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Padin

Text/Image by Clemente Padin (Uruguay)
EDITORIAL:

In this issue of Rampike we reflect on consumer demand. The pressures of consumption have begun to dominate and re-shape our lives. Here, Frank Davey considers the outer limits of our consumer culture, whereas Richard Kostelanetz plays with the aphorisms that shape and give voice to our anxieties and desires. Di Brandt considers human liberty and the Siren songs that seduce us, while M. NourbeSe Philip meditates on slavery and mortality. Steven R. Smith and Stan Rogal both offer homages to writers whose visions have fed our imaginations in the past. Alanna Bondar, Mari-Lou Rowley and Rebecca Rosenblum explore the realms of want and desire, while the iconoclasms of Norman Lock and Adeena Karasick reveal the depths of our own consumptive absurdity. Authors and artists in this issue consider the incongruities of trends in fashion, canonization, decrepitude and indoctrination. -- We take this opportunity to thank you, our readers, who continue to support us by consuming the cerebral delicacies served up by our international cadre of artists, critics and writers. Bon appetite! – Karl Jirgens/Editor
Bernard Heidsieck
Interviewed by W. Mark Sutherland
Interview translation by Noa Lior

Rampike is delighted to feature this interview by W. Mark Sutherland with Bernard Heidsieck, the legendary French poet, artist, performer, and essayist. Heidsieck pioneered a new form of sound-poetry through the use of 20th century recording technology and proposed the poetics of Poésie Action.

“We have to preserve poetry’s flow of oxygen, its ability to act as a mirror where anyone can see themselves…” -- B.H.

W. Mark Sutherland: You began creating the Poème-partition in 1955, and by 1959 the tape recorder was your primary compositional and re-transmission tool. As one of the first artists to link literary experiments to technology, please elaborate on the early influences and reasons that guided this decision.

Bernard Heidsieck: In order to answer this question, we have to place ourselves back in the 1950s, which was a disastrous decade, at least in France, in terms of poetic creativity. We were seeing the last gasps of Surrealism, accompanied by a nauseating inflation of images and metaphors, as well as the appearance of the opposite, of Poésie Blanche, a word here, a word there, a word per page, etc. Poetry was in a ghetto, at a dead end, and no one was reading it. The poem, passive, at the very depth of the page, was waiting for a reader who had become increasingly hypothetical. In 1955, the publisher Seghers had just brought out a small book of mine called Sitôt dit, and I saw first hand what the circulation of poetry was: i.e. nil!

If we still believed in poetry at all something had to be done, which was overturn the order of the factors: from the passive that it was in, it had to be made active, that is, it had to be brought out of the paper and the book and projected into space, reconnected to society, read before an audience, to the public. Therefore, in 1955, I made the difficult decision to radically change my way of writing. I titled these first texts Poèmes-partitions, in a clear reference to music, where a work, which exists as a score [partition], is not really itself, is not fully alive, until this score is performed. The same is true for me with poetry, insofar as the poem, set down on paper, like a simple score, supplies me with rhythms, intensities, paces, etc., and therefore only exists fully as a poem when it is recited aloud publicly.

During that time, I was enthusiastically attending the concerts of Le Domaine Musical that were organized by Boulez, and each time I discovered music that was all new and unexpected. At one of these concerts, when I first heard a work of electronic music, namely Der Gesang Der Junglingen by Stockhausen, where the music, without performers of course, was swirling in the room, I immediately said to myself: “This that we have to do with poetry, project the words into the space (obviously without being drowned out by the music!)."
The purchase of a tape recorder in 1959 was a turning point in this direction. I started first by recording all the *Poèmes-Partitions* ["Score-Poems"] that I had written since 1955 (which allowed me to find my voice, to learn to "read", and to learn this new practice). Of course tape recorders at the time were very basic, mono and did not allow for much. But in 1961 I realized that it was possible to make changes on the recorded track with scissors (for example, to speed up a text by editing out the breaths, etc.), making collages by introducing exterior elements into the text, and so on and so forth … until I bought a new tape recorder, a Revox A700, the Rolls Royce of tape recorders, which was a small factory in itself and made many things possible. That was what was going on at the end of the 1950s and why things happened as they did.

However, I want be clear that I was not the only one to take this turn. Indeed, there were four of us in Paris who, without knowing one another, were using tape recorders in the 1950s to "make" poetry, namely François Dufrêne, the first, from 1953 on, and then in 1959, Henri Chopin, Brion Gysin and myself.

**WMS:** Please elaborate on the differences and similarities between the *Poème-partition* (1955-65), *Biopsies* (1965-69), *Passe-partout* (1969-80), and *Derviche/Le Robert* (1978-86) and how each of these stylistic developments are circumscribed by your definition of *Poésie Action*.

**BH:** I have explained above the reason behind the term *Poème-Partition*. In medicine, as we know, a *biopsie* is the act of taking tissue samples to examine the constituents, and thus possibly the virus, etc. In the second half of the 1960s I created a whole series of poems, which were often short, by lifting out elements not from the human body but from the body of society. Sometimes these were types of "*Poèmes Trouvés*" [Found Poems], found around me, in the economic, administrative, or social spheres (professionally, I was the Assistant Director of a major bank). This world was a mine of information, commonplace or routine, and sometimes fascinating in its stupidity, its impact, its role, its playfulness, its effectiveness, and its usefulness. I have often written that I wanted to make *Poèmes Serpillieres* [Mop Poems], *Poèmes Attrape-Tout* [Catch-All Poems], and *Poèmes Caniveaux* [Gutter Poems] to try and distill the commonplace, the ordinary and the meaninglessness, which form the fabric of everyday life that each one of us experiences.

In 1969, I changed the term *biopsie* to *passe-partout*, very simply because *Biopsie 13* was dedicated to a very good friend – the poem in question was *Portrait-petales* – when he died, while he was learning to fly, with his instructor in a small plane, over the Atlantic near Dakar. I did not want him to be just a number in a series. Therefore, I substituted the term *passe-partout* for the word *biopsie*. This suited my purposes since a *passe-partout* is a key that opens any door (this function thus connects somewhat, indirectly, with the notion of *biopsie/biopsy*).

Moreover, the word *passe-partout* implies anything neutral, undifferentiated, without individual characteristics, which fits in with the commonplace, and dovetails, as previously indicated, with anything and everything, with the gutter. After that came the series *Canal Street* (35 poems), about communication, *Derviche/Le Robert* (26 poems corresponding to the 26 letters of our alphabet, each poem being constructed from the first ten words of the
I said at the beginning of this interview that I had wanted to make the poem “active”, by taking it out of the book, by in some way “standing it upright”, in space, facing the audience (which is not to say that the poem must necessarily be recited standing “upright”, it could be recited on bended knees, seated, while walking, …). The “spoken” poem may involve an “action” but that action should be minimal. Action, in reality, consists in physically absorbing the text and in projecting it into the space, towards the others, breathing into it the energy that is essential for enabling it to reach and captivate the audience.

WMS: Unlike many of your sound-poetry contemporaries from the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, I believe that your creative practice (sound poetry) is not Dada dependant. Would you agree?

BH: I agree. Totally. But! First, you know that André Breton and Surrealism deliberately obscured Dada, which meant that it did not really begin to reappear until the 1970s, with a small exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne, in Paris, with articles in magazines, the reprinting of manifestos, etc.

So this was like reuniting with parents who had been far away, with whom one feels the joy of “reunion”, an instant affinity and understanding. Indeed, we find that their practice of poetry, 50 years before us, was similar to the one that we were striving to establish, to reinvent, after a fashion, without knowing it, namely, that of presenting the poem live, trying it out, physically, concretely, at a specific point in time, to an audience, and thus to society. That being said, the historical conditions were not at all the same. Indeed, if Dada sprang up in a country that was neutral, in Zurich in 1917, it was with a spirit to rail against the carnage and horror that was raging in Europe, all around Switzerland, and thus against the rationalist mindset that gave rise to, permitted and did not oppose this state of affairs, this massacre. It was in this spirit, and it was for this reason that Dada insulted his audience, offended it, to jolt it awake. As for us, we were not at all in similar historical conditions. We had no reason to insult our audience. On the contrary, instead, what we wanted to say to it was: “We are all in the same boat, I have no solution, here is one that I am suggesting to you, do with it as you will.” Similarly, when Dada presented simultaneous texts on stage, it was to say that everything has the same value, that nothing has any importance, that a text can be recited by one or two or three or four people at the same time, and that it is of no importance, for us – and for myself, having widely practiced simultaneity, using a tape recorder – it was not at all in the same spirit, but rather out of a desire to try, using technology, to highlight the simultaneity of sensations, ideas and challenges that we experience in our daily lives.

WMS: The accumulation and negation of semantic values through the use of repetition, ellipsis, nonsequiturs, exclamations, etc. punctuated by sonic ruptures and interruptions create the rhythmic structure in both your recorded work and in your live performances. Do you improvise in live performance or is your live performance always based on maintaining the integrity of the text?
BH: Is there any improvisation in my live performances? None. Often I superimpose my own live voice with the microphone over the same (or another) text, pre-recorded on the tape, which passes through the speakers into the room where I am reading at the same time, and gives me, if I wish it, at that moment, the possibility of departing somewhat from the pre-recorded text, thus doubling in duration and in space the impact of the words.

WMS: Throughout your career you created visual poetry and edited many visual poetry anthologies. What is the relationship between visual poetry to sound poetry and action poetry?

BH: My Écritures/Collages, which were produced, often in series, from the 1970s onwards, belonged, in parallel or in complement, to the path of my Poésie Action since 1955. Indeed, there is a close symbiosis between my Poèmes-partitions, Biopsies, Passe-partout and other sound pieces, and these Écritures [writing] panels to which are added “Collages” of various origins. The first series was the one of Cent foules d’octobre 1970. The challenge was to produce, in one month, 100 panels of writing relating to photographs of crowds. Given the time limit that I had set myself for this work, it was ultra fast, quasi-automatic writing that was inscribed in the speech bubbles popping up from one or another of the people featured in these photographs of crowds. It so happens that my recorded poems abound with the sounds of crowds. The following year saw the creation of 40 Machines à mots. As a banker responsible for, among other things, the machine tools sector, I used photographs of machines, from professional magazines, and made them cough up words. Many pieces in my recorded texts sound as if they are delivered by robots.

Walking on Canal Street in New York in 1974, I bought a whole series of old integrated circuits for a handful of change, with the idea of using them upon my return to France, to produce a series of Écritures/Collages. I made 50 panels, revolving around the general theme of communication, because of the function of these integrated circuits, their origin, Canal Street being an important communications artery in lower New York I also introduced magnetic tape, my working tool, onto these panels. Once completed, these 50 panels ended up at the bottom of a large trunk. Two years later in July 1976, after buying a Revox, I took out my 50 panels again, to make a recording of their texts, which were actually summarized in 35 sound poems that were each recorded in a different way. Canal Street was released as a boxed set of 3 vinyl LPs, and later as a book published by Al Dante, which included 2 CDs.

In 1989 and 1990 successively, two printings of Circuits integers were published by Francesco Conz, in Verona, Italy, and then in 2006, 19 panels, Ici Radio Verona [Radio Verona] made out of radio tubes from old radio stations, and in 2007, 8 panels, along the same lines, called Radio Valescure. To complete this sketch of my work on Écritures/Collages, I will cite Mon Frigo a rendu l’âme, 23 panels produced in 2002, panels for the limited editions of my books by different publishers, and lastly, starting in 2004, the production of 6 different Abécédaires, each of which consist of 26 panels.

WMS: It was an honour, privilege, and pleasure to have been given the opportunity to exhibit my visual/sound poetry alongside your Abécédaires series in the recent exhibition Poetische Positionen II at the Kasseler Kunstverein in Kassel, Germany. Tell me more about these delightfully beautiful visual-poems. How were they created?
Rampike 17/2

BH: In the catalogue for the exhibition “L’un pour l’autre, les écrivains dessinent” which is currently being held at the Institut Mémoires de l’Édition Contemporaine, near Caen, Jean-Jacques Lebel, the curator, writes about my Écritures/Collages: “This term reflects the hybrid nature of Heidsieck’s activities, which are simultaneously sound (he has presented 540 public readings of his texts in about twenty countries), writing, physical and plastic, where the recorded magnetic tapes are used not only as sound material but also as visual material and constituent elements of the collage.”

These Abécédaires [Alphabet series] are composed of letters, of course, but also often of fragments of magnetic tape. Each one of them, a true stylistic exercise that has to be resolved / analyzed / unfurled, should be different than the others, and each Letter must be distinct from the others in the same series, while preserving the style and the spirit of the Abécédaire of which it is a part. Thus these Abécédaires do not ultimately have significance other than that of the very nature of their abstraction and only find their fragile existence definitively in the variety of the play that sets them in place, its desired tension, its variety and, we hope, its fantasy.

WMS: As one of the first artists to create technologically driven literary-experiments in the late 20th century, what does the future of innovative visual and sound poetry look like in the 21st century?

BH: I am not a prophet and I try to stay away from predicting what could happen with respect to poetry in this new century, which is already rich in continuous and rapid innovation. Still, one observation: pervasive computing must be exorcised, and in order to achieve this, penetrated by poetry. There are already efforts in this direction. Embryonic. Sometimes successful, sometimes disappointing. But we have to give it time and above all remain optimistic. It is an exciting challenge. We must keep at it constantly.

One hope, however: it is crucial that technology be controlled. It should not be about being consumed by it, using it merely for the sake of using it. It is critical that we know what to do with it and why we are using it. It should be used as a simple tool, because it is appropriate, whose purpose is to facilitate highlighting the subject that we want to address, develop and raise awareness of. Simply in order to better reveal its relevance. It is important that this technology, current or future, does not plunge poetry back into a new ghetto, accessible only to a small elite, a ghetto from which we have succeeded, I believe, and not without difficulty, in extracting it, in order to put it out in the open, without false modesty, upright, to enable it to be displayed, to be recognized and accepted as it is. That it not be monopolized again, in rarity, by a few specialists, at the risk of becoming a kind of new scholasticism of the 21st century, unknown and dead to all. We have to preserve poetry’s flow of oxygen, its ability to act as a mirror where anyone can see themselves, and remain familiar and present for everyone, regardless of the degree of technology that it thinks or will think it should incorporate. The risk exists. It is there. It is there. I know it well. It is knocking at the door. Beware!

W. Mark Sutherland (wmarksutherland.com) is a Canadian intermedia artist. He shared the stage with Bernard Heidsieck at Viatge a la Polinesia Sound-Poetry Festival (Barcelona, Spain, 1999). He has exhibited with Heidsieck in Poesia Totale (Mantova, Italy, 1998), Ad Libitum (La Spezia, Italy, 2003), and Poetische Positionen II (Kassel, Germany, 2006).
“Screeeeem” by Mark Laliberte (Canada)
MINIATURE APHORISMS
by Richard Kostelanetz

Make love, not war -- 1960s wisdom.
(For Napthali (Tuli) Kupferberg, whose “Kill for peace” is exemplary)

Gentlemen prefer gentle girls.
Guns shoot attackers dead.
Avoid archaic pronunciations.
Combat ants.
Always incorporate exit strategies.
Don’t bet on Chihuahuas.
Go up from down.
Inflate everyone’s sagging ego.
Befriend better friends.
Repel poisons with palliatives.
Stupidity makes intelligence apparent.
Embarrass your antagonists’ admirers.
Be cranially retentive.
Support inferiors, exploit superiors.
Enjoy every lover’s loving.
Be everyone’s best friend.
Relish spiders for breakfast.
Ring ropes enclose boxing.
Make every day efflorescent.
Sexual congress facilitates friendship.
“Noneofyourbusiness” is my motto.
Classic writing’s never forgotten.

Minimal aphorisms approximate poetry.
Learn Chinese in bed.
Accumulate nuggets of wisdom.
Imagine high, negotiate widely.
Impatient, run, don’t walk.
Spin in counter-concentric circles.
All dead are dead.
Support your favorite saints.
Read books over newspapers.
Design your own gravestone.
Rain rains rain.
Savor stray aphorisms.
Pennies piled become dollars.
“All rough sex” is tough.
Backwards run affected sentences.
Anti-bodies cure diseased bodies.
Make risk-free speculations.
Time’s your only “money.”
She sells sea shells.
Can aphorisms be ironic?
Command everyone’s attention.
Excavate residues from life.
Shrewd fools often win.
What’s imperishable becomes classic.

Mind your shadow.

Elope with rich women.

Divorce lovers, marry husbands.

Enshrine your mother-in-law’s mother.

Sleep all you need.

Don’t kill for peace.

Inoculate yourself against addictions.

Shout truth at power.

Silly aphorisms compliment solemnity.

Aim higher over lower.

Praise yourself before others.

Truths eventually smother lies.

Sleep in several beds.

Money can’t buy love.

Snobs disclose their frailty.

Drunks alienate, don’t engage.

Don’t disappoint inexplicably.

If drink, don’t drive.

Always pee into bowls.

Death stops all heels.

Eat healthy, drink extravagantly.

Love me past perpetuity.

Tick tock, tick tock.

Imagine your own universe.

What is soon was.

Repel violence with presence.

Be not an island.

Can aphorisms incorporate chronology?

Be a modest mentor.

Pronounce “colonel” as “kernel.”

Respect culture over heredity.

Let’s achieve 100% unemployment.

Be indefensible before foes.

Aspire to invisible humility.

Prefer sun to moon.

Nice guys finish proudly.

Take liberty over subservience.

To yourself don’t lie.

Fish didn’t “discover” water.

All activities end.

Whirlpools devour everything.

For deception alarms sound.

Don’t discredit superior judgment.

Write to be remembered.

Consider minimalism a constraint.
EXCEED YOUR LIMITS
by Frank Davey
(for Peter Jaeger)

Will we lose our tax status if we exceed our limits? How far will we exceed our limits? The sales price of the home does not exceed our limits. Your gross annual income does not exceed our limits. We will always turn around or seek safe harbor if conditions exceed our limits. Ensure that the total size does not exceed our limits per registration (above). If the winds exceed our limits during that time, we will not launch. If we exceed our limits we might receive harsh replies from our dear friends which will make u feel more worse. We exceed our limits when we use loudspeakers for our voices to impose our talk – such as in car loudspeakers, advertisements with loudspeakers. During the eighties most of us managed to exceed our limits. Viatel allows us to exceed our limits, without upping the monthly cost. It's like an overdraft limit that shifts with your bank balance.

If people like Al Gore are buying up all available credits, that makes it pretty hard for any of us to exceed our limits now doesn't it. Most users will never exceed our limits. Most of us have decided that we cannot exceed our limits and that stress is an unavoidable condition of life. We need to support them, but they exceed our limits. It is chock-full with experiments that teach everything from why our bones are so strong to how nature and technology help us exceed our limits. If you continue to exceed our limits, we reserve the right to suspend or terminate your service in accordance with the Terms for 3 Services. We reserve the right to delete your free ads if they exceed our limits. Robotics was born, a very long time ago, of the human desire to exceed our limits. But to enumerate every act of firmness of magnanimity of virtue which distinguishes this man would far exceed our limits. We have decided to keep on trying to achieve our constant progress, the rendering of services on a regular basis and at a high level, so as to exceed our limits and satisfy our commitments. Nevertheless, once in awhile we exceed our limits!

If file sizes exceed our limits, we may return to you to resubmit properly sized. Some might add that we also exceed our limits on ground that shouldn't be cropped and would be better suited and managed with other yields like grasses. There is a $50 charge per person or vehicle per night for guests who exceed our limits. We at BestMark will monitor shopper cancellations and reschedules and reserve the right to terminate shoppers who exceed our limits in these areas. We'll exceed our limits and we'll suffer for it. Contains links to outbound images that greatly exceed our limits. Add purchases as soon as they are made to keep track of how much credit is still available so that we do not exceed our limits. If you have web space elsewhere you can also post pics from there as long as you don't exceed our limits. That way it wont exceed our limits. The results of this query are expected to exceed our limits. Its better to be safe than sorry, especially in regards to such a huge issue, because once we exceed our limits of population it will be very hard to turn the table. Bear in mind that you can only do so through our e-commerce processor if you don't exceed our limits.

We have seen no evidence that there are clubs on tour that exceed our limits. Remember, hunter numbers are limited based on population, and we will not exceed our limits set by the biologist. Out of respect to Allah who gives us that position, we should not exceed our limit. Who gave us our limits, to let us to think, “we can exceed our limits, we have none, we are free?” what laws would govern that we should think ourselves? The nursery cannot accept a child without advance reservations if it would
cause the class size to exceed our limits. As leaders we seek challenges and accept opportunities to test our abilities, to exceed our limits. At least we should. The example of the numerous rowers who have raced at the international level and in the Olympics, serves to “inspire us to push and exceed our limits on a daily basis.” Now more gain a whole lot less pain (we still try to exceed our limits!). At the time of issue the Target Amount of this Rider cannot exceed Our limits then in effect. It is useless to want to exceed our limits: we are inherently limited, since we are creatures. Without struggle we would never be forced to exceed our limits, to stretch ourselves. To achieve our potential. With technology these days, it's no wonder we can exceed our limits and reach to the sky. I think in that case we wouldn't see the travel cause it would exceed our limits. Teachers must time their music in advance to make certain that it does not exceed our limits. It would greatly exceed our limits to attempt a description of the congregation. The amount applied for Business buy-out coverage may not exceed our limits; by "our limits," we mean the maximum Business buy-out coverage we offer to new applicant.

Initial screening is performed on these funds, similar to that of the brokerage list, eliminating highly volatile funds or those that exceed our limits on redemption fees. To enumerate the vestments, ornaments, jewels, relics, and altar vessels of gold and silver set with precious stones, would far exceed our limits. Check the size of the cache so we don't exceed our limits. We exceed our limits. It would much exceed our limits to attempt even a description of this justly celebrated Fonthill. It would exceed our limits even to enumerate the devices which have been tried by different swindlers with greater or less success.

We never got contented with what we have, with what we could give each other, we keep on asking for more, we always want to exceed our limits. However, knowledge makes humans powerful allowing us to exceed our limits and therefore, SETI and SETI@home is an invaluable endeavour. This very remarkable, and on the whole, unique monument of British antiquity, has been the subject of so much antiquarian re-search and learned discussion, that it would far exceed our limits even briefly to notice the variety of opinions, theories and suppositions which have been published concerning its origin and purpose. But at times their expectations exceed our limits, causing us to disappoint or wrong them. It would exceed our limits to insert the comparison between the calculations and the facts stated in the reports for the years 1762, 1765, and 1779. TriNet will provide the necessary support for effective and high-quality decisions to exceed our limits in an environment of complete accountability. We should far exceed our limits were we even very briefly to trace the progress of the Company, which rapidly extended in importance and magnitude. Making sure we don't exceed our limits for 2005 and years past (if anything is left?).

To give even the titles of all his shorter papers would exceed our limits, on which we have already trespassed. Our flow would exceed our limits. Even a bare epitome of all the results obtained would exceed our limits. Eventually our excesses exceed our limits and we end up with a polluted and stripped world whose environment collapses, bringing down whole societies, leading to war, famine, the end of global culture, and the dawn of a new dark age. Our limits of understanding are beginning to exceed our limits to construct representational models. Nsite will monitor shopper cancellations and reschedules and reserve the right to terminate shoppers who exceed our limits in these areas. In a moderate sized playlist we keep accumulating memory until we exceed our limits and crash.
5 Poems
by Di Brandt

1)

If

if Mrs. K
if mice
if cracks in the basement
if toxic silt
if plum-sized tumours
if carp
if whooping cranes
if PCBs
if angry river gods
if red dwarves
if bullets
if Madonna
if fluorescent lights
if poison darts
if casinos
if zebra shrimp
if ships
if mercury
if Donald Trump
if sturgeon
if dioxin
if rap
if bridges
if General Motors
if Otello
if pulsitilla
if we
if toxic silt
if resonance
if dolphins
if tigers
if elephants
if we
if polar bears
if elm trees
if bees
if we
Actions I thought were absurd if not outright insane in my clear-eyed salad days, but now I’m not so sure (and other such troubling questions)

Fiddling while the world burns.

Holding your child in your arms as she’s dying of Spanish influenza, even if it means you’ll probably be the next.

Not ever figuring out how to talk to your brother.

Sending out green shoots and leaves even if the bank has crumbled and your trunk is already half submerged in the rushing river.

Rocking back and forth, and back and forth, in your spot behind the door, and knotting up the handkerchief your grandmother sent for your birthday in a thousand lumpy sweaty love knots.

Running up and down the street with your hair streaking out wildly behind you, howling.

Not having a clue what happens next in the moment after no clothes.

Crowning yourself with weeds on the thunderstruck heath.

Walking through fire.
3)

Ah, Catalpa

Arigato, Catalpa, for Thy grand green plenitude of leaves, showered all in an hour over the front yards of Winona Drive this splendid Toronto morning in the middle of November, smelling slightly sweet, slightly sour, I would fain ask Thee for advice in this strange season, yet I see Thou art Thyself confused, are we heading for winter, or is it spring, shall we reflower or thicken our coats, which gods shall we turn to in this dire moment of earth’s turning, earth’s churning, spasm of cough, spit, phlegm of detritus from the deep seas, made by us two-leggeds, I’m afraid, I’m afraid, perhaps we deserve indeed to shrivel up in the heat of our own manufactured fog, smog, excessive investment in speed and power, so much undegradable garbage from Thy point of view, ah, Catalpa, should we learn to shed our midsummer glories as Thou hast done, all at once, grandly, making the decisive turn toward winter in the midst of reluctant, confused warnings, dire to ears that can hear, leaves that shiver and breathe as they inhale light, exhale might, signalling to us, in this dreadful poignant tender frightening moment, the approach of huge planetary changes, celestial re-alignment, hurtling headlong into our own human-made technicoloured terrible night?
4)

Santa on Bloor

So, would you be happy or sad, Grampa
to see yr white-bearded round-bellied likeness
red velvet-suited in every shop window,
yr grotesquely inflated plastic self
bobbing up and down along Bloor Avenue
mounted on stiff styrofoam reindeer?

Quite a feat, Grampa! even when you
were living yr beard was anomalous, odd,
regressive against razors and shaving cream,
but you held out, fierce, proud, flaunting
your traditionalism and simplicity, but also
patriarchy, Abraham over Isaac, white
bearded Nobodaddy lording it over us, yet
at Winter Xolstice you bowed your head
reverently before the Divine Mother and Child,
who came to us in the night and promised us
Light, the pang of the sacrifice of her Son
in the Spring adding a bittersweet note
to everything: you of course couldn’t have
foreseen your apotheosis as the American
globalizing Sugar Water God, lording it over
downtown Toronto’s Postmodernist Feminist
Multiculti Gay Pride, our dreams of peaceful
democratic commerce now bitterly crucified,
but if you had, Grampa, if you had, would it
have made you happy or sad, would you have
thot it a good thing or bad, to have substituted
the worship of an Old Man, looking so much like
yourself, for that other more ancient dyad, at once
more civilized and wild, of Mother and Child?
5)

**Siren song**

Hey there Robocop Terminator
Viagra Man why don’t you
take off those steel-toed boots
and clanking suit and hard
hard hat and sit down with me
with me a spell Here let me
unbutton you a button or two one more
one more one more ooooh

ooooooh Meccano Man what
a hot heaving chest you have under

all that tin singes my fingers
nearly to a crisp! O Action Man

what’s this what’s this what a girly man
you are after all now that your under

armour’s off trembling like an earthquake
a river a leaf crying like a baby

for the lover you left in Iraq in Afghanistan
your furtive secret under a scraggly

fig tree in purple moonlight ssssh
one more kiss one more one more oooah

shivering shivering all night long for
the big-eyed children you ordered shot

in the desert where once bloomed
the beautiful gardens of Eden and Babylon

falling like stars like dead bees
their blood flowing like spilled honey

like oil like rare precious wine
great black gashes across the yellow sand
Image by Jürgen O. Olbrich (Germany)
POEMS by M. NourbeSe Philip
Including excerpts from the OS section of Zong!

ZONG! # 2

the throw in circumstance

the weight in want

in sustenance

for underwriters

the loss

the order in destroy

the that fact

the it was

the were

negroes

the after rains

Wafor Yao Kehinde Bolade Kibibi Kamau
ZONG! # 4

this is
not was
or
should be
this be
not
should be
this
should
not
be

is

Lipawiche Aziza Chipo Dada Mazi
THERE IS

creed there is

fate there is

oh

oh oh

there are

oh oh

ashes

over

Ifá

Ifá

Ifá I

fa

fa

fall

&

over the crew

touching there is fate

there is

creed there is

there is

oh

the oha sobs

again Ifá

Ifá Ifá I

fá over

the seven seas

this time

ora

ora
WITHIN

within ora time
ora pro
this is but an ora

tion time sands
the loss within i am

lord

of loss visions over and

over the o ba sobs

no provisions how many
days how long where being is thirst & thirst

be being she falls rob

and rob her how I lost count fortunes

over she falls last from

tere to here bring them from is
to wa s sow

the seas

with she negroes ma

n negroes murder my lord

my liege lord my deus

my us my fate

my god sun

der crew own

from captain from slave under

from writer from
MORTALITY

mortality
le mort le
mort le p'tit mort
scent of mortality
she
falls
ifafaf
falling to
port
over
&
over
my fortunes
a sin you say
video video vide o who says i
say a
rose a rose
for Ruth and for t
ruth sup pose truth
then find
ing a way
found a port
a rule ought
evidence suppose then t
ruth a rose
over
Text/image by Jürgen O. Olbrich (Germany)
POEMS
by Steven Ross Smith

Three Palimpsests for Daphne Marlatt

i.

A hand reaches

as if an undreamed-of dream surges from

a wrinkle in prune-dark sleep

throws a shadow-startle down a throat

(a gurgle of barks?)

thunder

    limbs reed-like, water-tossed

    a shudder of tendrils

chokes off the blush of sun

a clutch of fisted throats

a grasp of thin fingers slips, fingers brush fear

’s Eros wells

of water tumbling crazed snatch at solid no solid ground-gone-legless in tumult reeling water

unswimmable dark pitch wet-whirl moment’s nightsweat nightmare-come-real

batters undoes unroots unbattens

obliterates

reclaims
sudden
prayer apparent at a lip’s (as if slipped)
moist words
canny sun
shines or shuns (as if to challenge)
branching oxygen machines
stand steady on stern trunks (as if they know themselves)
offering – air, whisper
to vaporous unpredictable clouds (as if un-cloaking,
the prayer) opens
a shelter of leaves (crackle)
a weave of wool (chafes the neck)
a gold-rush (in the chest)
or lances an ache’s crush
from lungs to mouth-chamber
over lips
a current of air (as if)
involuntary
song
handful or hillside of geomantic dirt divines disturbance
(stasis: an assumption of soil)
thrown soil radiant with signs and seams of loosening a random carom-crush of mud, the used-to-be-root-laced-firmament, unthreaded, untethered dirt, a tossed weight slumps shoulders swathes earth, citizens

a surround of trees leans
teeters with air’s and earth’s grumble a stir (since they are lungs)
some tumble some stand poised to save (air, soil) from poisonings

as with earth, flesh

(some say we invoke, invite our fates)
some stand some fold fold-in (thanatos)
look for a sign a shun
uncanny short -sighted (sight)

this moment unrooted (act!) gone in less than a toss, slides away but soil will lurch again
Slip
Emanation for Paul Celan

You lose syllables,
(an elegant table
    of elements,
    fragments, goes
    periodic)
once savoured conversations slip

Tongue hosts hesitation, caesura
An instant draws wide
its volumes, air love splits in it
where you once flexed it, furrowed
    it, it falls

slips from once rich soil, becomes brittle, the crust of another
    its scooped-out weight

You shed, hollowing, identity dissembles
an army on both sides in shambles, neither
an innocent

who claims possession, neither an aggressor?

Wordless, stasis abrades love to smitherens

What you knew
you lose again

In the heart, a grating ache
a snap-locked prison-gate ache
a throated speechless gasp, everything
rides that air

everything
but you
escapes
Haibun suite
by Alanna Bondar

Haibun #2

Between boards I walk a game of twister, alone the colours of fresh earth, shapes of the body. Everyone else is underground, the space between dirt and breathing. There is no blood here, no colour, no bones. In each step I hear him leaving, every day a new sound stretching closer. Time-walls are thin tonight, paper thin. So thin I can see the future. I fix his pillows, a tilted painting, hand him a teddy bear, count his collection of hats and then forget the number. This feeling of wanting. I meet a friend at the party who tells me he doesn’t exist. If you met him here, you met him 100 years ago. This house is abandoned. I said yes lying in the dark. Five days in Dublin and I am too late again to do anything but lie on pillows, play at twister between my fingers, toss the dice toward the station, taking a do-not-pass-go card leaving by taxi. Beneath the cardboard of your walls, you leave me the smell of vanilla, sips from the broken bedside glass, and mornings filled with your undead.

Dissolving /the ground beneath us /and then
Haibun #5

There’s a violence here in knowing scratch to blood tetanus rusty makes a vein furrowed to brow, place to path, path to placelessness.  *Fingers count to start again and again, fingers count to start again fingers start fingers start again to count: quarter note, half, rest rest, quarter note quarter note.*  I have these diseases in my veins like armour hardening the count to time.  This blood a virus; old tables a tree watching families disintegrate around individual servings, *the fall and fall and fall* until you are forever their centre counting and counting voices dim the light, lightly emanating from sublime in trees, trees the vanishing point.  Stripped of leaves, leave notes.  *Fingers count to start to start to start fingers.*  I could not live long here, here in your landscape.  Do not point me into barbs and fences and long paper-cut grass.  I will not you in clouds, colour rust.  Leaves that fall/ biospheric notes without/ endless unsustainable screams/ hag to chest unwavering.  The leaves that fall here break the edges of Lake Superior’s cliff carried as if by hurricane to the moment of my birth.  Breech and mangled head I taste the leaves that fall, the leaves that fall, fall.  I taste the leaves.

*Tom Thompson/ these notes/ underwater a speck of colour*
Haibun #7

Transmigration of the soul, the sparrow takes out his notebook, checks the list. Behind him, deep focus the camera spies a glass coffin filling with sand. He will not turn to flip it over. The subtitle reads blank. My uncle attempts to settle his will, willed contentious/ misses the mark/ strikes me. His portraits, members of the family hang on this wall’s hallway after hallway after hallway; he decides who will get which head and shoulders/ leads me to their frames. But something’s lost in the translation: these are portraits, master glazes, animals he’s killed. We are each to receive one at the reading of the will but he’s forgotten to write it down. Instead he writes *keep out, no access, eviction and sixty days /another death*. The inheritors painted into his frames before midnight; a man stands at the end of my bed pleading. I see only his threat and screen liquid amber. In that split second between terror and waking my mouth opens a sound/ inside of light; it obliterates the black sparrow who has no notebook and no words and no dream language /no broken chain of events. When I ride outside the lines, words I have never spoken appear less and less formed until nothing like anything I have every known remains. Not the memory of *Este Lauder*, purple sea-shells in halves, porcelain miniatures, Paul’s bakery and lunch in the old house smell with huge chunks of cheese, butter tarts, grapes and kielbasa. When effluence plucked from inside me returns, I find only sparrow-shadows branding my face a tattoo of feathered skin in fantastic detail.

**Imposters inside the frames, an interruption, the waves of Hokurai sweep**
Haibun #28

The tongue is a beak is a tongue is a beak/ s(poke)n words tangled moving through and the tongue /rests pointed /is a beak pecking words into a silence tasting the bitter edge of grey. A sparrow’s nest/ lost are the words that live lif(e) down the tongue; named /without articulation is a beak is /hard against the air never /forcing the wide-open mouth-shut paradox of prayer. Say O. Say read it again/ and bring back the ice house. //The beak /is a tongue that cannot tube, flat /to fold is a sound from lips like slugs /across the green, eats /feathers like words chanting funerals full of holes; the tongue /is a beak is a word pecked /out of order /silently withdrawn and inside eaten /the tongue is a beak /a beak a /beak the /tongue is /a /beak /the word and the wing /the tongue is a circle is a hollow /rock is a soft beak made for landing is /a voice in silent wing. Is a /flight /is a flight /is a flight into /high words flown/ schools of light lifted from wings /flow(n) in unison. But the beak.// The beak is a tongue, is the lip of the mouth, and when silent, /the beak is still just a beak.

circle/ the body/ throws/ lies grass/ prefers blue to black
“Hello Hello”
by Rebecca Rosenblum


“I’m in the produce section. Produce. Do you want anything? Like, oh, I don’t know….skinny green scallions like blades of grass? Rock hard nectarines imported from countries with complicated governments? Fresh crisp radishes with their skins all neon red? Neon. Bitter, radishes taste bitter…bitter as a thrown wedding ring. No, no, probably you wouldn’t like them. No. I don’t like them either. I don’t think anybody does. Sure are beautiful, though. So very red.


“No, no, I wasn’t yelling at you, I didn’t mean it like that. It’s a weak signal. The walls in these superstores are like bunkers. You’re not bothering me. I didn’t mean it like that. I want to bring you something. From the grocery store, just something small. Is there something you would like? Are you listening to me?

“No, I’m not at Whole Foods. Sorry. No Frills. Sorry. I’m sorry. No Frills. The one with the yellow sign. The prices are lowered and locked, locked and lowered, I forget which. They are very reasonable, I find. Find…find…find. Really. What was that noise?

“Raspberries? No, not this time of year. December burns raspberries ash-grey. Even the imported ones. Even from California. By the time they cross this dark-hearted winter continent they are clouds of mold. Well, maybe some places sell them, but I wouldn’t recommend them, they’ll be moldy. I find that. Well, I do. I do. I… Yes, I could be wrong. I could be. I could try winter raspberries sometime, just to see if I’m wrong. Just not today. I’m not up to it today. No. Well, they don’t have them anyway.

“Listen, I’m blocking other carts, I’m going to circle through meats and give you time to think about what you want. I do love you. I do. I do—I know you know that. I love you pineapple sweet and mustard forever. You know I love you. What? I said love.

“Grapes? I think I saw some, lemme check. Is the blender on? Is there someone with you? …there’s grapes. Of course I’ll buy you grapes. Grapes…Grapes. There’s a lot of kinds here, do you know what you want? No, no, that’s ok, who ever really does? We can do this. We can intuit this. I do this. Every day I try to guess what you want and then I try to bring it to you. No, I want to. I want to bring you grapes.

“Oh, I shall bring you grapes, my love, yes, I shall bring you grapes. Grapes from valleys sunk between the heights of icy-hearted mountains. Grapes that were plucked so gently that their vines did not even tremble. Tremble. I said tremble. Shake.
“Let’s start simply. Let us— Is there someone there? Are you by the sea? Is that the surf? All right, let’s focus. Let us begin at the beginning. Red or green or black? Grapes. Red or green or black grapes? Try to focus. Seeds or seedless? Yes…that’s true, that is true; red and black are lies—both are really purple, more or less dark-hearted, depending. Yes…it’s true, no one likes seeds. So then there is really only one choice, one honest choice.

“No, I don’t mean to rush you. I just thought I had it. I didn’t have it. I see that now. I see it. See it. I see it. I do. Take your time. Imagine sweetness, imagine roundness. Imagine firm fat grapes, the flavourless smooth skin. Imagine rolling a single grape round and wet on your tongue, the precarious moment when your heavy teeth dig in. Imagine the gush of thready flesh, the squirt of sugar at the back of your throat, that cool juice moving against your softly closed lips, as you crush that grape to nothing. Crush it. Crush. Destroy, flatten, mash. You know what I mean.

“Do you know what I mean? Can you feel it? The grape, I mean, the juice. Can you taste it? Can you hear me? Are you getting this? Hello? Hello? I’m losing you. I don’t know what you are imagining. I think you are picking up other signals. Are you listening? Are you sure there is no one there? Are you imagining the grape juice glistening on your lips? Or are you imagining a single bird lofting on a breeze 170 feet above a vineyard, the smallest quiver of the vines in that breeze, the smallest quiver of my lips as you lick them.

“Or are you just imagining me? Do you ever imagine me when I am not there? Imagine me as I stand here. Here. Here, beneath the gaze of fluorescent rods on the ceiling, beneath the gaze of tired grapeless loveless people. I am making a spectacle of myself here in the produce section. My fellow shoppers are hard and unloving as they unravel the plastic bags. My coat is shapeless and salt stained, my hair curls limp over the edge of my silver earpiece at the side of my face. My face. Do you remember my face?

“I will bring it to you, my love. My face, these grapes, this craziness that seizes me when I think of your mouth filled with this fruit that I will bring you. I am going to buy all the grapes, you don’t need to decide. I will bring you everything. I will be there soon. Soon. Soon. Me. I will be. I think I’m losing you.

“I can’t hear you. I hear interference. I hear other voices. Is there someone there? The static is getting thicker. I’ve got to go, these walls get to be like bunkers when I’m unhappy. I must take my purchases and go stand in line. I’ll be there soon. What? What? Soon. I must go. I’m coming to you. I have to go. I’m losing you.”
Suicide Psalms
By Mari-Lou Rowley

21
mood portal
tongue in groove
swerve control
the better to steer you by
my dear
rough terrain, hurricanes

swelling in the brain
encephalitic ensilage
fodder for future
fits and storms

another kind of weather mapping

serotonin gauge
hormonal readouts
neuronal firing
electrocardio impulses
fluid secretion rate
blood flow

serous intentions
heinous intervention

34
keen shuttle
back and back again
road enclosure
a broad brush to
wash you out with
stroke after stroke
picaresque
the shrill hee hee
white-throated
sparrow laugh
underbrush erasure
ants and flies
ravens and crows
carrion cleaners
gaze into the swirl of ferns
spiral down into thick brush
sink down into soft moss
dissolve to black
discandied
atom by atom
quark by quark
flavour by flavour
37
heart hollow, hypertrophic
a dilation of longing
dream paths that go on and on
didactic distances
take this corner, up these stairs
a woman in a washroom
a chef with a cleaver
run running
leg ache intensified
with each leaden step
erratic heartbeat

the panic of the chase
of being so lost
so late
so empty

substance less
intransient trespasser
interloper in life
incapable of coherence
drifting fractals of self
spiral out and away

39
neuropathic ever since
gone a long while
the nebulous leverage
of leave-taking
slinking off silently
remorse inversely incremental
to relief

he remembers the mole
soft brown nevus a cluster
of vessels on her shoulder

her body a vessel
to lose oneself in
her seas deep, turbulent
swells and storms

inhaling incidental in the
whirlpool vertigo
eyes closed, mouth open
a drowning thing she laughs

he laughs over beer
with the boys
eyes closed, mouth open
a long swallow
another
and another
whirling vertigo
nightly drowning
gorge reward
anon anon
the horizon just over there
there
the lip the edge
the ledger
rolled in throes of thunder
names called anonymously

you for dithering madly
you for blame and curse
you for nothing
nil nada

echo exit, tensile
taut
scalene sinew
jugular sheaths

disappointment
a hard line
a dull knife
an unsteady hand

anglers indulging
phosphorus bliss rends out
bottom feeders
from dank mud
the reek of methane
algae overkill

understandably in the afternoon
ontological
a bonding event
father, son
barbed hook catches lip ring
slice and screech

ravens such angry birds
forest goths
kill joys
nihilists

you owe me you sonofabitch

a day in the sun
dangerous history
4 POEMS
by David Hickey

Channel Markers

Never float up from underwater shipyards
where lost deckhands are

hammering a new sky; are neither copper islands
or rusted moons, the muted

bells of flooded monasteries, Christmas ornaments
or fallen space

capsules, pteragon shells or petrified mammals
tied by chain.

They offer little more than highway
signs, a tip and nod to passing boats:

a starboard red, an outgoing
green, their bodies the aftermath of gulls.

Once, though, like a cork lost in a milk bottle,
I stood at the bottom of one,

the marker sawed in half and planted in a backyard
garden, cleaning the metal sides

while goldfish woke around my ankles.
I watched as each one arrived from hibernation;

a dozen orange leaves
blown clear of the spring snow,

they traveled back and forth
as though they had not spent winter

along the marker’s bottom, but were emerging
from another body

of water, swimming up now through
the open buoy, which felt like a hole in the sea.
Several Possible Explanations for the Appearance Then Disappearance of a South African Parakeet in Western Labrador

1. It was a stowaway, a colourful hat worn through customs by the daughter of an immigrant mining family.

2. It flew out of a couch’s pastel patterns, a musty living room spirit drawn to the wallpaper’s vines.

3. It was perpetual: it poked holes in the children’s snowsuits.

   It talked to shovels, the snow puddles drying in the porch. It was curiosity all covered with feathers:

   summer trying to understand the thermometer’s fall.

4. It must have looked at winter with the ambition of a sun tan salesman:

   seeing its chance to make millions, it flew out an open window, flapping like an assembly of flags.

5. It was a collection of salvation army handkerchiefs, a hand glider in a hail storm, a sea urchin arguing with an assembly of waves.

6. It must have flown for blocks: its lungs going asthmatic, drying like wrinkled apricots

   while the chambers of its heart migrated to opposite poles.

7. It disappeared into us, into the extended forecast, the woods’ imagination, the streetlights’ stationary tribe.
Bypass
Left to its own designs, the heart might choose
to pump water instead, might dig into a plain
of earth until it struck an underground stream,
cause that cold drink to surface, then crawl
back into some sleeping chest. Take this one:
its ribs warmed under the steam of the electric
scalpel while the surgeon’s hand worked to seal
the body against its own flooding, then closed
the cavern, the heart like a sunless fruit,
a fistful of leaves pulled from a damp garden.
The scar as a gill, a thin schism closing over
time, proof of some other life, perhaps at sea.

Early Morning Sojourn
At this hour, the toilet is also
the shell of an animal
whose bodies fills the house
with its lull, the soft
growl of the bowl at streetlights,
the silo of an armless bell.

It’s handle needs to be pressed
at, needs to be jiggled, needs
to be held, the flush slightly
off since water first
fell through its valves not long
after the house was built.

The toilet arrived then
like a beacon, pink in pick-up
tuck’s sky. It appeared
complete with ports for pipes,
with factory dust,
the porcelain not yet chipped
from a plumber’s impatience.
Each night it waits for new
company, for the shuffle of bare
feet in the hall, a stark figure
to stand in the doorway,
swaying a hymn to darkness.
HOMAGE SUITE
by Stan Rogal

ISLAND
Milton Acorn

“I worry about the shape of my skull”

Grimly outlined by the salt squall
in such grey matter it hung
uncertain
to the finish, as:
what might come of it?

Here, &, alive at the margins (barely)
the famous writer, pensive, now stops & lights a cigar.

Delivered on a plate to a vengeful Salome?
Split apart by wisdom’s leggy kick?
Gone to line mackinaw men with a fine-combed tooth?
No carpenter with a cross to bear
could drive the nail
so deep as this beerfog boy
nor cause such unholy stir
that shivered timbers of Trotskyites & Snarks the same.
Who had been known to give skull to a minor
took serious to heart.
Boldfaced, fer sure, brass-balled & backwoodsy
with a sprawl of crags, crevasses &

thick underbrush ghosted down for the count.

Boo!
Call him Ishmael. Call him Shadow-maker.
Who’d’ve sparked a fine grave roller if provisioned a rat’s ass chance, instead, was bushwhacked; cut off at the neck & made a bust.
Through no fault, save, to preserve a mean reputation,
meaning, apart the common red dirt that conjures an island from this twisted wreckage

(say: pee-eye, say: spud, say: Minago)

sprung a low brow cast of dead fish; so-called people’s poets
with little taste for blood – their own or any other reckless spill,
&
beyond the uneasy drift of smoke & ash from the vacant socket
pronounced a breed of missionary position
set to bugger waters generations to follow
with their thin colourless milt.
CIRCA 1970
Margaret Atwood

“The body buries itself”

Methinks the lady doth protest too much, tho,
hard pressed to venture who’s who in this punished space.
Whether Susanna taken down river, her lean yard cordoned,
her now inviolate carcass a’buzz with the violet pulse of
skeeters, black flies, no-see-ums
noumenal glow canted toward
  no art
  no song
  no asylum
  no taste of tea & oranges
merely an institution set to cough in its dead
at the least suspicion: cholera, tuberculosis, paranoid
schizophrenia
orgasm
  any similar melancholic deemed hysteric
for the time.

Or perhaps some further itinerant hobbled
mad as a March guerre that ate at wood too sparse
to call a forest.
Who waxed a lonely figure herself
marked a duplicate X in the frosted field
laid out as she was in traditional garb:
  hair shirt
  shaved head
  gooseflesh anointed with ashes
  feet bound in chicken wire & doused in kerosene

mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa...

What might normal be considered country matters
goes bats in this fresh wilderness,
revolts against the brainpan &
  (her favoured sex having no place in this rough bush, seems)
turns tale, seeks transformation toward the other
all the while forgot
  one can never fully be aware
  the exact moment skin barks, fleece constricts
  & horns cut deep into the skull, set, as ever, to grind
a moody girl to rapture
  even as the first shovel threatens to fill the hole.
warm exes
Charles Bukowski

“how many dead beasts float and walk from Wales to
Los Angeles?”

there are those horses, those ones that boast a lineage,
that post as favourites, but finish dead last
no one questions
that stagger & drop at the wire in photo-ops of
delirious tremors
& shit ampoules of PCP out the ass of their dying
while we murdered tear up our ticket stubs
no one is surprised
we check our programs, ask about the wife, the kids,
ogle the tarted-up bleached blonde
with the duck lips & silicone tits
pressed tight to a player wearing a wedding ring
& two fingers jammed up her quim
lucky bastard
we scratch our bellies

& light our cigarettes for the next big fix
even as the twitching carcasses are dragged
to the local glue factory
no one is bothered
later, these brutes return to haunt
the glass of our beer mugs
they peer at us through eyes of warm exes
their noses daubed with angel dust
their horsey ears pricked with foam
their long faces bright with visions of
Eliot with his trousers rolled
Schopenhauer with his sufficient reason to exist
(beyond evil & loneliness, one guesses)
& what does it matter in the final dissolution?
snow fills the TV screens of America
& those horses, those ones with neither
a penny to spare nor a pot to piss in
kick up their ragged heels & shuffle off to Buffalo
we order more beer
no one gives a good flying fuck
cold in the knowledge:
   we recognize those faces
   we know those glue factories
   we are those horses
DELUSIONS etc
John Berryman

“literature bores me, especially great literature”

How many years, O, since Henry
huff his lank frame ‘cross the wide ocean
to venture out some tale (or, more precise) some
piece of tale ‘pon which to thrust his reaction’ry
erections; his gripes & rails, to spur home
his jaundiced bear to a mean locomotion?

How many, order to claim spurned lover, rejected heart,
unsuited suitor heaved bed to bedlam in the whiskeyed throes?
Her he remembers as (alongside beer & sausage)
Germanic, tho’, nothing formal here as idiom drops
among spare change in the furthest corner pockets
& all type fond record is held hostage.

Strange currency, his little books, of sudden, sell
& how is this mischief if not short of miraculous?
& what it was or is that made the words tell?
& who whispered the ear with the wherewithal?
Confused?
The image ghosts of moonlight snatched in blues.

FORWARDS
bpNichol

“a/lake/a/lane/a/line/a/lone”

four
words
for
lines
“Nothing is, but what writing makes it so.” -- Marco Knauff

1. The boat was wrecked and slid into the sea, its single stack hissing briefly like a cigar thrown into the water, its little red light put out. A rock had jumped up out of nothing, though it seemed as if we had struck a piece of solid night, so very black it was and undistinguishable from the water and the night sky, too. It might have been night itself and not granite on which the ship foundered. I was thrown into it, wearing nothing more than pajamas and slippers. I had come out on deck to lean against the rail and smoke because of the heat in the cabin and my anxiety. I went over the side with only those – my dispatches left behind me to sink with the rest. I did not drown. Uncannily, the sea upheld me. I ought to have drowned with the rest, but a wave bore me up and, after a time, discharged me in shallows whose blackness was absolute, holding not so much as a particle of moon or star light. I was hardly aware of myself carried landward by an obliging tide. I may have slept. It may have been sleep that kept me from drowning. I woke on the beach with the morning light, next to the captain’s boat-shaped hat. I woke although there was no evidence that I had been asleep. If I woke – into what did I wake? Unless I am sleeping still.

2. On the beach, a bear was setting out folding canvas chairs. His striped jersey was faded by the sun. I spoke to him shyly, as anyone would with only slight acquaintance of bears. His replies were intelligible. He was well on in years but appeared, nevertheless, to be robust. He handled the chairs effortlessly. To my question whether the place where I had washed up was an island, he declared it to be so. “Large or small?” “Quite small,” he said. He then tried to sell me a ride on a swan boat, which at that moment was straining to be away with the tide. “You can circle the island in no time,” he said, drinking beef-tea from a glass. I wanted nothing to do with boats of any description and told him so. He shrugged. “Are you a man dressed like a bear or a bear that can talk?” I asked, angered by his indifference. He did not deign to answer. “Are there women on this island?” I asked him next although I was not convinced that it was an island. “Yes!” he leered shamelessly. I thought then that a bear dressed in a man’s clothes was undignified and unworthy of a higher animal. If he was a bear. “At this hour they are all in their beds.” I pressed him to tell me where. The beach was empty except for the hut in which the canvas chairs were stored for the night and a forest of pine trees, each tree standing close to the one next to it. But having withdrawn into taciturnity, the bear would say no more – not on this or any other subject I put to him. He sat down on a folding chair and went to sleep. Or pretended to. If it was a bear and not a man masquerading as one. What might persuade a man to dress as a bear in so sultry a climate I could not guess. Unless he was made to submit for reason or reasons unknown.
3.
The ways into the forest were without number. I entered as if through a door, which opened and closed behind me. Immediately, I was seized by shadows – those sinister orderlies of night – and beaten. They spoke Dutch or a language like it, each word a stone that, falling one on top of another, raised walls in the twilight as if to entomb me. Bleeding, I pinched my nostrils to staunch the issue, which tasted of rust and salt. My hand smelled of pitch. Astringent, it brought me to myself again. The walls dissolved, tumbling down in an avalanche of stones, while the ruffians, dropping their sticks, slipped away. I might have imagined them because of my terror to be without map or compass here in the uncertain light. They were useless where they lay, on the bottom of a sea that might have been the Tyrhenian, for I had embarked at Naples on a diplomatic mission to Benghazi. I began now to be hungry and would have despaired had a sandwich wrapped in wax-paper not caught my eye and, next to it, a carafe of sweet water. I refreshed myself, hearing in the distance all the while a groaning, neither human nor animal but what a tree might make put to the rack. The sound came from far away and joined with others in a difficult counterpoint woven on the loom of the crowding trees: the laughter of women, there was, and also a bell’s voice – not that of the deeply sonorous bell tolling in a cathedral tower but a small, nervous one. I thought that the women must be those who had been asleep when I arrived this morning on the beach in thrall to strange dreams, but what the bell might signify I could not tell. I stayed a long time in the forest, hardly daring to move, while the twilight gave way to darkness and that to daylight or what portion sifted through the high leaves to the roots and creepers that tried to ensnare me, or so it seemed. From gas jets in the branches, sickly greenish blooms of light trembled. My fancy, ordinarily dull and insipid, was sharpened to a degree I had known before only in fever. Recalling the bear lolling on a canvas chair, I wondered if I might not be inside a delusion and not on an island at all, if island it was. Far away the wood suffered, a bell told by its sound that it was moving, and women laughed. What quality of laughter, what meaning it held for me, were impossible to divine. I wanted to find them – this, I did know – but the trees jostling one against another would not let me walk farther on – no, not even crabwise – and already another night was falling. I would have to go back to the beach. I considered that, in dreams, one does not go back. One is only and always thrown headlong into darkness. Doubting that this was a dream induced by fever or some other cause, I was afraid.
AMUSE BOUCHE
by Adeena Karasick

Hors D’ouvres
by Adeena Karasik

Oh gourmand! Just mop up those ketyusha
encrusted garnished margins
all blasted and beat-up like whipped ricotta --

yeah, i’ll have a plate of artillery shells, with a
zesty bomb-water pottage, a fuzzy naval (base)
with an umbrella of Arab allies

What do you serve at a beheading, a prisoner swap?
a missile launch?

Oh go on, just terrorize my
palette –
your approval rating is
falling like a cold souflée.

So, just take your explosive liquid
and smear it all over my
sweet sweet sweet peace, heavily decorated and all trooped out hot ‘n beefy like a
gaza strip
sirloin broiled over a burgeoning cease fire
’t cause over here the stakes are high,
colossal and strategic
with a garlic-enfused shi’it-
aki mushroom
cloud all jihad
and caramelized
with a berry strewn
hezbollah crème frêche

and may i suggest
some frothy framboise where boise
will be boise–
enberry like poised
oiseau was o-
let them eat
caked on
Islamist Hamas with side of
pita paté picked a peck of pickled patriots

moistly skewered and
topped with flaky herb flecked fromage
forged with the chaos of clogged artillery
all bollixed up like clumpy béchamel

What do you serve at a statue toppling? a
guantánamo gala? A border invasion?
Just slaughté 4200 civilians
a handful of morphing militants,
4 salted sunnis, 3 shias shopping
2 condied Kurds (and whey)
with 1 September that never ends

and ask, what’s in your Lebanese cabinet?

Say, is that a raging skillet or
a pan Islamism?

Oh just suck the savory juice of this unilateral lexicon and
the lingering zing of your saucy
imperialism laced with a tapenade of
terror, a
creamy trouble-scented galette a cornet of
sweet corsette a cornish garnish flourish a florete a fleur de darfur / for tubors or two by
forays. topped with a dizzying oh mama ma ma sha’aryiah
of oily allah la holy olé mullah aioli
braised in suni-dried
cabbage, like a ravaged
battalion, wrapped
in an artillery fire cluster
a po' boy oy polloi envoi of
honey glazed humvee
with a cup of kaffyieh
all embroiled in conflict

Entrées

i’m sorry, did i order this insurgency? This aerial onslaught of premature detonation?

Does that threat level come with a side of terror cells?

May i substitute these liquid explosives
for an escalating attack of piquant parliamentary leeks?

oh this is delicious militia

SOUPÇON! ...of terror
Accompaniments

So, take that Pyongyang gangbang angrily felanged
dried kimchi beanpaste
broiled beef cabbage fishcake; and hanjoun-sheik it up baby

honey, you ARE the bomb…

But, to tell you the truth, i am more terrorized by my refrigerator
There’s an ongoing low grade war
between my carbalicious coffee cake

and my low rise hipsters.

y’know sometimes, after that succulent
nosh o’ ganâche, there’s a
nuclear explosion going on
along my southern borders.

Oh dill sprigs –
anytime is a good time for an invasion!

So, dip your nuclear-tipped
schnapp crackle pop pop fizzled warheads
in my juniper pear jus de jewy
jewy jouissance,

a bissel a fissel
an extended range ballistic missile
with just a hint of

terraform gone gone gone, shia be gone so long…

Yo, i’ll take my rogue state medium rare
seared with a lemon herb crusted
axis of upheaval, effervescently
crushed like a thermobaric cocktail with a
nuclear umbrella –

oh, just a sec, my despot is boiling over.

So, don’t serve me no cut ’n run cumin-tinged phyllo-wrapped tank shell
crema gratinata, frittata pannacotta
duck breast con[flict] (low in saturated fatwa)
no dirty gratin scallions, shallot
solutions, because
this is just a jalapeño in my as-
paragus. 

kaffir and loathing, punk ass bitch fragrant sweet tease
buffer beefy boeuf burr in my

il fait (fated) froid
gras – nope, just couldn’t eat another bite
o’ that petit four, three, two, one…

(KAMBOMBastic flavor!)

i simply cannot stay the (4) course for that
fudged hegemony high reason treason raison, low rise
maison d’être (national debt) no frill fret de floret
stir fried black current. au current;

So, give it up to
drenched antidotes and icing licks
soixant croissant jews and g[oy]za
yuzu hoisin ouzo azul oozin’ muezzin
a bluesy früz frissé
for social change
and to all
those misty
watercooler memories for

The Way We War

Fromages et Bonbons

Son of a bistro –

i’ve had enough of yr peekytoe poached dates,
oily baby back mid-eastern mezze

So, just shelf yr fillet o flashy fascism n freedom fries
Syriasly –
Just gimme a Islami sandwich
(toasted awry),

A melting pot of Iraqi road.
A frozen mahdi pie –
fortified with a uranium-rich neocon death trip

A roasted leg of –
Islam is my lam[]
th’islam is…

all shawarma and cozy --

oh my sweet darjeeling,
stick this in your
one-two sucker punch bowl
‘cause all this over-assessorizing –

it’s just not my cup of terror.

So, don’t pull the rugallah
out from under my feat

my arc de triumph coup de
fois gras drenched in a heavy cloying pinot push pull
boor-battered robust zingy
killing field

Put that on your hot list

along with a blackened Falujian
all gussied up like a gamy-whipped
t(rifle over truffled
tost

So, don’t give me no easy-bake errant
backswing. No sloppy seconds slathered with
a kerfuffle of messculine --

served with a “no-clue”cumin-seeded
macho-chili raison relish
No semi-freddo frontline
marinated
with sweet solypse

i’m livin’ large

with my choco al-monde
allah hu akBAR
none –

And, i just don’t want no
emboldened blazon
embattled with a itty-bitty bomb
laden with a petite plane platter
no jamba-
laya liar pants on []
all fired up
like a fauxthentic crudité, a
minty monster münster my word,
it’s a

croque monsieur

And, i don’t want yr
massacred mascarpone phony
plutard moutard mouton

oozing like l’rani yolks

freshly squeezed
like a waterboarded suspect.

No more creamy armed forces
bathed in a balsy-osamic vincotto
ricotta staccato legato toccata

all sufferin’ from overkill –

a bloodbath of trans fatut-wa
wallowing in delicious mogadishus
strategically plagued with ineptitude
with atrocity

Just tagliatelle it like it is.
and don’t serve it to me
as a gloppy googlegänger

a plum palette sorbet of middling foreplay
of immapable mussel and mayo mama may i

soy seared into a subpar fusion
of smoked meat mounting in a mushroom cloud

or an icy cold war
over a very hot
arms race --

And, i’ll take that
troop de jour with a
side of cold fury.
TWO POEMS by Bill Howell

MANAGEMENT HAS DECIDED YOU MAY PREFER TO HEAR SOMETHING ELSE AT THIS TIME

The recurring nightmare centers on a long weekend inside a huge office complex. You used to work here but a lot’s changed. They’ve agreed to return your ID fob, permitting you to attend a series of informal meetings. This is on an explicit understanding: you won’t be having any original ideas. But dreams allow you extended periods without sleep or nourishment. If you can meet enough people, you’ll earn enough points to get a new contract on Tuesday. Most of these people are stern women in purple culottes. Apparently they run the place. Food is catered, there’s no direct contact with the outside world, nobody has a rollicking clue what season it is. Instead of speaking, everybody uses telepathic email. It feels like living in a bad movie except nobody’s bothered to get the rights. Then you notice you’re missing an arm again. As the place slowly consumes you, you realize: There’s no here here. You call home between meetings: “They’ve announced nobody has to pretend to read scripts anymore.” Of course you’re both being monitored to insure quality control. Having decided to kill things later, a ghost on the line whispers, the cat sleeps through Debussy….

HOW IT WAS AT THE END

“How only parasites tremble on the edges of the future…” – Osip Mendelshtam, 1923

Downtown dusk, matchstick crane beaming one last business swizzle across air-conditioned silence: sun-struck surface stunning incandescent distance. Suspending every image. Meanwhile truculent turtles outwait the latest shadowy update in effluent shallows: tectonic platters refusing to use the word umbrage. Refusing to budge just because their day is done. Because it’s never the end of anything: nothing is. Quietly again, the rest again divide what’s left. We’re only told what they figure we can handle in the moment. This is the wish of Now to somehow be present without qualification. (The cat at the window: again the sparrows chitter in the stark March lilacs.) This is the meeting they held without you. This time it comes down to air & water. After all, if the playing fields were level they wouldn’t drain properly. Anyway by now they can’t hide the truth of it. Hey: maybe it’s better this way.

And you’re not helping. You’re not contributing. Good for you.

How did they ever get in the building? The place becomes an abandoned zoo where the animals keep feeding on each other. Everything they pretend to address/endorse/endure. Never mind all the telling letters they don’t bother to open – they’re so busy lining up their bottom line with their bottom lip. Make ‘em say the words. Make ’em send you to the mountains to forget yourself. Everywhere their slogan takes you….
TANCHAZ X
by Bryan Sentes

Be One thatN Cursory childhood this repeat ed Averting hanging heads awAken would pAle nes sAlone Moment Our skin

 craVe thAt pRide abject Maimed cAtatonic blooD thAt Redeeming shocK thAt

Off evEn numbEr ed Side sTreet All Not Can

soMething tO shou ld enDeavour inVen t A high omniscienT heAven coNcrete baCk

oN A desPeration sIow Motion waNdering haIf Pill s wrOng moMen t

Beast fibrEglass Crackles unspoilEd sI Beast fibrEglass Crackles unspoilEd sI

loaThe rAtties buNny onCe everythiNg stOps Then Arms liKe

skY shInes paSt Joy excEpt gazing cloUds hiS

smoOth gazing peOple Never True pOrtrait

Girls strUm Their blAck Men cigAreTTes garbAge heAps thEir flaGs eYes eVery dArkness fluteRs [O] diStant

Stay carcassEs aBle forgEt wIsH For tO reveRence shou lD've remediUm beLated loOk ing

tIDe sEv ExpLambda At aLI Flight Of cLoUds fleD tIlI consiDered plaCed haLt suLL plAcid Mouth's contOurs evoKe

Bird yOu aGainst mY anCent piouS scrutiniZe flaking alOng wIll nothing hEre Place draggeD uniVersAl plaCed tO taKe

tv-seriEs neo-conservAtives Beats millioNs Of vicTims And bladE maSs ideOlogy Late A t ni ght histOry iS

snaKe thE Snake thE cRow Vision undEr hiS

thE iS steaLing villAge Stealing setS stUmbles

stuMbles A hedgehoG waY And laRge rOck homeS

Recall stAnzas rocKy mOutains proCession horiZontal It maRched betWeen discoVered idEnTity Sober stanZas rhymEs woMan

unnistaKable pArrow Lip sO cleFt Almost Sure rendezvous linEs backGround In pacEed innocEnce luSt thEy aRe liVe thEse lineS

hiddEn thIS transLucent spArkling skUl liVe deaD intimAte irreconciLable eMbrace thIs Many cAn aRe theSe

luck thE waRm siT wEather meMory whAt ever huddLe hAppy Teaches shelTer

thE Outbreaks libeRations puttiNg On flaG a operaTions suN fingErs ProclamaTions Dance meAning jostLe whoeVer shak
The Invention of Language
By Kim gOLDBERg

g I g
s HAVE s
g AN g
s URGE s
2
de FORM ed
g A g
s WORD s
d A d
s TRAIT s
2
s LEEVE s
p A p
s TONE s

d I d
s HAVE s
s INK s
2
s PRINT s
s IT s
g A g
s LIP s
2
s TOUT s
s IT s
d A d
s TOOL s
2
s CARVE s
s IT s
s IN s
g AN g
s OAK s

s EVEN s
s HAVE s
g AN g
s EAR s
2
g UTTER IN g
2
s NOW s
d I d
s WILL s
re SEARCH er
4
d A d
s WORD s
“Herd Maneuvers” by Kim Goldberg (Canada)
the gravity of the moment
by Jonathan Lyons

2.1 and i get too close to that moment, i can feel it closing in. so i run from it — run for all
i'm worth.

this thing — my savior. i've been skipping for months. it's been since —
well. don't want to go then, do we? why else would i be trying this hard to stay away
from it?

and it all starts sk/sk-k/ng/s/sk/iiip/skipping, and

i am
outta there.

3.1 i'm knockin back drinks with my best bud krystoff, sneaking huffs of what he calls
hardware, which i know is really some kind of souped-up model glue, and we're laughing our
asses off at how many brain cells we torch with every whiff, and krystoff says, like, hey,
y'wanna go and hit my smack supply? and i'm like, no, man, no, that stuff's addictive. cuz
seriously, anything you gotta inject to get off on just seems like goin too far for a high, dig? i
mean, let's be reasonable here.

but we're in charlie's pull'r'in, and krystoff's suggesting is turning into badgering, and i
know he'll get sick if he doesn't spike in and download some, so i give, and we head out to his
place. their place. his and paxton's. it used to be a warehouse. or, it is a warehouse that used to
be a working lumber place, and now it's still a warehouse, but the only work it sees is when the
band practices. krystoff's band. his and paxton's. everything's so complicated.

4.1 and krystoff's slappin out a rhythm on his thighs, cigarette smoke pluming from his
head, doesn't even know, right now, while i'm walking with him, doesn't know what i'll do to
him, my buddy. to her. this is no time to be here, no time to be thinking these thoughts. no time
at all, no sir, no how. i hate it when i realize that, cuz it's a buzzkill.

5.1 and i am hiding in a one-room walk-up with a shitty shared bathroom and cockroach-infested communal
kitchen. ministry named an album "dark side of the spoon" and thought it
was funny — it was, kind of a fuck-you-we're-shooting-heroin-and-you-can't-stop-us, in-yourfaceness about it. but i
remember krystoff and the smack, the payload of powder and water
cooking in the tablespoon, the syringe, the spoon's underside a darkening butane smudge. the
belt round his biceps, him spiking in, the droplet of blood in the syringe telling that he'd hit a
vein, the download, and then that look, the transformation from pain-filled desperate to relief,
then a genuine, real-life, swear-to-god sexual euphoria. never asked him if he actually came, but
i could see his orientation changing from wife to needle before my eyes. heard it could do that.

6.1 tear garden said, the needle is a lady, and a lady needs respect. and paxton was not the
kind of woman you neglected.

7.1 crazy bastard. shooting smack.

8.1 i'm shaking. my hands are shaking. i don't remember my last meal, so it's been a while.
listen: i'm skipping like a record, a cd, a corrupted mp3.
listen: i'm skipping along in my own timeline. part of it, anyway.
i live forever, free, living through my own lifeline, dropped wherever the skipping stops and drops me, waiting for the next trip.

1.1 this is the earliest of my moments i can reach. i knew the second i saw her that i wanted her. but, yeah, hell, well, you already know she's — she is, she was (tense loses meaning) — married. they're married. paxton and my best buddy krystoff. paxton with that weird jet-black hair, struck through with a single white stripe on each side, hair falling a few inches south of her shoulders, that severe makeup, her tearing at her bass while krystoff, transfixed, in his own world, plays till he's smearing blood all over his stratocaster. they'd finish a set and seem so separate, man, him panting, head down and hands bloody, a hardcore christ, nailed up with the needles, hands stigmatic, bleeding for the music, her beauty twisted in a scrunch of concentrated rage. god damn that was hot.

9.1 and krystoff screaming at her to go out and find him some fucking smack, he didn't care how, and her showing up at my place, that thick, proto-egyptian thing she did with her eyeliner a waxy ruin, and krystoff's looks going soft and fleshy. and me lining up shows for the band to play, just like always, and the drummers and the vocalists rotating out every few years, and new ones from the local high-school hardcore kids' bands rotating in, the show must go on, and those nights, them under the hot lights, putting it out there, and me at the bar —

5.2 and me hiding in the one-room walk-up —
2.2 and me running somewhen else in my life — cuz i’ve tried to go around that moment, and bam!, i hit a wall, somehow —

7.2 and krystoff's a fucking fool for spiking up with smack —

6.3 and a needle is a lady —
and lady paxton gets neglect —
and paxton's a beauty —
and i'm just doing everyone a favor, right? yeah, man —
yeah —

13.1 and the the whole world around me is falling down, falling down, falling down, all those moments, falling down —

4.2 this is no time to be here, no time to be thinking these thoughts. i hate it when i realize that, cuz like i said, it's a buzzkill.

5.3 and i'm in my one-room fleabag walk-up and i'm hiding from him, hiding from krystoff,
hiding from my best bud, cuz he never saw it coming. and i'm shaking, my hands are shaking, and i feel like shit, and i don't know when my last meal was.

and i look in the cupboards, but no one leaves anything in there anymore, but i need food so bad i had to play the game i play sometimes with myself, a game where i might have missed something the last time i checked, who knows?, there might even be a beer or some thunderbird, so i check, and as i check every nook and every cranny in the fucking place, i get angrier and angrier, cuz i can't figure out where dumb-fuck me would've left all his food and hooch, and i'm cursing myself, and i'm cursing the neighbors, bunch of fucking thieves, who i avoid, cuz who knows who they might tell i'm here? and i'm cursing me and i'm cursing them and i'm cursing the cockroaches, fat bastards, and i'm smacking myself, just once at first, palm to the forehead, almost slapstick, but then again, and again, cuz i really am angry, and my eyes tear up and i know that the truth is that i did this to myself, and i know that i don't have food and i don't have hooch, i know i ate and drank it all long enough ago i don't remember when, and a set of frightened little-old-lady eyes peering at me between her door and the chain and the doorway makes me stop.

's ok, i say, just trying to find a friend, thought he lived out here. and i hurry best i can down the hall and grab my coat. and my steel-toeds. and my checkbook.

11.1 winter in iowa and i'm making my way to the osco to pass a bad check for food and something cheap and strong to drink. and i stomp my eight blocks there, keep my cap pulled low, hope no one sees me, and when i step into the osco, the clerk at the front register gives me that look that tells me he's not happy to see me. i don't recognize him, but maybe i don't come here earlier until later.

12.1 or 9.2? those nights in the sweltering clubs, those nights skipping along cuz i'd heard all the band's songs 800 times - is this one of those nights, here in the osco? am i really at the club's bar, drinking something cheap and strong? or am i really here, where i think i am, in the osco, looking for shitty, overpriced groceries cuz my checks won't work at eagle?

11.2 i grab spam back in the osco, dinty moor e beef stew, cereal, wonder bread, mac-n-cheese, some other stuff, and four bottles of thunderbird, which i know will hurt, and about which hurt i do not care. and when i get to the counter, the clerk who was unhappy to see me is still unhappy to see me.

how you paying? he says. and i get that sinking feeling. check, i say. we been through this before, he says, your checks ain't welcome. and i am so pissed off at this pipsqueak jerk-off for keeping me from my can of dinty moore and bottles of thunderbird that i pick up a bottle and hurl it at him. he dodges, ducks, and i guess hits a button somewhere, cuz an alarm starts ringing, forces me to beat a hasty retreat. i do glance at his register, but of course the damned thing is locked, and there are cameras. i go. another three blocks and i hit a quickie-mart where i haven't bounced many checks, i don't think, and get the same stuff, more or less, and pass the
check to a clerk i've never seen before.

13.2 it's hot enough now the methane under the gigantic peat bog in siberia just exploded, says the newsticker on the tv in the quickie mart. no skin off mine, i guess.

i choose an alternate route back that does not take me past the osco.

2.3 and i get too close to that moment, i can feel it closing in. so i run from it—run for all i'm worth.

my linearity is destroyed in this thing—my savior. i've been skipping for months. it's been since—well, don't want to go there, do we? why else would i be trying this hard to stay away from it?

and it all starts sk/skk/g/pin/s/iiip/skipping. and

i am outta there.

, my moments now walls surrounding me ... scenes orbiting like an asteroid belt around that moment ...

x.1 to live with some crimes, to live with yourself, is to live on the edge of a lie —

9.2 or 9.3 + 14.1 and i am eating and drinking like a normal person, and i am back at the club drinking something cheap and strong, and i've heard this song 800 times now, i swear, and there she is. and somehow, i know that krystoff's smack habit and new sex pref will eventually send her to my side. i don't know how i know this. it's like the ghost of a memory,

17.1 something coming down the pike like a locomotive, like something i just can't avoid, like i just can't stop myself. i've tried, but bam!, it knocks me back. i can go a little ways past it, but the pull of the moment, its gravity, is always too strong — it snaps me back a ways —

18.1 i wonder if i'm still alive on the other side of my last moments ... ?

15.1+7.3 and she is at my door, and that proto-egyptian eye-makeup thing she does is a smeary mess, and i know that this comes after that last club moment, cuz now i know she's about to tell me she's here to see me. and i think my best bud krystoff is an idiot and an asshole for doing a drug you have to inject to get off on, and for doing anything that carries the most remote possibility of sending her away from himself, and yet clearly he has, cuz clearly, here she is. and that just ain't right.

come in, say i.

6.4 a lady needs respect —

14.2 and paxton is here, in my apartment from before it all blew/blows up in my face, and i think my best bud is an asshole, and i can see the anger she wears on stage, only this time it's not something she's doing for the stage. and she leans against me, and i grab onto her, and that's how it all gets started. and i almost, almost, think it (don't even think it). and that's the end of that scene.

2.4 this is no time to be here, no time to be thinking these thoughts. no time at all, no sir, no
how. i hate it when i realize that, cuz it's a buzzkill. i do everything i can to run from that moment.

16.1 back to the strangely warm winter and the bag of bad-check groceries from the quickiemart, and jesus h. christ my stomach's knotted. get back to my shitty one-room walk-up, open the can of dinty moore and balance it on the burner to cook it — no pots or pans out here. after a few minutes, i grab a dirty, stinking bath towel from my one-room, turn off the burner, and use the towel to keep from burning my hands when i pick up the dinty moore. i find a spoon someone somewhen left behind in a drawer, run it under the tap, and go back to hide in my room.

i don't know if it's cuz i waited so long between meals or if it's maybe the stew, but it doesn't go down easy, it's a fight to eat. but once i'm done, i know what's up: this is no time to be here, no time at all, no sir, no how.

2.5a and i get too close to that moment sometimes again, i can feel it closing in. so i run from it — run for all i'm worth.

x.2 to live with some crimes, to live with yourself, is to live on the edge of a lie — never admitting what you've done because admitting that means admitting —

2.5b this thing — my savior. i've been skipping for months. it's been since — well. don't want to go then, do we? why else would i be trying this hard to stay away from it? i know what happens when i try to get past it: *bamm!*

and it all starts sk/skk/g/pin/s/iiip/skipping, and i am outta there.

5.4+14.3 i am paxton's hero, her savior from her asshole husband, my best bud, krystoff. he traded his lady for the needle, and i'm showing her respect. we've been meeting for sex for two months, and my best bud krystoff doesn't seem to have noticed that his wife has given up trying to have sex with him. and it's nice, y'know, in my apartment from before, having lots of sex. but it itches at my ego, all this sneaking, everyone in awe of the rock-star married couple while i line up shows, make it all happen, then sit in the background, at the clubs' bars, watching the show. i want to have her for real, for myself, want to take her from him and lock her away where no one can take her away from me. want them all to see she's picked me, i'm that fucking cool. i want her for myself. sneaking sex isn't enough. and i am thinking this as everything starts skipping again. it's like i can't stop myself.

and i think, why the fuck did the skipping stop and drop me here? and i answer: because it'll never let me forget. and i meet krystoff at a show where the band is about to be the opener, and he takes me backstage with the rest of the band, paxton, and the vocalist- and drummer-dujour, and he pulls out his guitar case. and paxton gives him this look, like what if he's a cop?!, and he says, don't worry, he's cool, so i know this happens earlier, when i was just getting to know them, thinking i could work my connections to land them some gigs.
and krystoff cooks down the water and smack, the spoon's underside black from butane,
and he sucks up the water with a syringe, and ties tubing around his biceps, and fattens up a
vein, and plunges in the spike, pulls back a tiny drop of blood into the syringe — a hit, and:
plunge. and paxton rolls her eyes, and krystoff's eyes roll back, and he gets that look, orgasmic,
and i watch them take up their gear and take the stage, rock on.
14.4  and i'm in bed with paxton, and i tell her i want her for real, she looks like she seriously,
seriously does not believe what she's hearing, and then this look like terror hits her face, and she
tells me after a sec that she loves krystoff, he's just fucked up, this was all a mistake, she just
needs to get him clean. no — she says she needs to get her husband clean. And i wince at the
word, husband, and it just keeps banging around in my head, cuz we've never used it together
before, not since we started sleeping together, and i start running my hands over her, saying
come on, baby, and we're great together, and i love you, you know that, right?

and she starts to get up, and i grab her by the waist, it's like i can't stop myself —

and this is no time to be here, no time to be thinking these thoughts. no time at all, no
sir. i'm too close to the moment. i hate it when i realize that. buzzkill. it takes everything i have
to get away, run away from this moment. it's getting harder to avoid.
8.2  i'm shaking. my hands are shaking. i don't remember my last meal, so it's been a while.

listen: i'm skipping like a record, a cd, a corrupted mp3.

listen: i'm skipping along, stuck in my own timeline.
i live forever free trapped, tunneling through my own lifeline, dropped wherever the
skipping stops and drops me and waiting for the next trip, imprisoned. i can't get past that
moment, not far, and i always snap back to the beginning.

13.3  and the methane explosion in siberia looks like a freaking nuke went off on tv, and it's
starting a chain reaction, more explosions heating up more water, more methane exploding, pass
go, collect $200, a chain reaction of methane, nuke-like explosions, and there's some suit on tv
saying we could have stopped this but we didn't, all the exploding methane used to be safe and
cool under the safe, cool water and under the safe, cool siberian peat —
5.5 and even this won't put an end to my sentence, i'll run back, i'll skip, i'll hide out with
the roaches the suit says might be all that survive, i'll spend forever trying not to go back to that
moment with her, the moment my whole miserable life swirls around now, and i just can't seem
to stop it. i can roam the same stretch of time forever, but i can't get far from that moment. the
pull of the event is too strong.

0.2  and krystoff is my best bud, and i want paxton all to myself, want to take her far away,
and lock her up so no one can take her away, all to myself. and i want everyone to see her with
me, see she's chosen me, cuz i'm that cool, and i grab paxton by the waist, and i tell her i love
her, and she looks at me like she really, seriously, does not believe me, then her look changes —
this look like terror hits her face, and she tells me after a sec that she loves krystoff, he's
Rampike 17/2

just fucked up, this was all a mistake, she just needs to get him clean. no — she says she needs to get her husband clean. and i wince at the word, husband, and it just keeps banging around in my head, cuz we've never used it together before, not since we started sleeping together, and suddenly i know i’m losing this game, and i start running my hands over her, saying come on, baby, and we're great together, and i love you, you know that, right?

and she starts to get up, and i grab her by the waist, it's like i can't stop myself —

and i know i'm way, way too close this time, i want to drag myself back out, but i can't.

and everything starts skipping, cascading out of control. it's like i can't stop myself —

and my hands are shaking, and i'm not sure when the last time was i ate anything, but i remember the dainty moore, but then again

i get too close to that moment, sometimes, i can feel it closing in. so i run, run like hell, wait for the skipping to start and get me the fuck outta there.

2.5 and

i am

4.2a knockin back drinks and sneakin huffs of hardware with my best bud krystoff, then

x.3 to live with some crimes, to live with yourself, is to live on the edge of a lie — never admitting what i’ve done because admitting that means admitting that you are i am a monster.

4.2b i know i have to get around it, get around that moment, it’s like a black hole holding me in a decaying orbit. i hurl myself at it, and

2.6 bam!

i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam! it throws me back again. i hurl myself at it: bam!

* * *

bam!

(it knocks me back so hard i relive the whole thing in reverse …)
x.4 to live with some crimes, to live with yourself, is to live on the edge of a lie — never admitting what you’ve done because admitting that means admitting that you are a monster.

0.1 everything zeroes here, swirls in some kind of orbit around ground zero —

0.0 clutching paxton by the waist, back in my old apartment from before i made a trainwreck of my life, our lives, life, screaming at her that i love her, and she's making a loud, high-pitched sound, that proto-egytian eye-makeup thing and smear, and i am inside of her, my hold on her hips like a vice, it's like i can't stop myself, and i don't even know until it's over that she's been fighting me. her hips are bruised. her eyeliner is bruised, and i see blood, her blood, on her mouth, she's bleeding for me, stigmatic, she runs a hand across her mouth and looks stunned to find blood, her blood, on her hands, blood on her hands!

i've been trying to outrun that moment for months, years — i don't know — terms like those are losing meaning — i'm not krystoff's best bud. i'm the guy who attacks a woman i told i love, attacks my best bud krystoff's wife, rapes her after i tell her i love her after we have a fling behind his back.

16.1 this is the last of my moments i can reach. it won't be long. i never get further than this. the cord will go tight, it'll snap me back to some earlier point, and i'll relive it all again.

and again. and again.

and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again.

and again. and again.

5.7 i'm the guy in the anonymous one-room fleabag walk-up who scares the hell out of one of his neighbors sometimes, sometime, somewhen.

end.
Photograph by Melissa Ray (Canada)
Donald Barthelme Saved from Canonization
by Pat Leech

Donald Barthelme is standing on a man-hole cover, looking down through the little rust-rimmed holes. He looks at you. “Does this make my butt look big?” he says.

*  

“He used to buy his groceries near where I work – Eighth and Vegetable. I knew him from his picture. That beard. One day, I saw him going by and I thought to myself, ‘I should kick him. Just go out there and kick him really hard. You know, that way I could be kind of famous too: the guy who kicked Donald Barthelme.’”

*  

Donald Barthelme is tugging on your arm excitedly all the way to the hardware & home appliance store, for no apparent reason. Then the issue becomes apparent: he doesn’t know what a hardware & home appliance store is.

“Candy!” he says gleefully.

*  

“I see this guy with a beard, kind of like a Santa Claus’ beard except different. And he’s wearing a plaid shirt. And he’s stuffing fragments into somebody’s window. One after another, these ugly unfinished things. Two fifths of a baseball, a half-smile, a baby, several unripe strawberries, the left half of a half empty glass of water, 1.5 of a jazz trio, one fragment after another …”

*  

“Hi, I’m Donald,” he says.
I ask him if he goes by Donald or Don.
“Donald,” he admits sheepishly.
“Enjoy the party,” I say, and welcome him in to the living room. My wife points at the punch bowl, which is getting low. I go to mix more punch, hoping this guy keeps his big, lovefilled eyes off of my longhaired daughter, Angie.

*  

“Our illustrious friend – though, you know, he liked to be called ‘Don’ - we all called him Don, down at the pub. Or, ‘Dunny,’ we’d say, if we were into our cups. Which we were; this was down at the pub, you understand. Anyway, I had mentioned I was playing the Santa Claus bit in town square this year, and had my Santa costume all rented. So he knew I had this beard. He says to me like this he says, “Paddy, I need you to get into your Santa beard, go to this address, and act like someone’s out to kill you. Doesn’t matter who, boyo, doesn’t matter who – say the cops. Your name? Today you are Donald Barthelme.” That’s what he said to me upon that day, or my name ain’t Seamus Waterhouse O’ –”

*  

After you left, he went to these three places in childish ritual remembrance of you: 1) the café, 2) the bus stop, and 3) the street where you used to live.

*
“Local veterinarian and medaled Vietnam vet Frank Matheson was kicked in the groin by John Terrier. Apparently, Terrier recognized Matheson as Donald Barthelme, a literary figure of some note who infamously frequents local cafés. Terrier was quoted as saying, “Oh I only meant to kick his leg ...”

*

“I sold him a TV for fifty-five dollars. He seemed to be a very confused, flustered man. He said, “I don’t want yer stinkin’ TV,” and walked out. Years later, I saw him coming out of an Irish pub, wearing sort of a red sports coat. I remember thinking he wasn’t Irish. This was when only the Irish went to Irish pubs ...”

*

Your name is Angie; once, under the window sill at a house party, he gave you a very polite, very sad and tender kiss. He said your hair was very terse. Both of you giggled into your hands at his word choice, so that they wouldn’t hear inside.

*

1) He remembers you in a sepia café; he remembers thoughts working invisibly under the sugar-brown lid of your brow, the sun-rise crescents of your closed eyes trying to keep all the ideas inside straight. He goes to that café first, and sits.

*

Donald Barthelme is counting his money at the lunch table; all fives.

“I have fifty-five dollars,” he says to you.

*

The metal beast towers over the city, weeping and dashing through the streets with uncommonly soft feet. It’s mouth is a huge transistor radio, bulging out of its face as if too large for the skull. You wonder where the police are in all of this. The beast is just out there. No one is reacting to it. Where is God? Where is Superman?

It is impossible to react to. It keeps doing things no one can react to. Then it goes away, and everyone thinks ‘Finally!’ and then within five minutes, they think ‘maybe it was just a dream,’ and then it comes again, doing more things. It was wearing a children’s swing set on its head like a football helmet. That’s just one thing. It was hiding in the bottom of the ocean, eating take-out chinese food from a bowler hat. You don’t even know how you know that.

Its monotone, androgyne voice echoes into your bedroom tonight, over and over: “Fragments are the only form I ... have certitude about.”

*

“I like your dic-tion,” you say to him after a while, putting your hand on his, cracking up even as you say it, and he laughs loudly, partly because of the nervous intensity of the moment. He’s sold; you’ve sold him on you.

(But you fool, Angie, you’re sad already, even before this moment under the window is over, wondering how much the window and the sill and the idiot-voices had (has!) to do with it.)
2) The bus stop where you wore drawn eyebrows and black lipstick, like a David Lynch movie double, your brief, full mouth worn pursed and solemn; arms like sheer columns suddenly pushed back primly and tied behind at the fingers, in a gift bow. He goes by there after the café.

* 

“What’s that you’re reading there?”
“Donald Barthelme,” I say.

* 

’ Is that him outside?’ you think, peering through the window from your desk. ‘Older,’ you admit, ‘but not not Donald Barthelme: still him, still Donald Barthelme, maybe more so than before.’

* 

“Apparently he knew someone who lived on my street. They said he came over a few times, just before he moved to Nicaragua. He would stretch out on their sofa, they said, and talk about Nicaragua for hours, and hours. I never saw him or anything. I mean, maybe I did and didn’t know it. Is he an actor or something?”

* 

Donald Barthelme is playing a violin outside your window. You throw it open, unbraid your strong hair, and try to hang it down. Of course, it’s not long enough; as you lean over, it kind of rests on the window sill. You look down at him, afraid of what he might think.

* 

“I like jazz,” he says, sternly.

* 

3) The street where you used to live. He remembers a chocolate gold doubloon you found in your great aunt’s gray coat, when you were “too, too fat,” (according to you at least, and what you thought you heard in friends’ comments), and he remembers your hair sheltering ears with lives of their own from the people on balconies across the street, who were hollering and screaming because it was raining, because it was raining and the game was on …

* 

“Look,” he says to me, “I’ve killed someone. I’m not joking. You have to help me out.” So I suggested he move to ... Nigeria. No, Nicaragua. He started crying. Eventually he left. He was wearing a plaid shirt, I remember that. The cuffs were open, flailing around his thin wrists. Maybe you can use that … Anyway I decided to tell people that. That he’d moved to Nicaragua.”

* 

With that stuff, my reaction is always, ‘what’s the point?’ I read for character. I want something to happen. I want to be engaged emotionally. I want a beginning, middle and end. Of course, I said nothing of this to the other editors. But I just didn’t see why that should take up space, given all the great – truly, great - work done in the American short story ...”
Collage by Jürgen O. Olbrich (Germany)
SESAME
by Ellie Csepregi

A sesame seed and a felt pen. That’s all and it was over. Judith decided that she could never return to this place of white cloths – folded, ironed and smoothed over rectangular wooden tables. She was stunning, wondrous and she was glad she remembered the last lines – she said them clearly at the right time, using the right tone. The sisters were proud of her.

They brought the girls over on Sunday afternoons where they were asked to pour tea from a polished tea service. The bread for the finger sandwiches was always white, soft with the crust cut off. Perfect triangles – the trio. Patti, Marilyn, and Judith – the three with the most promise. Virtuous, pious girls industrious, and kind, humble, obedient, modest girls. After tea, the girls would remove the table cloths – pulling them off like sunburned skin. Summer was just around the corner and the radio played songs about wearing flowers in your hair when you go to San Francisco. Saint Francis High School, Connie Frances, (Where the Boys Are) Frankie Avalon (Muscle Beach). Sand, beach towels, bright colours never seen in the winter.

The sisters knew, and remembered. They always said, “When God calls, you better answer the phone.” But God was like the other guys, too shy to call. Or was he mysteriously planning a date? So they waited and prayed. Bold girls always scared the boys. Judith thought she scared God sometimes. Jude was her nick name. The patron saint of desperate situations. Sister said Judith was going through the “big change”. She skipped too often and sat in the courtyard, near the grotto, instead of mathematics class. Judith only liked the number 5, because it was a perfect balance. Cut in half. Half a circle on the bottom – half a square on top. “Take Five,” iambic pentameter, a heart beat. A break. Her watch stopped at 55 minutes after 5 – just before six. The hands were supposed to line up. It did not create a sum total. It just didn’t work. It just stopped.

Blame the Pixie boy. That’s what everyone called him, small, quiet and precise. He did not look too smart, but he worked quickly and quietly -- always moving his lips. What? In prayer, was he memorizing poems, was he reciting numbers, was he cursing his fate? No one knew, no one cared. Small and sweet as the Pixie boy was, no one really noticed him except Judith. Who, also was teased for whispering to herself.

It was raining when Judith noticed that the Pixie’s green eyes were rimmed in red, they were watery. He was sitting at a table. White table cloth with an imperfection – a sesame seed from a piece of discarded crust. He removed a black felt pen from his shirt pocket, took the lid off and began pushing the seed around with the tip. Beads of perspiration strained under his coarse yellow hair, his face hard and intense. His efforts created scratchy black marks. It was ugly. Judith watched - her face expressionless, removed.

The seed remained stubbornly on the table. That’s all. Suddenly, the Pixie stood up and left quickly as usual, quietly as usual. Judith took the spoiled table cloth away and replaced it with a fresh one. No one ever found it. She kept it for her hope chest. A secret desire, promise, for love, for knowledge. Breath. “Beach Blanket Bingo,” flowers and San Francisco.

The Pixie’s message for Judith was, “In a dream, when we close our eyes, with seeds, we slowly find solutions.” That’s what she told the sisters.
“Not in Service” by Jesse Ferguson (Canada)
THE ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION
AT THE LOCUS OF
ARCHITECTURAL TENSION
by Robert Stewart

Keep in mind they don’t have to be kept apart
like mantids or fighting fish.

One is the light created by the failure of thousands of words;
the other is language operating in the darkness of

the inscrutability of things—
but they fit like positive and negative space,

pointing to something there.

If you are plagued by the dark monsters of the subjective heartland,
a sister singing in the shower with a spying brother,

holding each other captive,
seized in their adolescent spark

and pushed through a lens for language and caught
in the space built for the light of her words

by the darkness from his hand,
take heart:

they speak of each other;
what they say is a kind of architecture.
“Fable” by Jesse Ferguson (Canada)
Concrete poetry for me is not a score for performance & is a refusal to participate in the trade of meaning which is underscored with the writer proclaiming the meaning for an ever-receptive audience of captives. By stepping away from the score it is my aim to trouble the exchange value of poetry and its commodity function. Sianne Ngai in "Raw Matter: a notion of disgust" referred to the inarticulate sound, something I want to expand to the inarticulate mark, the mark which refuses to participate in the traditional meaning-making. Ngai writes that "no words are used in the expression of disgust and thus what the question of what words mean is simply irrelevant to this particular type of utterance" (103)... Concrete poetry treats language and communication as raw matter without a reinforced referent as a means of breifly interrupting exchange-based signification. Language here, ultimately, only covers a space, perhaps building upon the idea of a field of poetics...

By using obsolete technology, the concrete poet can recoup erate means of communication which have been rejected and trashed. Lea Vergine, in her book When Trash Becomes Art (2007) argues that "the artist, of course, is a useless figure (...) he is a social error" as is concrete poetry in this context.

The poet has become, much likes the means of production itself, an obsolete form, a generator of facile statements of the 'human condition' meant to transfer an emotional state to the audience/reader. In this form, poetry is an empty signifier. We already have enough people writing about people & the emphasis on content meaning only reiterates a traditional, humanist drive for understanding. While form may be neve more than an extension of content, the reverse is also true: content is never more than an extension of form.

This is not to suggest that the romantic image of a writer pounding away at a typewriter with the ever-present bottle next to him is what I am supporting here, rather that the poet's role has become as obscure as outdated machines, an un-needed and un-serviced 'social error'.

Concrete poetry, then, is a brief moment of reclamation of a poetic space which does not attempt to map the author as anything but a place-marker, signifying the absence of role. Christian Bök argues that best-selling poet is the equivalent of world-famous doily-maker or championship house-of-card maker, and it is increasingly an issue of alienated labour and endurance, to be a poet should be tantamount to being involved in scientific research; what can the restrictions of the form (26 letters and punctuation) communicate, and why?

This may also testify to my reluctance to create concrete poetry on the computer, preferring to use hand-made forms such as lettraset, typewriters, printmaking etcetera, using the computer only as a storage and transferral device (emailing pieces for submission, compiling manuscripts, etc) the actual process of creation of concrete is a hands-on issue for me.
Rereading Sheila Watson and Elizabeth Smart at the Garneau Pub, Edmonton

rob mclennan

In the winter, on very cold days, you can see her small figure, wrapped up in a huge, yellowish fur coat of indeterminate ancestry, walking across the snow-covered campus of the University of Alberta. She seems vulnerable, fragile almost. A strong gust of wind might blow her away. But that’s an illusion. The small figure creates a space of its own, asserts itself, and yet seems an integral part of the landscape. So also in her house, where she and Wilfred have created spaces in which both, strong individuals, can function separately and together. Paintings, pieces of pottery, Eskimo carvings, Indian masks create the stillness in which these two figures move.

— Henry Kreisel, “Sheila Watson in Edmonton”

I’m already off-topic, wanting to talk about two essential novels but already outside, wandering the dusty grey streets of the Alberta capital. How is it my day-to-day experience of Edmonton, after my first three months, became immersed in Sheila Watson and Elizabeth Smart? How is it that the ghosts that haunt my wandering the city streets became women writers from away who, for whatever reason, ended up being known, forgotten and known again for writing they had done so much earlier? Two women, too, who might have wanted more from themselves than these singular novels, each producing a lyrical prose masterpiece, but somehow the rest of their writing lives could never get out from under the shadow of their earlier, and difficult, pieces. For west coast Watson, it was her novel of the British Columbia interior, The Double Hook (1959), and for Smart, Ottawa born and bred, it was By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept (1945). For either writers, it wouldn’t be until the 1960s and even later that they would develop a reputation at all, and by then they held a near-cult status. In the end, how did either of them relate to the city of Edmonton? In the end, does it even matter when reading their books?

In the folds of the hills

under Coyote’s eye

lived

the old lady, mother of William
of James and of Greta

lived James and Greta
lived William and Ara his wife
lived the Widow Wagner
the Widow’s girl Lenhen
the Widow’s boy
lived Felix Prosper and Angel
lived Theophil
and Kip

until one morning in July
Sitting in the Garneau Pub on 109th Street in the Strathcona neighbourhood, in part of what once called “new Edmonton” until the forced amalgamation in 1904 with downtown, the sports bar with three televisions on sports, often two on one gone, and part of the geography Edmonton author Todd Babiak wrote about in his third novel, *The Garneau Block* (2007). In a review of the book the *Globe and Mail*, Cynthia MacDonald opened her commentary with:

> The city of Edmonton has received harsh treatment from many of the famous writers who’ve passed through it. Mordecai Richler called it “Canada’s boiler room.” Margaret Atwood offered her opinion in poetic form: "only more/ nothing than I’ve ever seen."

Passing through some 25 years ago, Jan Morris was even more blunt. "The longer I stayed in the place," she wrote, "the more I wondered why on earth anyone would want to live there." It made her think of Beirut.

But still, these are novels started, finished and published well before either author had even arrived in this highway boom town. “When and where does a book begin?” It’s one of the lines friend, critic and later biographer of Sheila Watson, F.T. Flahiff, wrote in the first line of his afterward to the paperback edition of *The Double Hook*. As Watson herself writes from her character Ara, “It’s not for fish she fishes […].” When I was seventeen years old, one of the books that the eventual mother of my child would hand me to read was a copy of Sheila Watson’s infamous novel, *The Double Hook*. A small edition published by McClelland and Stewart as a New Canadian Library paperback. The first part of his introduction reads:

> When and where does a book begin?

> On its first page, of course, with each reader and each new reading; with its recovery – or its discovery: here and everywhere, now and always.

Reading coyote and the interior of British Columbia, when I first read Watson’s first published novel, I missed completely the murder on the first page, enjoying but not understanding what it was I was taking in. By page fifty or so, seeing the mention of Mrs. Potter’s death, I had to return to the first page, to read over again what I had missed. When the hell did that happen? Where or how does a book begin? From the wheres and the when of biography, Watson’s life when the construction of the book would have begun, or very simply from the opening line of the first part, “In the folds of the hills // under coyote’s eye…” Or this section, beginning at the bottom of the same paperback page, that reads:

> Still the old lady fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting-paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom.

What brought me back to Watson, and Smart as well, was as much geographical as anything else, my nine months in Edmonton as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, where Sheila Watson taught from 1961 until retiring in 1975; how could I not see her in my future, taking copies of what little I had with me west? Another part of my return, was a hopeful return to fiction, with two incomplete novels that had been set aside for eighteen months while I completed a number of other projects, including a few editorial projects, a collection of literary essays and a travel book about Ottawa. By the time Watson got to Edmonton, she was still writing, but somehow nearly done; she
was nearly done but for some pieces in the journal she started, White Pelican. What effect did Edmonton have? Edmonton, where after some twenty years of marriage, the first house she and her husband, Wilfred Watson, owned, just west of the campus, on Windsor Road. Edmonton, where she taught for fourteen years, and oversaw more theses than anyone else on faculty.

What are you saying? Greta asked. You don’t even know. You don’t know a thing. You don’t know what a person knows. You don’t know what a person feels. You’ve burned and spilled enough oil to light up the whole country, she said. It’s easy enough to see if you make a bonfire and walk around in the light of it.

In the Garneau neighbourhood of Strathcona, one of the neighbourhoods Watson would have known, just the other side of the campus from the house where they lived in Windsor, at 8918 Windsor Road. Part of the appeal of Watson, is the internalization of region, of place; not the problem of place but taking it as something much deeper. Given that Watson sent a draft of the manuscript to University of Alberta professor Frederick M. Salter, an early champion of the novel while still in manuscript, it seems appropriate that her writing desk sits in the reading room named for him at the University of Alberta. How does one book or one author or a series of same hold on so to the imagination?

Elizabeth Smart, born in Ottawa to a prominent family, is known predominantly for the heartbreaking lyric prose of her By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept, originally published in England in 1945. Her infamous first novel was misunderstood, dismissed and unseen by readers in her home country, and finally went out of print for twenty years, only to be rediscovered in the 1960s in a reissue available to Canadian audiences (it, along with a later title, The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals, remain in print). No matter what else she wrote or produced throughout the rest of her life (she began publishing again after decades of silence in the late 1970s), it was the first novel that she is known for, both for the writing itself, and the situation of what the novel came out of, namely the doomed love affair she had with the married British poet George Barker, with whom she had four children, and received not a speck of support (he eventually had fifteen children with five different women, and never, through the process, left his wife). For Elizabeth Smart, it is very easy to let her work be overshadowed by her biography, but to hear the prose of her heart does away with all else, just as much as it reinforces it, as the beginning of the final chapter, part ten, begins:

By Grand Central Station I sat down and wept:
I will not be placated by the mechanical motions of existence, nor find consolation in the solicitude of waiters who notice my devastated face. Sleep tries to seduce me by promising a more reasonable tomorrow. But I will not be betrayed by such a Judas of fallacy: it betrays everyone: it leads them into death. Everyone acquiesces: everyone compromises.
They say, As we grow older we embrace resignation.
But O, they totter into it blind and unprotesting. And from their sin, the sin of accepting such a pimp to death, there is no redemption. It is the sin of damnation.

It certainly didn’t help that her mother was her harshest critic of all, interfering whenever she could, from as far a distance as possible, including having all the copies of the 1945 edition of her novel that made it into Canada seized and destroyed, with the help of family friend Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. Even when the novel was subsequently reprinted, her mother only responded with the same ugliness that she had brought to the table from the first edition. But still, Smart’s return to Canada in 1982 to become writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta (at the invitation of the previous writer-in-residence, poet Patrick Lane), was fraught with its own peril, including the fact that it was mere months after the death of Smart’s youngest daughter, Rose, from
an overdose, as author Kim Echlin writes in her magnificent Elizabeth Smart: A Fugue Essay on Women and Creativity (2004):

In 1982, a few months after Rose died, Elizabeth returned to Canada for the last time. She went to Edmonton as a writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta and then stayed on in Toronto for a second year, spending time reacquainting herself with the country of her birth. Although she met Alice Van Wart, who edited her final prose collections and her journals, Elizabeth found Canada “stifling” and was generally disillusioned with the “poor caged Canadians.” She found nothing in Canada worth staying for, and finally returned to her family, The Dell, and Soho.

What is it about these solitary, determined women that appeals so? What is it about those solitary masterpieces of lyric prose, pared down to the bone? When I walk the cold, winter streets of Garneau, I don’t think of Robert Kroetsch writing wild horses loose across the High Level Bridge in The Studhorse Man or even any part of Todd Babiak’s Garneau Block, but instead the reams of unwritten between two women who gave their time to Edmonton and the University of Alberta very close to each other but not meeting there, as Watson was long gone by the time Smart arrived in 1982. Recounting the Toronto introduction of Watson and Smart in his biography of Sheila Watson, F.T. Flahiff writes:

I remember on one of her last visits—in the summer of 1983—she [Watson] read at Harbourfront in connection with the publication of an anthology of Canadian literature edited by Donna Bennett and Russell Brown. It was an afternoon reading followed by a reception, and I remember that Sheila read “Antigone,” and P.K. Page, who also read, said to Sheila that she would have given all her own work to have written “Antigone.” After the readings, as we drank wine and ate cheese among large cardboard advertisements for the anthology, Elizabeth Smart, accompanied by an Antigone-like granddaughter, made her determined way to Sheila—they had never met—and attempted to kneel in homage before her. Sheila was startled and perplexed, as were bpNichol and Philip Marchand who were talking with her at the time. bp fell back, taking one of the advertisements with him. I remember Sheila and I remember Elizabeth Smart’s determination and her grand-daughter’s poise in the midst of this slapstick and strangely moving scene.

For both novels, there is the lyric as opposed to a more straightforward line. For Watson, it was the passionate stripped down matter-of-fact prose writing the trickster Coyote, and a prose later emulated by writers such as Ondaatje, Bowering and even Elizabeth Smart herself. For Smart, it was the heartbreaking and classically dense prose of lyric heartbreak that fish-hooked her insides out of her, and a novel that competes only with British writer Shelagh Delaney’s A Taste of Honey as the book most quoted in song lyrics by pop singer Morrissey, former front-man of The Smiths. How does a book by an Ottawa-born former socialite become such an influence? But I will leave the last words to Smart herself, from an earlier part of her novel:

And so, returning to Canada through the fall sunshine, I look homeward now and melt, for though I am crowned and anointed with love and have obtained from life all I asked, what am I as I enter my parents’ house but another prodigal daughter? I see their faces at which I shall never be free to look dispassionately. They gaze out of the window with eyes harassed by what they continually fear they see, like premature ghosts, straggling homeward over the plain.
Photograph by Melissa Ray (Canada)