you) how a small boy's feet inside the coat's lining

carry me to a closet
& woollen coats big with mown
grass breezes like the breath of sleeping
lovers graze gently the genitals
deep within my skull

the shed

not closet. no. shed we called it.
because winter coats were shed there,
anything in the final days of April that
needed shadow, like outcast members of the
family. it was their presence i sought in
the dust that rained through slow bands of
sunlight. solar suspension. i dreamed
overcoats into inmates & a sad lane of
freedom i could refuse for their dirty hair
smell, their weight, their woollen weight.
the bodies they intimated sang no words in
the kitchen: white, close by, close. the
smooth round enamel of time . . .

lexicon of the shed

shed: a room deep in dream-rime escapes you
winter coats: womb-smell, wool's remembrance of
your mother's dirty, oh, wet and
dirty hair: close, closer, closer still
(still: amazing morpheme pluperfect)
dust rained slow: red cell shadows, their rhythm out
of time, singing: whalecalls, the wavelength of flesh
dreamed inmates: i's dream of not-i, the subject confused
lane of freedom: the afterbirth
sad: modifier, as parts of speech are all

syntax of the shed

as parts of speech are all
a matter of exclusion. parts the
author cuts away body parts passages
too dark for words allowed: the passage
from shed to lane a wooden staircase
spiral organism (what he thinks of as)
me moving through its scent — humus
dangerous humus. below, a lane-full of
sky the whole weight of its blueness
pressed against where the light
leaks in like desire: the dark moist door
he was afraid (so am i)
to call my mother's cunt . . .

correspondence

*a mother is a continuous separation, a
division of the very flesh, and
consequently a division of language — and
it has always been so.*

julia kristeva

to a carrier of the south-west light,

has a phrase ever come or a gesture or the
way you articulate certain things, come as if from
behind, and you, just the place it was passing through
then? i am a tattooed body, you think, and these
colours aren't mine, though you can't say whose or the
meaning of mine. let me tell you, your words
apprehended me. made my poem admit, *i, too, am about
'to be born'* and recognize the plot of my symbols:
glass of a porn-shop door, glossy pages turning like
doors, pictures of a woman glazed like a door (like a
mirror-door), shed full of overcoats (woollen hair
instead of fur), wooden stairs spiralling through
smells of a forest-floor to the border of light shaped
like a door. how in all the rooms that women adorn as
icons of their own humiliation men congregate to
restlessly adore what they must never allow (and so
they despise), never name, my mother's cunt, the door
disguised in o's and x's: o examine, o exalt, o
excess, o exclude, o excise . . . the door? what is
forbidden? cunt-thing? cunt-word? cunt-
thing/[slash]word, the slash that signifies a door

ajar, infeasible but not the same? or, since the law
is mostly possession, is the subject forbidden, her
possessive case?

carrier of the south-west light, perhaps you shied
away at first from all (and nothing) that's been made
of it, the blunt *graphein* that takes women into
traffic. or was it a light thing, a kiss, to steal
back from pornography the precise, spontaneous
explosion of a daughter's love for daughters?

(context: who speaks, the son
the text, "my mother's cunt"
who listens, the you)

oh weigh it weigh it. turn it over gingerly like
a tender limb a groan the irreplaceable failure
of . . . to recall and not dismember my mother's
sturdy sweet body whole and (only) once my own, to know
she'll never forgive me. will you? did yours?

yours truly,

straight men

straight men don't come
together, we converge. the way we're
always verging on a con: conversation, confidence
the two of us
and a chair — bottle-green, empty — our
eyes-con-verge (three syllables
stuck in the evening's throat) the speaker
speculates in other words:
con, the cunt, *verge*, the prick, night-
stick that rubs out the i of *la vierge*,
o the empty green periphery
we had in mind

swallow swallow
swallow swallow swallow

a word caught in the rib cage
escapes us. it goes without saying
where
beer, chips, hockey, the failings of other men —
order them, our friendship
rises like suds in a slender glass
televise our lines of sight
déjà vu, the v's our eyes crisscross
a woman with
a thousand times before
we ever meet

(what we gave away when we traded smiles)

her absence, her presence, the silences both
understood. and a kiss on each cheek
should she enter

NADINE SHELLEY

Three years ago I was invited to be Writer-in-Residence for a week at Ganges High School on Salt Spring Island. Bill Underwood, a brilliant and sensitive teacher who actually believes writing is important and that students should be encouraged (!) brought a pile of manuscripts to my house so I'd be able to read his students' work beforehand. "I think we have a prodigy," he said.

While all the work I read was of a higher standard than most high school writing I'd seen (thanks, I imagine, to the enthusiasm generated by Bill Underwood), one poet had a voice so haunting, so original, so *frighteningly* mature, I recognized someone in touch with voices from a world far older than the present organization of her 16-year-old self.

Nadine Shelly and I met for a private conference. She had published one poem in *Grain* — I told her what I had been told at the same age: start sending your work out to magazines and get used to rejection slips. Also, to read. She didn't need creative writing classes, she just needed to absorb as much poetry as she could, immerse herself in that world. She said all she wanted to do was to travel and to write. I told her there was nothing I could say about her work, other than "don't stop." I told her what Sylvia Plath had said, that "the blood-jet is poetry: there is no stopping it."

Nadine left to meet Josh and I left to catch a ferry back to Vancouver Island. That may have been the end of my role in this had not Sean Virgo been staying at my house. I told him I had met a remarkable young poet and he asked to look at her work. He read her poems once, twice, three times, and then asked if I thought she would like to have a book published. Exile in Toronto was one publisher still willing to take risks with promising but as yet unestablished writers.

Sean called Exile, who, on his recommendation alone, offered to publish the book the following month. I returned to Salt Spring the next day to give Nadine the good news. All she had left to do was to find a title.

Barebacked with Rain was published, and Nadine won the Morley Callaghan Award for a Young Writer (\$5000) and, a few months later, a second Young Achievers Award. With the prize money she travelled to India and then to Mexico. The last time I saw her it was in my garden on the Saanich Peninsula where she was being interviewed for YTV in conjunction with a prize she had won.

She's a muse, a magician, a priestess; most of all she's her own person. And Nadine will be going wherever poetry takes her.

— Susan Musgrave

Nadine Shelly / FOUR POEMS

HORUS

hillcrest gypsomoth, dripping moss
a spot of green. Wet mouth,
wet eye. Rolling
over the old hill, hovering.
The speckled hawk is roving here.
Hunting: your eye is an egg
is a grape in the grass, cool surprise
in round, red mouth. Circling
the bright flight of your vision
shape of the eye is the head
of the hawk

broken rock
bleeds clear green tears.
Two drops on the back
of the tongue, tip back.
The head drops, smash. Water spills
upon the hills: this muscle
in your neck talking, tick tocking,
tipping the wide face the white
forehead into the sky

wide open wings of winter grey sky

take you in my arms, keep you
warm, safe from harm. My love
who is thrush, who is bullrush,
who is blond arms of arbutus
reaching. Wither

have you wandered love, wither
do you wander? Through dark
woods, golden frog
in a fog, a rotting bog

underbrush of birdsong, brambles
like mazes, like madness
tearing your tatters,
tangling your hair.
Caught in a brittle thicket,
bracket of sticks (unspoken
violence) indicates
a breath, a pause, a bearing
compass rose
veins of milk and veins of quartz

gathering twigs to my dry heart
kind as kindling, love of fire.
This land is a hand
on the sole of your foot. Black
boot, bare foot, steel toes.
Stones and steps fall on the face
of the green man, fool of false
spring. Not hurting the land.
Not knowing but going, being led.
A branch in the hand, a spine
cracking

love, your heart like a sharp horizon
a light on the crest
of the still heart, the hill

VERNAL VERNACULAR

With this land I am growing
older everyday, decay
like days of rain
water on the brain.
The body bears its barren
breasts, hips, belly
like a heavyweight
across the bridge, over
the hill. Will you be there
waiting? Wondering
where the spring fed fawn
has gone to, what laughter
what slaughter has befallen her.

With this land I am growing
older, greener, meaner
everyday. Spring sings
in my veins, shouts out
showering flowers of perennial
pain. No shame, no gain,
a shake of the head
sun's flare/lion's mane.

ODE TO A NODE (DEJA VU)

1. astronaut

underpass, undertow
throwing small rubber balls
tight bright words against the walls
of winter. Underground flesh
pressing against a cold stone
heart, harvest moon tombstone.
Seeking your darkness and quiet
caress

your hands are leaves falling
from frostbitten crimson trees
tender as fingertips your tongue
holding, folding my body
like a paper bird or origami box
birch bark biting snowflake stars
upon pale skin, tooth marks red
running like a loveletter's ink
in the rain

in the country of silence
there is no place for pain

luxury of memory, to say:
do you remember
sky spinning a spiderweb
in silver darkness, tongues tangled

eyes crossed with clear delight
of starlight, love, do you remember

taste of rosehips
(shape of your lips)
walking through the haunted hills
like songs of sleepless deep
surrender. Dancing barefoot
through fading fields and forests
my body is bread
I throw to the birds
in hopes that they will always
bring me back to you
pirouette silhouette
to the sound of the sea
smell of wet skin, mushrooms
in the shadow of hush
damp towering trees

put it away: call it pipe dream
smoke screen, scanning the green
wilderness of our common memory

2. juggernaut

look around, hear the sounds
of here and now
ear to the heaven
ear to the ground

sound of surfaces
dry sand, silk sky scraping
a city of skin
your name a windowledge I walk
across like a cat in early morning
mottled light, milk bottle
everfull of flowers;
me-o-my, honeypie
call you my milk man
call you every day, every way
that I can

your soft lap a boat
I can float in, away
no burden to say:
love, lift me up

when hope hangs her head
like a coat by the door
where will she go? home
along a slick black road
shining all night, street light
through a single window pane

3. slipnaught

brain like a breadbox, a mailbox,
a bioluminescent origami box
to hold the butterknife

the day to day life
the constant image of the crane
slipping into passive moonlit
inlet of calm abiding,
the mind content with confluence
influence of silence
impossibility
simplicity of the sea

brings me back
like a bouncing ball
to the blank walls of winter
where everywhere your face
is a hoarfrost mask, melting
where you see me
emerging/submerging
in some well loved landscape
a frozen breath on the window
a mystery of memory

expressions of ecstatic change
impress me, please hand me the reins
of the silver horses who are harnessed
delicately to every minute muscle
trembling in your placid
perfect, inexplicably pleasing face
gently softened now (like my heart)
with a fevered fall, a day of dreams

internal damnation: the furnace of angels

sailing away, blank blot
of abandonment
I meant to leave you there
but how could I bear
the look on your face

and now all the waters
are turning red and brown
the desperate search for signs
continues, down the river

drowning in sentiment
sediment sinking ships into soft
skin, running cold hands
through the water your body

is passing. What a waste.
Saying sorry, sorry to your sad
sister and the dead seas
she drowned in

skull is a shell
is a bell in the blue
hours by the window, watching
you in some far part

of the house. Skies fall
in a metal dish of rain water

the metal scraping some pink
wet part of you, parted lips

glisten: ovarian breathing
listen: ask again, my friend
am I speaking this language of yours, yet,
am I telling you things you already knew?

language of love, lost children,
tin rain, red roof, dull pain
of a forehead hitting the floor.
Mountains fall down

to the brown river
in the Valley of Gods, monsoon
of insanity. Desperation devours
your integrity, I send you these signs:

stop/yield/surrender.
Lay me down in the river of peace
just down, just through
just under the belly

you already knew that, didn't you
I couldn't fool you
if I wanted to

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

CHRISTIAN BÖK is a doctoral student at York University, where he is writing a dissertation on the theoretical relationship between science and poetry. "Fractal Geometry," a poem from *Crystallography*, is due to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Descant*, and "Radiant Inventories," an essay about Christopher Dewdney, is being published in an upcoming issue of *Canadian Poetry*. Bök's work has also appeared in recent issues of *Canadian Literature*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *English Studies in Canada*, and *Open Letter*.

SUSAN CREAN is a writer, critic, and long time cultural activist who has worked on behalf of artists particularly in the area of copyright. Her most recent book, *Twist and Shout*, an anthology of feminist writings from *This Magazine*, was published in 1992. She was chair of the Writers' Union of Canada in 1991/92.

CHERIE GEAUVREAU has published fiction and poetry in several journals and anthologies including *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, *PRISM International*, *The American Voice*, and *SNAPSHOTS* out of Black Moss Press. Her first collection of poetry is forthcoming from Brick Books. She lives and writes on Salt Spring Island.

MADONNA HAMEL has been writing since childhood and has in the last six years brought her body into her art making. Her recent works reflect a need to re-connect the psyche with the body and to challenge the growing eroticism of voyeurism and alienation. Her collages work as spontaneous therapeutic tools to connect fragments of a personal revolution. Her influences include: delta blues, free jazz, experimental film, Flamenco dance, clotheslines, Alice Miller, Joni Mitchell, Kurt Schwitters, and a partridge in a pear tree.

YASMIN LADHA is the author of a collection of short stories, *Lion's Granddaughter and Other Stories* (NeWest Press, 1992) and "Bridle Hands on the Maple," a long poem published in chapbook form by DisOrientation Press, 1992.

SHEILA LAWSON is a visual artist who works with photographs as well as video and electronic imaging. Her work has appeared at Birganart (Toronto), Cold City Gallery (Toronto), and she has been a participant in Roundup (Toronto) from 1989 through 1991. She holds a BA from the University of Guelph and currently lives in London, England where she is completing her MA in Visual Arts at Goldsmiths' College. Her copper pieces are being considered for an exhibition at Economist Plaza in London this July, and she has another exhibition at Birganart in the fall of 1993. The work represented in this issue employs images culled from amateur snapshots.

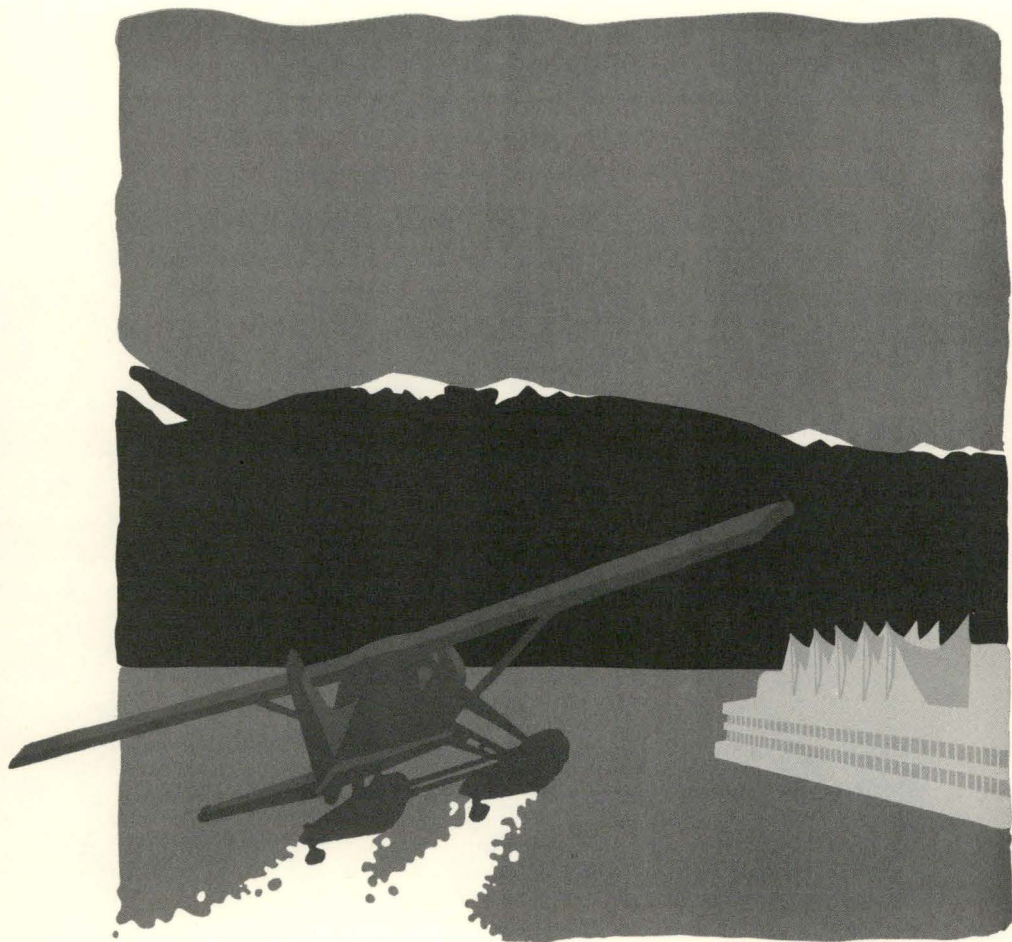
LAZER LEDERHENDLER works as an English instructor and freelance translator in the city of Montreal where he was born. The poems published in this issue are from a book-length collection entitled *The Inner City Exhibits*, which is primarily concerned with the invention of male sexuality and masculinity, and with its connection to the city. He is currently working on a novel (thanks to a Canada Council grant).

KAREN MAC CORMACK's work has been published in magazines in Canada, the USA, the UK and Australia (*Writing, PRISM International, What!, Notus, Triage, Fragmente, Overland*, et al). She was contributing editor to *AVEC* magazine (Pennngrove, California). Her published books of poetry include *Quill Driver* (Nightwood Editions, 1989), *Quirks and Quillets* (Chax Press, 1991). A new book is forthcoming this year: *Implexures* (Chax Press, Tucson). She lives in Toronto.

ROBERTA REES writes prose and poetry. She published a book of poetry, *Eyes Like Pigeons*, with Brick Books in 1992. A novel, *Afterdamp*, recently won the 1992 Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism Fiction Competition, and will be published in the fall of 1993 by Red Deer College Press.

NADINE SHELLY is currently living in Vancouver, although her home is on Salt Spring Island. In 1990, Exile Editions published her first book of poetry, *Barebacked with Rain*, at which time she received the Morley Callaghan Protege Award from the Toronto Arts Award Foundation. Her work has previously appeared in editions of *Exile* and *Grain* magazines, and last year she read at the Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival. Interspersed with travel and study, she is working on a second collection.

ALICE TEPEXCUINTLE is a Vancouver poet interested primarily in performance poetry. She performed most recently with Sheri-D Wilson, Kedrick James, and Coat Cooke in Calgary's High Performance Rodeo in January/93, and her work appeared in the last issue of *The Capilano Review*.



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