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This issue of *Rampike* magazine considers different forms of environments including ecological, social, political, and cultural. The title of *Rampike* magazine is in keeping with this theme and refers to the life-cycle of trees. A "rampike" is the skeletal trunk that remains after a tree has been ravaged by lightning or forest-fire. There is a tree known as the "Lodgepole Pine" which will not release seedlings from its cones until temperatures exceed 450° Fahrenheit. During fires, the pine-cones pop open, and seedlings with small paper-thin wings rise upon the hot air above the flames. When the incendiary heat disappears, the seeds slowly spin earthward, land in the fertile ashes, and regenerate the forest. This cycle of re-birth is part of a natural flux that includes us all. In this issue of *Rampike*, we are honoured to present numerous authors, artists and leading thinkers from around the globe. Here, the Grand Chief of the Cree Nation, Matthew Coon Come, speaks on the complex land and treaty negotiations involving First Nations people and the Canadian Government. Poet and Governor General's Award nominee, Don McKay speaks about the inter-relationship between artist, natural environment and language as apparatus. Eminent theorist and literary critic, Linda Hutcheon offers a feminist perspective on post-modernism and irony with reference to the socio-cultural environment. Novelist Matt Cohen, nominated for the Governor General's Award in fiction, remarks on connections between the social environment and his work as an author. Poet and critic, Clemente Padin summarizes changes in the cultural and intellectual environment in his discussion of new nodes of poetry in South America. Numerous mail artists have sent us textual images from their individual sites on the living global art network. In this issue, *Rampike* examines the environment in its broadest sense, and in specific ways. More precisely, *language itself* is considered as an environment in both acoustic and visual forms. Here, *Rampike* presents numerous expressions that consider ink, paper, and communications as environment. We trust that you will find this issue to be both stimulating and exciting. The response *Rampike* received to the topic of environments was so strong that we gathered enough material for two issues. Hence, the "Environments II" issue will follow this one, and will feature an equally splendid selection. Following that, we will present our special issue on "Electronic Culture." (Please note that the deadline for submissions to the electro-culture issue has been extended until July, 1998). In the meantime, may we remember to tread lightly on this earth, to cleanse our environment and to replace what we take from it. And also, may we learn to live in mutual respect as stewards of this fragile ecosphere which unites us all. -- Karl E. Jirgens/Editor.
REMARKS OF GRAND CHIEF
MATTHEW COON COME
4th Peter McGregor Memorial Lecture:
Algoma University College,
Sault Ste. Marie, Canada

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come graciously agreed to speak at Algoma University on November 3, 1997 for the 4th annual Peter McGregor Memorial Lecture. The Grand Chief spoke candidly about the plight of the First Nations people of Canada, and also responded to the recent Royal Commission on Aboriginal rights in Canada. Rampike magazine is very grateful for permission to publish Grand Chief Coon Come’s talk in this special issue on environments.

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come (Photo by John Gagnon)

Wachiya! First, I wish to thank the organizers of the Annual Peter McGregor Memorial Lecture series for inviting me here today. This lecture was founded to deal with social policy and social concerns. I believe that it is fitting that you have decided to devote this year’s McGregor Memorial Lecture to an Aboriginal perspective. In light of your choice, I am very honored to have been chosen to speak to you today.

I understand that Algoma University College, one of the co-sponsors of this series, is located in the former Shingwauk Residential School. I also understand that the land on which it is situated was given in trust to the Anglican Church by the Garden River First Nation, for the education of Aboriginal children.

I also understand that First Nations and First Nations people in this area have been advocating the conversion of Algoma University College into a new Shingwauk University, that would promote Native culture. I am pleased that these historical connections with Aboriginal history in this place are a source of positive initiatives and pride.

Please forgive me if I come straight to the point in my presentation today; the current social state of Aboriginal peoples in this country is a national tragedy and disgrace. It is disgraceful that after hundreds of years of accelerated development in these lands called Canada, the first peoples that live in this land continue to endure the social conditions under which we find ourselves. It is tragic that after 130 years of the formal existence of this country – a G-7 country that is stated to be the best place in the world to live – Aboriginal peoples continue to be widely excluded from any meaningful benefit and contribution of their own peoples and the population as a whole.

It is fundamentally wrong that Aboriginal peoples continue to suffer under social and economic conditions that would not be tolerated by any other peoples or communities in this land.

I do not wish to make you uncomfortable. I know that I am here among friends, people who are concerned with social development and with Aboriginal issues. I know that you are not afraid of what you will find if you shine a light of concern into the shadows of Canada’s doorways. I know that you are not among those who prefer to avoid discussion of the problems you will find if you enter the physical and psychological reserves into which Aboriginal peoples have been forced.

I would like to address these questions tonight, from a social perspective. I would like to discuss what the situation facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada is. I would like to discuss why and how this situation came about. I would like to discuss what will be necessary to succeed in turning it around. And I would like to mention what I fear will happen if it does not turn around.

There are 600 or more so-called “Indian Bands” in Canada. Many of these are part of 60 to 80 larger Aboriginal Nations or peoples, who each speak the same language, share a common culture and history and self-identity as Nations.

For example, my people are based in nine communities, Chisasibi, Eastmain, Mistissini, Nemaska, Ouje-Bougoumou, Waskaganish, Wawa, Nemindji, and Whapmagoostui. Each of our communities are part of the whole James Bay Cree Nation. We call our nation Eeyouatche.

For the James Bay Cree People, our lands on the eastern shore of James and Hudson Bays are part of us. My people live off the land, as we have done for thousands of years. We are sustained by what it provides, by the caribou, the beavers, the parrmagans, the sturgeon, the geese, the lynx, and the moose, which the Creator placed in our lands and gave us the ability to hunt.

All of our land, which we call Eeyouatche, is covered with our family trapsines and the graves of our ancestors; every bend in the river, every mountain and hill, and every island and lake is named in Cree. A Cree map of our vast lands looks as crowded with place names as is a map of Southern Ontario. The footsteps and burial grounds of my people are everywhere. Our presence is everywhere.

Actually, most Aboriginal peoples have been artificially split by the imposition of provincial and various other boundaries across this land, whether in the West, the East, the Prairies or the North. There are James Bay Creeas as out west in Ontario. We have the same names, and many of us are close relatives. Further ahead, the Cree of Manitoba and the Innu of Labrador are also our people. And where we were not split by boundaries, the provisions of the Indian Act have seen to it that our peoples were divided into hopelessly small, but conveniently manageable, local units the government calls “bands”.

Nevertheless, the histories and cultures of the many First Nations across this country are often as different as the differences between the settlers from England and Poland, or from Holland and Lebanon, of from France and Japan. And yet the core aspects of our Aboriginal societies and our ways of life are very much the same. We are all deeply connected to the land. And our common experiences at the hands of settler societies has united us in a new commonality.

In 1972 I was a young student in Montreal. One day, I read in the newspaper that my community of Mistissini and our traditional lands in the vast La Grande watershed were slated for flooding in Premier Bourassa’s “project of the century”, the James Bay Hydro-Electric project.

I was in the south because I and others of my generation had been taken from our families and sent away to residential school. For generations before, our people had been nomadic hunters, and still are. But as you well know, the government’s coercive plan of the day was to ensure the assimilation of my generation of Aboriginal youth “into the Canadian mainstream”.

Paradoxically, the education we younger Cree received increased our determination (and ability) to fight for the rights and survival of our people. We returned to James Bay, and because our elders did not speak English or French, the younger generation of Cree was suddenly pushed into positions of leadership.

Just a few years earlier, it would have been illegal under the Indian Act for our leaders to organize to try to defend our Aboriginal rights to our land. It would have been illegal for them to engage lawyers as they did to approach the courts to press our case. Just a few years earlier, we still did not have the vote, because at that time we were still regarded as being lower down on the scale of social organization.

The prohibitions in the Indian Act, which had been in effect for most of the century, had recently been repealed. However, they had resulted in a jurisprudence that concerned our rights, that was shaped in our absence and without our consent.

Because of legal and political theories of native inferiority, and because our rights were being determined in our absence in the courts and legislatures, a number of doctrines were employed against Aboriginal peoples in order to give our dispossession a veneer of legitimacy and legality.

So even though the bulldozing and destruction of our lands was well underway, we argued before the Quebec Superior Court that we were not squatters. We argued we were original inhabitants and an organized society, and that we had jurisdiction and ownership of our lands.

After six months of argument, we won a brief victory when Mr. Justice Malouf ruled that two odious and discriminatory doctrines from another age were alive and well in Quebec and the rest of Canada. I am referring to the related doctrines of terra nullius and extinguishment.
Three judges of the Quebec Court of Appeal disposed of our rights in less than six hours of deliberations; the court ruled that we were squatters in our own lands. Because in 1670 King Charles had given our lands (and the rest of the Hudson Bay watershed as far as Alberta) to his cousin Prince Rupert the Hudson’s Bay Company, the judges said our rights in and to our lands had been extinguished.

How on earth could this be, we wondered. We have always been here. We were put here as a people by the Creator, to live in and take care of this land. We call it Eeyou Istchee, or “Our Land.”

“This is the law of the country,” our leaders were told. “Your territory was terra nullius, or land belonging to no-one, when King Charles made his grant in 1670.” This was possible because your society was too inferior on the scale of social organization to have any concept of ownership or jurisdiction over land. And so, according to our laws, your rights were extinguished, and Rupert’s Land became Crown land.

We didn’t know it then, but we know now that what we faced was what many dozens of other Aboriginal peoples had faced for hundreds of years elsewhere in Canada. Along with the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba, Labrador, Ontario, BC and elsewhere, we were facing wholesale flooding of our lands for hydro development. We and others had also faced the wholesale taking of our lands for farming, for forestry, or fishery, or sport hunting, or mineral extraction. Or the establishment of forts, cities or military bases and low-level flight testing ranges. Like many others before us, our leaders had no choice but to try to enter into treaty negotiations with the Crown. Our leaders had no choice but to try and salvage what they could, especially because the governments told them that if they didn’t they would get nothing at all.

Our negotiations ended in 1975 with the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. In this Agreement we obtained certain promises of benefits, for example health and social services, education, income security, environmental protection, and economic development to replace the destruction through flooding, of our economic relationship with our lands.

While we have obtained some of these benefits, many of the promises that were made to us have not been kept. Lime many First Nations before us, our treaty is already best characterized as a broken treaty, less than 25 years after it was signed.

We also now know that these benefits we were promised are, by and large, taken for granted by all other residents of Canada. Non-native residents of Canada — whether descended form French or English settlers in the 1700’s or newly-arrived immigrants from Hong Kong or Vietnam — do not have to give up, code, surrender, and accede to the extinguishment of any of their fundamental rights in exchange for these basic services.

No other people are required (as we were by the governments of Canada and Quebec) to give up, code, surrender, and accede to the extinguishment of their fundamental rights in exchange for manpower training, regional economic development, or their right to develop and participate in the governance of their institutions and communities.

And we now know, because we have since researched the history of treaty-making in Canada, that it is in reality a camouflage for something very sinister. The treaty making process in Canada has always been masqueraded as the honourable settlement of Aboriginal land claims by the Crown. In reality, it is a process whereby governments purport to complete the wholesale extinguishment of Aboriginal rights and dispossession of the First Nations, all with the apparent consent of the Aboriginal peoples involved.

Look at the official texts of all of the treaties signed from historic times to the present day. You will find clauses in every one that purport in various ways to extinguish the land rights, the resource rights, the rights to hunt, fish and trap, and other rights of the Aboriginal people concerned.

When these clauses are challenged in court, it is held to this day that it is an ancient and good law [and], that the Crown has the power to unilaterally extinguish our Aboriginal rights as long as its intention is clear. If the entrenchment of Aboriginal and treaty rights in s. 35 of the Constitution now poses an obstacle, well then governments simply wait until the circumstances of the Aboriginal people concerned are sufficiently desperate for them to agree to the extinguishment of whichever land and other rights that may constitute an obstacle to the development of the day.

In short, the name of the game is still the effective application of the odious doctrines of terra nullius and extinguishment, to the social detriment of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. If there is any doubt on this count, one just has to examine the current situation that has arisen at Voisey’s Bay in Labrador.

We are increasingly succeeding in making our objections to these ongoing policies and practices of dispossession known. Our efforts in the courts, and before Royal Commissions, in the court of public opinion, and in the public places where we demonstrate in Canada and overseas, are occasionally being successful.

We know this because of the wave of historical revisionism regarding the fundamental status and rights of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is showing new strength. Social commentators such as Melvin Smith, Rafe Mair, and Gordon Sinclair are in a class of their own. They are joined by many Reform politicians and many provincial premiers, who in defiance of history and the Constitution insist that there can be no affirmative status for anyone in this country.

Premier Harris used lethal force to make this point at Ipperwash Park in 1995. Premier Bouchard’s government actually argued that the doctrine of terra nullius still applies within the boundaries of Quebec with the effect that there have been no Aboriginal rights in the province for more than 400 years. The Supreme Court rejected this view, but Premier Bouchard still asserts regularly in the context of the debate regarding Quebec secession that the Cree’s rights have all been extinguished.

And other commentators and politicians are increasingly stating that Canada must shed its mantle of historical guilt, that history is history and bygones should be bygones. Most of all, it is also stated that, all of a sudden, the best approach for Aboriginal policy is a so-called “level playing field”, in which present conceptions of Aboriginal jurisdictions and rights to land and resources are the ceiling — or even too much.

One does not have to be an Aboriginal person to understand that any dispossession of legal status and fundamental rights is that root cause of profound ongoing social disadvantage and deprivation.

Coloured people and women all over the world know the links between denial of their status and rights and their social and economic disadvantage. The links between race or gender and social status still hold true in Canada. In the case of Aboriginal peoples, these links are not abstract. The taking of our lands and resources has resulted in the involuntary resettlement of hundreds of thousands of First Nations people. It has resulted in great damage to the social and economic fabric of our communities and societies.

Thankfully, the news is not all bad. Our people and our societies have been patient and resilient in the face of these policies and practices of dispossession and discrimination. Our peoples’ identities, our economies and our ways of life survive, and our societies are developing in important ways. All of the credit is due to the courage and spirit of our elders and our women and our youth.

However, as pointed out by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal peoples remain at the top of the scale on all indexes of social distress in Canada. The social and economic costs of this status quo are enormous.

In our Cree communities in James Bay, for example, our people face a critical shortage of housing. We live in seriously overcrowded conditions with the result that there are outbreaks of infectious disease. Our ability to create new families is being hindered. In addition, many of our communities still lack adequate sanitation, safe water, and other essential infrastructure.

We Cree are aware that many other Aboriginal peoples in Canada are in even worse shape than we are. Both levels of government we deal with frequently point this out to us when we attempt to get them to implement their treaty commitments to us. But we are willing to permit comparisons to a lowest denominator.

If comparisons were in order, why not compare our circumstances to those of the people of Sudan or Chad?

Rather, we believe that the correct approach is to compare our socio-economic and other conditions with those of non-native communities of similar size in the Northwest Territories, Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba or any other province. When these objective comparisons are made, there is considerable socio-economic work to be done.

I have mentioned the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. For the first time in Canadian history, a concerted exercise was undertaken to examine the past, present and potential future of relations with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Royal Commission was not perfect, but it was a truly extraordinary and very moderate exercise. Two senior non-Aboriginal justices were commissioners, one a former Supreme Court judge and another sitting judge of the Quebec Court of Appeal. Other prominent public figures, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, were commissioners. The terms of reference were drawn up by a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and approved by a conservative Prime Minister.

The work of the Royal Commission was conducted over a period of five years. The commission heard thousands of witnesses and received thousands of briefs. It consulted hundreds of experts, corporations, governments and individuals, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The Commission process was really an exercise of wisdom in the counsel of many. It was also an unprecedented exercise of attempted reconciliation; I myself witnessed the deep commitment and hope with which our people approached their participation in the commission hearings.

It has been stated that the commission was too costly, took too long, and that its recommendations were too numerous and too far-reaching in terms of political or legal change. Some of these criticisms have been echoed by prominent First Nations leaders, who apparently said that some of the Commission’s recommendations are “not supportable”.

These “criticisms” of the cost and scope of the commission’s recommendations have so far mostly been unsubstantiated. Of course the work and approach of the Commission was broad! But I believe firmly that nothing will do in
Quebec, there has been extensive clear cut logging, and now there are devastated
forest lands in the Serpent River area in Ontario, and in the Great Bear Lake area
elsewhere in the Northwest Territories. This sad story is detailed in the report of the Royal
Commission in its section on the "Great Bear Lake Experience." Our approach to the problem and our approach to the future is determined by
our understanding of the immediate past. Aboriginal peoples have not just been excluded from a whole bunch of abstract rights. We have been, and still are, concretely excluded from a meaningful and proportionate share of the economic and social benefits that this land has to offer.

Our people are suffering the serious social consequences, daily in our communities, of this social and economic exclusion. We have referred to housing, sanitation and infrastructure concerns; in addition, unemployment in many James Bay communities exceeds 50%, and this number may increase greatly when the current Aboriginal baby boom comes of age. The status quo of social and economical exclusion is the root cause of our dependence on other levels of government.

The terms of the Crees' Agreement with Canada and Quebec were, for all intents and purposes, imposed on us in 1975. It is now clear that our Agreement does not provide any real foundation for the development of the Cree Nation, or any substantial basis for a sustainable economy or self-sufficiency.

In contrast, governments, crown corporations and multinationals are now removing resources to the value of over $5 billion per year from our traditional lands each year. In return, the federal and Quebec governments spend a fraction of this sum on the Cree Nation. These expenditures total a little more than per capita average expenditures on all other Canadians, and much less than is spent per capita in the Northwest Territories.

Thousands of jobs have been created for non-Aboriginal Quebeccers as a result of the utilization of resources from our traditional lands. In contrast, less than a few dozen jobs have gone to Cree -- in spite of treaty promises that we would have priority access to these positions.

Ours is not an isolated story. Twenty years earlier, the communities of York Factory, Nelson House, Norway House, Cross Lake, Split Lake and South Indian Lake were undergoing flooding and economic dispossession at the hands of the government of Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro. This sad story is detailed in the report of the Royal Commission. The Commission records that:

...although the project directly affected the lands and livelihood of five treaty communities and one non-treaty community, they were not consulted, nor did they give approval for the undertaking. Reserve and community lands were either flooded or affected by dramatic changes to levels in surrounding lakes and rivers and traditional land use areas were damaged or rendered inaccessible.

The Royal Commission also discussed the Northern Flood Agreement, the treaty that was signed between the First Nation and the governments of Canada and Manitoba. It states that this treaty has been the subject of much controversy:

In many respects the agreement has become the model of how not to reach a resolution, as its history has been marked by little or no action in implementation of treaty obligations and a long drawn-out (and continuing) process of arbitration to force governments to implement their obligations.

Our ambassador, Ted Moses, recently led a Cree fact-finding mission to Manitoba Northern Flood Agreement territory. He found that in many communities, the water almost laps at the doorsteps of the buildings of the affected communities. These communities are perched on man-made islands linked by bridges and artificial causeways. The water levels are never constant because of hydro-electric draw-down, leading to hazardous water and ice conditions that have taken the lives of a number of Manitoba Cree hunters.

In a number of these communities, over 80% of the people are on welfare. Ted Moses reported that while our experience in his home community of Eastmain and elsewhere in Eeyou Astche is similar, we Crees in Quebec can be grateful that we have not experienced such an extreme level of imposed hardship throughout our lands. These experiences have been repeated across this country. In First Nation traditional lands in the Serpent River area in Ontario, and in the Great Bear Lake area in the NWT, and in the Baker Lake area in Saskatchewan there are now millions of tons of radioactive uranium tailings. Elsewhere is Alberta, in British Columbia, and in Quebec, there has been extensive clear cut logging, and now there are devastated habitats and ecosystems.

Other First Nation peoples have experienced the effects of expanded mining,
We are dealing with a complex history and very varied circumstances across Canada. In the brief time available to me this evening, I hope that I have at least succeeded in stating the case that our social and economic survival is coupled to full recognition of our status and rights. In the words of the Royal Commission:

If what Aboriginal peoples thought they had won had been delivered -- a reasonable share of lands and resources for their exclusive use, protection for their traditional economic activities, resources revenues from shared lands, and support in the new economy being shaped by the settlers -- the position of Aboriginal peoples in Canada today would be very different. They would be major land owners. Most Aboriginal nations would likely be economically self-reliant. Some would be prosperous.

Instead, every Aboriginal people in Canada can testify to the efforts of countless governments through countless policies, to deny us these benefits and our fundamental human rights.

This approach cannot last forever. In a section of its final Report entitled "The escalating cost of the status quo", the Royal Commission stated that:

Every year that the social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal people remain as they are, it costs the country $7.5 billion... the equivalent of nearly one per cent of Canada's [Gross Domestic Product] GDP.... If no effort is made to reduce the cost of the status quo, it is likely to increase... to $11 billion by 2016. It is possible to avoid this costly future, but not with current policies. To be sure, some improvements have been made, and we want to acknowledge these positive steps.... As we have shown, however, these measures, while constructive and offering some hope, do not go far enough.

Only a more fundamental renewal of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians will lead to improved conditions for Aboriginal peoples. The positive steps taken so far are likely to be overwhelmed by population growth, government expenditure restraint, and a lack of economic opportunity for Aboriginal people.

On the day the Final Report of the Royal Commission was released, I stated my initial reaction after reading the summary report. I said that a failure to heed the recommendations and warnings of the Commissioners would leave Canada with a "social time-bomb".

I take no pleasure in making this observation. I believe that while there is much to do, there is no good reason to believe that increasing numbers of Canadians are becoming aware of this reality. After all, the organizations of the McGregor Memorial Lecture have afforded me this opportunity this evening, for which I am very grateful. I will end my presentation with one more passage from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples. The Commissioners concluded:

Unless tangible progress is made soon, there is a serious risk of major conflict, with high human and economic cost, much higher than the cost of the status quo we have described....

[However], these steps we have recommended, taken together, have the potential to bring about fundamental change -- in the hearts, minds and life experience of Aboriginal people, who have waited so long for justice, and in Canada as a country of fair-minded people. Each step, and the rationale from which it springs, must be accepted and adopted with determination and good will, by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and their leaders. It can be done.

To which I can only add one word: Amen.

Meegwetch! Thank you!


textimage by Mogens Otto Nielsen (Denmark)
RE-TELLING TELLING
ABOUT COYOTE
by Rolland Nadjiwon
Dedicated to Simon Ortiz’s “Telling About Coyote”

once she got told...
...coyote that is

simon couldn’t take back
his telling

...maybe he forgot
every indian...
even little kids know
once you tell
that told takes off

that’s why indians
they don’t like telling too much
...pretty quiet sometimes

anyhow...

once coyote got told
he just kept going
and going
like duracell...

you know...
like that little pinko bunny

coyote caught him one time
she doesn’t come into
indian country no more

...sure couldn’t outrun a coyote

anyhow...
i heard telling from a cree
who got told by a shawnee
who got told by an apache
who got told by a tewa...

she told me that simon
was heading back to new mexico...
he took a room up in bovina
just a little northeast
of clovis which is
a more
little northeast of roswell

roswell...
that’s those space people
...everybody knows they were
looking for coyote cause coyote...
he didn’t only chase pawnee women

some of those women he chased
well...
Lots of times...
they had boyfriends or husbands

...that’s really how coyote got his fur
all broke up and patchy...
not gambling...coyote likes romance
...she didn’t lose his coat gambling

not only aliens were looking for him

oh yeah...

...anyhow...
that night...
out across the full moon desert
simon was thinking about
a story he was going to tell
...he saw coyote
sneaking around in the sagebrush

simon says
"come on in...yer a mess...
clasin pawnee and aliens again huh..."

coyote doesn’t answer that question...

"hey simon" he says
"i gotta do sometin...
those aliens...
they’re looking for me...
they’re cutting
dy privates off all those animals...
...they’re looking for me simon..."

"what you gonna do..." says simon

"i want to go to university...
maybe hide out there for a while...
get a education like you simon...
teach mahingunish
get tenure...
work maybe 15-20 hours a week
sabbaticals every 2-3 years...
...with pay...
maybe go to russia..."

"russia" simon says...
"russia...
why russia..."

"well...that’s it simon...
you told i was a
dostoevsky coyote
now that’s how i’m stuck...
you gotta get me into university...
i gotta write a
dostoevsky coyote story..."

simon was stuck with his telling
coyote too...
he was stuck with his telling

"look coyote...
i can’t get you into university
no coyote...
even that columbus coyote
thomas king told...
he couldn’t go to university...
they just started letting
us indians in a short time ago..."

simon gives a coyote smile

"tell you what...
we can make a deal...
you won’t even have
to do anything much...
you let me write stories and books
about you...
maybe a poem or two

those stories and books and poems
will be in universities...
...like the king coyote...
and people will read them
and study us
you won’t have to do a thing...
just be coyote...

tricky and raggedy...
like you are now...

why...
you’re already in university...
...this guy is telling us
right now...

students...they’re listening to us
being told right now...
and re-told...and re-told
just like old copper top

well...
last everybody got told
by them newspaper’s guys
...simon died
musta got the story from coyote

heck...
i saw Ortiz and coyote
up at painted rocks
earlier this summer...
they was laughing and talkin
with the may-may-quay-zhowug...
they was talkin about
doing them paintings
like picasso or dali...
wasn’t Simon though
was that other Ortiz...the anthropologist

no wonder they were laughing

that would be a good coyote trick
picasso and dali forgot to add time
and those paintings would wear out

...had a stranger with them...
funny lookin white guy...
hummmph...
...dostoevsky maybe...
MEDITATION
by Armand Garnet Ruffo

The sidewalk melts as if it were spring
but it’s not, far from it,
I jump to avoid the splash.

A boy approaches who turns out not
to be a boy at all but a little old man.
There was a time I enjoyed puddles.
A young woman stares past, and I can see
from her eyes she’s looking for someone.
Who? I don’t know and wonder if she does.
I pass myself in a glass encased skyscraper.
The reflection reminds me of someone else.
The letters I write are eaten
day in and day out
by the red mailbox at the corner.
Your response is distant and silent,
I picture you in a white room, sparsely furnished
the buzz of European traffic below.
You slit open my letters with a long thin blade.
Today I’ll demand the garage attendant
make certain he fixes the car properly.
What do they mean? I mean all these letters
I send and receive.
Cars are accidental, people are not. Both
hook and speed off in all directions.
My wet feet sneeze.
Even the noise is shredded by a moment
of sharp calm.

What would you do if one day I showed up
at your door (in place of a letter)
would we stop trying to understand?
This woman who was staring at me looked a lot like you.
My reflection confused me. For a moment it made me
feel old, even young.

They say the temperature is rising. Spring
has nothing to do with it.
No, I haven’t been seeing anyone else.
Yes, I’ve thought of it.
When I arrive at the garage I know exactly what I’ll say
I’ve been rehearsing.
I was old and saw her as she was.
Then I was young and didn’t see.
What would you say if you could see me now?
The car’s a crime.
They constantly ask about you.
You have friends who know something I don’t.
Some days pass as though I’ve slept through them.
Others days rant and rave.
Then there are the ones in between.
I still introduce you at parties.
Is love a fixation? Is loneliness?
I’ll continue to write even after you’ve returned
and everything is back to normal or at least
as normal as possible.

APPARATI AND MATÉRIEL:
TALKING WITH DON McKAY
by Karl Jirgens
Friday Nov. 14, 1997
Banff Centre for the Arts Writing Centre

In this interview with Rampike Don McKay talks about Apparatus, his latest book of poetry. Don McKay, born in 1942 in Owen Sound, Ontario, was raised in Cornwall, Ontario. He went to Bishop’s University, the University of Western Ontario, and gained his Ph.D. at Swansea College, Wales. He has taught Canadian Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Western Ontario and the University of New Brunswick (where he edited Fiddlehead magazine). McKay is also an editor with Brick Books which is based in Ontario. He currently lives in British Columbia. Some of McKay’s other books of poetry include Lightning Ball Bait (1980), Birding, or Desire (1983) which was nominated for a Governor General’s Award and won the Canadian Author’s Association Prize, Sanding Down This Rocking Chair on a Windy Night (1987), and Night Field (1991) which won a Governor General’s award. Apparatus is Don McKay’s eighth book of poetry and was nominated for the 1997 Canada Council for the Arts Governor General’s Award. (Apparatus. ISBN: 0-7710-5763-6 – c/o McClelland & Stewart, 481 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5G 2E9).

Photo: Don McKay

DM: No kidding. I used to have a teaching job in Sault Ste. Marie at Algoma University.

KJ: Thanks for agreeing to do this interview!

DM: Well, anybody who’s been doing a magazine since the 70’s deserves a medal.

KJ: Well, we used to work out of Toronto, but today I’m calling you from Sault Ste. Marie where I teach at Algoma University.

DM: That’s a long haul. I think that literary journals are important.

KJ: I never knew that. I think they call that school Sault College now. It’s a small world. So, you got your doctorate at Swansea in Wales, didn’t you?

DM: Yes, University of Wales.

KJ: I find that interesting because the neighbourhood that I grew up in back in Toronto was called “Swansea” and it was named after the place in Wales. Fred Turner who lives in the Swansea section of Toronto, sells old and rare Canadian books and other things of historical interest. He’s a local historian there and he likes to follow the connections between the Swanseas in Wales, and the Swansea in Toronto.

DM: Is that right? You know there was an old bookstore in Swansea Wales that Dylan Thomas used to go to, called “Ralph the Books.” It’s a Welsh formula, like “Evans the Death,” or “Davies the Bread,” and it was “Ralph the Books,” and it was a great old bookstore. Ralph didn’t know what he had, or at least he let on that he didn’t really know what he had. He had a lot of crap, like a lot of these used book stores, but he would take a real find, like a first edition, and he’d bury it, like a treasure hunt. Every so often somebody would go in there and find a real gem and for five shillings they’d get something worth about twenty pounds, and word would get around, and he kept getting business. And I bought a lot of crap there, because you’d find the crap while looking for a gem, but the crap would be fascinating, you know nineteenth century things about etiquette, what a woman should do in this and that situation. I found some wild books. It was a nice place to hang out. One of those great old bookstores.
KJ: So, this is your third Governor General's award nomination. You were nominated before for Birding (1983), and you also received a G.G. for Nightfield (1991).

DM: Yes, but I don’t think that competition is native to poetry. I don’t think that competition really benefits any of the arts. So, its kind of an artificial situation to gain attention. That’s the benefit of it. Obviously it puts some money and recognition in the hands of particular poets, but the whole exercise is, supposedly, to raise the public’s awareness of poetry. I think that for people who are already aware of poetry, their interest becomes sharpened, but I don’t think that it really extends the readership that much, frankly. It does with fiction, but that’s a whole different thing. And I think that poetry is particularly out of place in that sort of competition.

KJ: Yeah, I guess it is hard to decide which metaphor is better than which metonymy.

DM: Yes, you get down to five strong books, and the choice between them is really a matter of taste. I’m associated with Brick Books and we have two nominations, both Patrick Friesen’s and Carol Glasser Langille’s, both of which are strong books. We hope that the nominations will result in more exposure for both Patrick and Carol, and it’s nice for the publisher, although I don’t know how much actual effect it will have.

KJ: I think you are being modest. If I’m not mistaken, you had a hand in editing the books by Patrick Friesen and Carol Glasser Langille. Rampike has some interesting connections with Brick Books. For example, in the past we’ve run some of John Donlan’s poetry in the magazine. John Donlan is still editing for you isn’t he?

DM: Yes, he is, thank God. I am acting as the general co-ordinating office boy/editor right now. We don’t have any official titles exactly, but I’ve been the one who has been pulling things together since I quit teaching.

KJ: It seems to me that a lot of important Canadian publishing happens on a grass roots level where individuals end up serving as office clerks and editors. It has been said that your book Apparatus deals with the general human assault on nature in a way. Would you say that is an accurate assessment?

DM: It is an accurate assessment of part of the book. At one extreme it is about the reduction of nature and the reduction of things not just for your own use, but to things that become parodies of themselves, until we have no access left to the natural world at all. In the middle of the book there is a whole section called “Matériel.” 1) That’s a word that I borrow from the military. It means that we not only take the life of something, such as the life of a tool which you might use for a whole lifetime, but we also own it in death. I was trying to think of environmental devastation, not just in terms of global issues, but also in terms of what is it in human character that leads to these things. It isn’t something incidental. So I tried to trace the roots of what might be called "atrocity." But that’s the dark end of the book. At the other end of it, I end up doing meditations on tools and things, musical instruments. Trying to feel out ways in which tools not only divide us from the natural world but also provide ways in which we can touch it again. Musical instruments are tools that permit us to touch natural forces.

KJ: I was thinking about that whole idea of instrumentality. For example, a couple of the earlier poems, such as "Glenn Gould Humming" [p. 9] and "Early Instruments" [p. 3], or, "Ode to my Car" [p. 62], are all about different apparatus, and it seemed to me that they are all about articulation in a way, not unlike the cover image of a base drum pedal. And I was also thinking of articulation in the broadest sense of a word as articulation of thought, or the wrist and finger joints as articulations in writing or playing music or repairing an automobile. And all of these articulations seemed connected to movements of instruments, and tools, as well as movements of the mind, so that eventually the text is an articulation about articulations.

DM: I was also hoping that the idea of "apparatus" would refer to the book itself, in that language is a type of apparatus. I know that language is powerful and that in some ways the mind is controlled by it or inhabited by it. I realize that, but in some ways it is healthy for us to remember that it (language) is a tool. To think of it that way, give language back its humility, especially in the current times, when everything threatens to become language. You know, the whole post-structural thing. So in a sense, every theoretical approach you take, makes language the premier and most important element and the defining condition of whatever context or feeling or perception you have. And while that is true, I think that it is also a very frail and inadequate medium. So in some ways some of these things are ways of trying to chasten it. The "Twinflower" basically tries to see language as apparatus. The title and idea of the book come out of some meditations that I was doing on tools and things. I have an idea of how the term apparatus itself has a relation to tools, and in particular the kind of a tool that we can still see as a tool. Unlike technology which is always trying to disappear.

KJ: Right. So there’s a kind of de-mystification.

DM: Well, actually, yeah. Being residents of language, we can’t help but anthropomorphize the world when we speak or write. But, if we make ourselves aware of the fact that we’re doing it, then in some ways that very awareness will recover some sense of the thing. I mean it is impossible for me to write about birds and pretend that I am giving a kind of naive window onto the actual bird itself. But I can use language in such a way, that we feel that it is gesturing outside of itself, acknowledging that there is a world outside. I’m not the kind of writer that thinks that everything finally does reside in language. And I guess my main strategy in this book is try to make us aware in language, of the limits of language. I guess you could call that language as apparatus.

KJ: That makes sense. I personally prefer a kind of balance between how you say a thing and what you say. I was quite fascinated by the acoustic dimension in this book, not just in reference to music, but to sound-scapes in general. For example poems such as "Thaw in C Major" [p. 12], the "Song for Beef Cattle" [p. 13], and the acoustic dimension in the poem "Camouflage" [p. 14] which is about the sudden sound that a surprised ruffled grouse makes. If we keep in mind the idea of apparatus as such, and the blend of the other sense, then would you say that there is a kind of synaesthesia happening here through the multiple senses as they inter-mingle?

DM: I think that synaesthesia, like other metaphors, is a way in which we recognize the limits of language. In order to even get a partial sense of the sound and energy of a bird like the ruffled grouse, language has to go to some extremes. Synaesthesia does this wonderful blending of the senses, and it also says, "look how difficult this is." It can’t really name it. It is un-nameable in ordinary language. Language can stretch to this synaesthetic mode and it still hasn’t succeeded. So, it is a kind of anthropomorphic play which by the very extent of its difficulty gestures to the actual wonder of the bird itself. Inside language a gesture of awe. The failing attempt to define the bird within a linguistic phenomena is a gesture to how wonderful, how wild the bird is.

KJ: The musicality in writing emerges in an other way in your writing in poems like "Black Box" [p. 32] or "Stretto" [p. 46] which have this amazing jazz-like "beat" to them and very strong rhythm. Do you have any affinities with particular types of music or musical influences that affect the rhythm in your writing?

DM: Well, Karl, I’m kind of a music junky. I love jazz and I live with Jan Zwicky, a classical musician who plays the violin, so I’ve been in close contact with music for a long time the way a rink rat is close to hockey. Poems like the saxophone poem "Acoustics of the Conical Tube" [p. 65], have come from my repeated thoughts that "boy, I could pick up the sax and I could play this thing." But, I’ve rented them and actually tried, and of course, I can’t. But I have this fascination with the music and also the way in which it is generated. The way that we have contrived things to give us access to what I call the "wilderness" that is out there in the world of sound. So, I try to get some of that into the poetry too in various ways.

KJ: You are talking about this idea of "wilderness" and the sense of a particular kind of presence, and also meditation. Do you feel any kind of affinity with, say, Zen, in your writing, for example, is there maybe a connection to an imagist or objectivist background?
DM: That’s a large question. I think it would be presumptuous for me to say that there is a Zen connection because I am not well informed or read in that area. But I think that poetry can naturally lead one to one’s own practice. A lot of the preparations for this book for example, involved thinking about or actually going to places where there were notorious dam-sites or environmental devastation, such as places where bombs were tested. And living by a military base was really handy. This base had signs all around saying “Do Not Enter” and it was a big, big tract of land. You just can’t believe how much land has been appropriated for military manoeuvres. And they would bomb and then they’d re-bomb it, and then they’d bomb it again, and they tested Agent Orange there in the sixties. Its a good example of material. So, I did a lot of things that were both meditative and kind of practical. I’d go there and think about what has happened to the land. I wrote an essay that appeared in a publication called Poetry and Knowing edited by Tim Lilburn. It lays out what I’ve been talking about in terms of the kind of poetic attention that I think is one way of countering our tendency of turning the world into “matériel”. I wrote the essay after I wrote a lot of the poetry, to consolidate a lot of its ideas for myself. I find the poetry turns things up. It is in some ways a kind of a tool that leads us to insights. And then there was another essay called “Remembering Apparatus.” (I wrote that essay before I had the title of the book. It has been awaiting its fate while sitting in the editorial offices of a literary magazine.

KJ: Sounds good. Well, maybe we could run it. You’ve got a poem called “The Laugh” [p. 29], which I found very intriguing, and you use this image of the laugh that ate this snake, and the poem begins with a quotation from Emmanuel Levinas which reads: “The inverse of language is like a laughter that seeks to destroy language, a laughter infinitely reverberated.”

DM: Yeah, I was interested in the limits of language there. That epigraph comes from Levinas’ Totality and Infinity. I took this as something that defines the limits of language, and almost is a kind of wildness that preys upon it. (And I’m sure that this is not integral to Levinas’ philosophy because I’m taking out of context and re-working it). But, it seemed to me that in such natural outbursts of laughter, we have suddenly in our vocalizations and speech an eruption of wildness or a kind of rush of wildness, from the other side. It can appear inside language as a kind of calamity, which is what I wanted to get at in that poem. A kind of wordlessness, that gives us back something of the unutterable wildness and individuality of things. You know how when you are experiencing a dream or a picture and you’re suddenly shocked? I think that imagist poetry did that, or haiku. You’d suddenly see a chair, or some other object...

KJ: A red wheelbarrow.

DM: And see it suddenly and freshly and then resolve it in the conventions of our perception, or the conventions of language. There is a dangerous acuteness, where the wildness suddenly surges forth. And so that kind of perceptual acumen, that perceptual wildness, suddenly in our vocalizations and speech an eruption of wildness or a kind of rush of wildness an element of chance, of things going awry. That’s partly why people like to go places like the rocksies, the kinds of places that are surrounded by the wilderness, something that you don’t have to make an imaginative leap, like is crossed by ravens and other wild creatures. I think that once you get into the natural world and start just sharpening your perceptions, throwing yourself into a kind of poetic attention, then, historical time doesn’t seem to be so compelling. We don’t seem to be so bound by it. We spend so much of our lives within a cultural context so that just going out for a walk is partly to experience a different sense of time. You could be walking across rock and you’ve got geological history, if you like, thrust up in your face all the time. That’s partly why people like to go places like the rocksies, the kinds of places that are surrounded by the wilderness. It is more sustained. You still move in a kind of process-oriented way, and while the mind meanders somewhat, it covers a lot of interesting ground.

DM: I think that prose and poetry have an erotic relationship to one another. In some ways the prose line complements the poetry. I have in the past frequently written poems that have a prose component, such as the one called "An Old House Beside a Military Base" [p. 34], which has two sections in it one in prose and one in poetry. It’s almost like going back and re-seeing the thing with a different lens. Or, I sometimes think of it as a different sense. If you’re using language as an animal, the poetry animal might be flying over the thing and the prose animal might be like a dog, sniffing through the neighbourhood with a kind of serendipidity, it doesn’t have the kind of sharp, acute line-breaks that you might find in poetry but it has its own rummaging, ransacking kind of music. Looks like I’m saying that poetry is like a bird and prose is like a dog, but that’s a very personal thing. Totemic, I guess.

KJ: Well that’s pretty interesting because the avian and canine metaphors you just mentioned remind me of the raven and coyote images that you sometimes use. I was just wondering if there is any kind of a remote connection with the aboriginal worldview there? Those are both trickster figures, as I guess you know.

DM: Tricksters are certainly crucial to more than a few native traditions. Seems to be they are often a way to account for the element of chance, of things going away. That represents what is missing in our conventional 7th Century rationality mythology or our Judeo-Christian inheritance. Obviously things go awry. Obviously there’s this element of chance in our everyday experience. But, how to account for that? Well, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, that’s the devil, I mean, that kind of dualism is either God or the Devil, or some invocation of God that doesn’t work out right. There’s no trickster there to account for, uh, screw-ups, and screw-ups that are the result of ingenious plans, like Raven’s or Coyote’s.

KJ: Plans that are going to “fix the world.”

DM: Right. There’s great wisdom in all of those native traditions. Great wisdom. So, you can come to it that way. Or, you can come to it the way I did simply by watching ravens, crows, jays and other corvids, who are extraordinarily ingenious, intelligent birds. You don’t have to translate them into mythology for that wisdom to have meaning. You can come to it from just watching birds closely.

KJ: In some poems you have an almost innate sense of story of the land and how it’s animated, but in other poems such as “On Foot to the Bypass Esso Postal Outlet” [p. 53], you cover a period of time that stretches way back to the Cretaceous, up through Charlie Chaplin and then on to present day New Brunswick with eighteen-wheelers hauling up the highways, and looking over it all is this raven who takes a piece of the sky. Can you say something about your sense of time there, or the scope of time?

DM: Well, a huge amount of romantic poetry is inspired by a walk like that one. And I guess I was being ironic with myself by saying, “well, if you’re going to have all these wars that you’re doing in the bush, you should walk along the highway as well.” So, that’s a kind of cultural context, which is crossed by ravens and other wild creatures. I think that once you get into the natural world and start just sharpening your perceptions, throwing yourself into a kind of poetic attention, then, historical time doesn’t seem to be so compelling. We don’t seem to be so bound by it. We spend so much of our lives within a cultural context so that just going out for a walk is partly to experience a different sense of time. You could be walking across rock and you’ve got geological history, if you like, thrust up in your face all the time. That’s partly why people like to go places like the rocksies, the kinds of places that are surrounded by the wilderness. It is more sustained. You still move in a kind of process-oriented way, and while the mind meanders somewhat, it covers a lot of interesting ground.

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KJ: Sometimes write what could be called "prose-poetry", I feel a slightly different energy there. It is more sustained. You still move in a kind of process-oriented way, and while the mind meanders somewhat, it covers a lot of interesting ground.

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THEORIZING — FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNITY: A CONVERSATION WITH LINDA HUTCHEON
by Kathleen O'Grady
(Trinity College, University of Cambridge)

Introduction

So much of contemporary critical theory alienates the uninitiated and exasperates even the most determined reader. And postmodern commentators, which promise to unlock the mysteries of the movement, often make better doorstops or coffee-coasters than easy entries into the twisted and lugubriously passageways of postmodernist thought. Contemporary feminist theory has not always been free from this tendency either.

Linda Hutcheon, one of the most respected and renowned of Canada's theorists, has long been known to dismiss this proclivity with an easy shrug of the shoulders. Her extensive writings, both on postmodernity and feminism, provide lucid and succinct analyses of the most slippery of topics -- parody, irony, aesthetics -- and do not stop there. In each work she adds her own valuable insights from her background in literature, her interest in art and architecture, and her understanding of contemporary philosophy. With such a diverse background it is often difficult to characterize her work with a single title. She is known by many to be a "cultural theorist" or "literary critic", by others as a "feminist"; some think of her as an "art critic", while she is known by many to be a "cultural theorist" or "literary critic", by others as a "feminist"; some think of her as an "art critic", while she is seen to be "a specialist in Canadian literature"; others still, think of her as a "philosopher" in her own right. Of course, it is likely true that she is all of these things and more. What is not disputed is that her writings are always engaging, dynamic, and above all else, prolific.

Linda Hutcheon is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. Her theoretical works include A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction; The Politics of Postmodernism; Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox; A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms; The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction; Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies; and most recently: Opera: Desire, Disease, Death with Michael Hutcheon.

KO: You have recently co-authored a book which examines the aesthetic and erotic representation of disease in the heroines from various operas. What did your study uncover about the construction -- or in your words "mythifying" -- of gender, desire and illness? You also note the relation between the 19th century scientific understanding of disease and its subsequent gendered representation in art. Have you noted similar contemporaneous parallels?

LH: The research I did with my (physician) husband on the cultural construction of women and disease in opera was a real eye-opener for me, I must confess. Like most of Puccini's Mimi in La Bohème or Verdi's Violetta in La Traviata: because of the strength of the stereotype, I imagined that there were all kinds of other such consumptive operatic heroines. Well, there aren't. There are only a few more. This is what prompted us to study the reasons for the power of this stereotype and, thereby, to examine the cultural meanings given to diseases and those who have them.

As you might imagine, our work was also provoked by the fact that we have all been watching the cultural construction of meaning of a new medical condition -- AIDS. We discovered that the representations in the media and in art of this syndrome have played out the history of many other illnesses -- from the plague (it was called the "gay plague" in the early 1980s) to syphilis (as a sexually transmitted disease). We have all watched the press and television make the differentiation between "innocent" and other victims -- thereby passing a moral judgment, while apparently dealing with a medical issue. This slippage isn't new, of course: the history of disease and its representation in art (think of leprosy in earlier periods) is a history of social and moral values as much as medical information.

In Opera: Desire, Disease, Death (1996), we looked at moments in medical history when major scientific changes occurred in the understanding of a disease -- for instance, 1882, when Robert Koch discovered the tubercle bacillus, and taught us that tuberculosis was not something you inherited as a matter of familial disposition, but was something you could catch from someone else. We then studied how this medical information made its way into the art forms of the day: La Bohème (1896), with its insistence on urban poverty and the hero's fear of contagion (he leaves Mimi after she has a bad night of coughing), is a post-Koch opera, though its romanticizing of the consumptive heroine -- in all her pale and feverish beauty and desirability -- is a continuation from the earlier construction of women with the disease.

KO: I noted with great interest that your definition of postmodernism (in The Politics of Postmodernism) states that this movement, particularly its attention to difference and marginality, has been significantly shaped by feminism. Most commentators -- those compiling the anthologies and encyclopedias -- have stated the opposite: that feminism is the direct result of a burgeoning postmodernism. This may seem a trivial observation -- the beginnings of a "chicken and egg" argument -- but it may also be indicative of the proclivity of academic texts to consign feminist writers to the sidelines, the happy cheerleaders of the postmodern movement.

LH: My sense has always been that there were certain important social movements in the 1960s (and before) that made the postmodern possible: the women's movement (though, of course, the movement existed much earlier, but this wave of it in the 1960s was crucial) and, in North America, the civil rights movement. Suddenly gender and racial differences were on the table for discussion. Once that happened, "difference" became the focus of much thinking -- from newer issues of sexual choice and postcolonial history to more familiar ones such as religion and class. I think feminisms (in the plural) were important for articulating early on the variety of political positions possible within the umbrella term of gender -- from liberal humanist to cultural materialist. Feminists discussions "complexified" questions of identity and difference almost from the start, and raised those upsetting (but, of course, productive) issues of social and cultural marginality.

KO: Why have so many feminist artists and theorists resisted the lure of postmodernism?

LH: In part, it has been because the early constructions of the postmodern were resolutely male (and that's one of the reasons I chose to write on the subject): male writers, artists and theorists were for a long time in the foreground. Sometimes this was a real blind-spot; sometimes it was what we might call a form of gender-caution: people were afraid, because of that resistance of feminists, to label women writers or theorists as postmodern. This was, in part, because, women were indeed resisting such labelling, sometimes out of a worry that the political agenda of their feminisms would be subsumed under the "apolitical" aestheticizing label of postmodernism. But it depends on whose definition of the postmodern we are talking about. I happen to think that postmodernism is political, but not in a way that is of much use, in the long run, to feminisms: it does challenged dominant discourses (usually through self-consciousness and parody), but it also re-instates those very discourses in the act of challenging them. To put it another way, postmodernism does deconstruct, but doesn't really reconstruct. No feminist is happy with that kind of potential quiescence. Then if she (or he) approves of the deconstructing impulse: you simply can't stop there. This important issue of agency has become central not only to feminism, of course, but to "queer theory" and to postcolonial theory.
LH: Marginalization -- in a word. Just as women have traditionally been positioned on the fringes of male culture, so Canadians often feel as if they are watching the action (be it American or European) from the sidelines. Faced with a strong colonial heritage that conditions its response to Britain (and France, but in a different way) and confronted with an even stronger cultural power to the south of us in the USA, Canadians have often turned to irony to position themselves (self-deprecatingly) or to contest the strength of those dominant cultural forces of history or of the current situation. I wrote a book called Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies to try to explain my sense of the pervasiveness of parody and irony as a Canadian response to marginalization (often self-marginalization, I should say).

KO: You have placed parody at the centre of your descriptions of postmodern art, music, architecture and literature. Is this also, in your view, the defining feature of contemporary feminist work?

LH: Yes, if you stress "a" (and not "the") defining feature. It seems to me that, like Canadians, women are often in the position of defining themselves AGAINST a dominant culture or discourse. One way to do that, a way with great subversive potential, is to speak the language of the dominant (which allows you to be heard), but then to subvert it through ironic strategies of exaggeration, understatement, or literalization. Parody is the mode that allows you to mimic that speech, but to do so through re-contextualizing it and therefore without subscribing to its implied ideals and values. Women writers (witness Jane Austen) have known of this transgressive power of parody for a long time. Men too create parodies, of course, but interestingly the most cogent and forceful of these lately have often been produced from the point of view of marginalized men who position themselves by sexual choice as gay (such as the Canadian photographer known as Evergon) or by 'nationality' as postcolonial (such as Salman Rushdie, to pick a controversial example). But women writers today -- from Jeannette Winterson and Angela Carter to Margaret Atwood and Ann-Marie MacDonald -- have certainly put parody to excellent political use.

KO: Your texts on irony and parody, and your work on postmodernism and feminism are all bursting with examples from a varied mixture of art forms: performance art, architecture, television, literature, movies, opera and pop music. It is not uncommon to encounter in your writing examples from Shakespeare, Laurie Anderson and Wayne's World interspersed to illustrate the same theoretical point. In addition to mixing "high" and "low" art forms, your theoretical assertions arise directly from concrete examples. Is this a conscious methodology on your part? And does it arise from your position as a female academic, as a feminist, as a Canadian? This is a rare treat when so much of the theoretical works produced today offer as proof for their conclusions wise words from other critics or philosophers, producing a kind of insular argument.

LH: I guess I’ve always believed that theory had to be theorizing -- in the sense that you had to theorize from something and that something should be as broad as possible in its definition. Any theory of irony and parody that only worked for literature, for instance, was (for me) an inadequate theory not worthy of its name. So, I chose to work from examples from visual art or music or film and try to understand how irony, for instance, worked -- how it came to "happen" for people in viewing or hearing these texts. Teaching has taught me that popular cultural examples can be very helpful in explaining complex theoretical ideas. But, when working on the postmodern, it became crucial -- because of the postmodern blurring of the boundaries between art forms, between high and popular art -- to deal with that variety in theorizing this cultural phenomenon. I tried to model it from the first relatively uncontested usage of the term -- in architecture -- and then looked to other art forms, from the novel to photography and film with similar manifestations. This strategy also allowed me to bring in the work of women writers and artists who had NOT been seen as postmodern (for some of the reasons outlined above), but who clearly had used techniques similar to those used by male postmodern writers -- but with an added political, contestatory edge. I’m thinking of people like Angela Carter or Barbara Kruger. So, I suppose, my feminist interests also condition why I theorize in the way I do.

Z

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NIGHT

A Work for Four Voices
by Joanna Gunderson

Joanna Gunderson, was born in 1932, graduated from Columbia with a degree in English and Ancient Languages and studied Sanskrit and Kathakali Dance in West Bengal. She started Red Dust Press in 1961 (which has published 75 books to date). She lives in N.Y., writes fiction and poetry and creates plays based on sound.

---

Each of the four voices speaks several parts. The voices can be heard one after the other or in the combined form. If using Combined Voices each voice must seem to speak continuously without attention to the others as one might see several events at once in a night sky. Another possibility 1, 2, 3, 4, can murmur their parts allowing one voice to be dominant until all have been heard.

1 may be forward, left and still -- a voice of anger.
2 may be lying toward centre "at the end of the dock" or near "the surge" of the billows.
3 hesitating with a moth-like motion of precision toward the light is in the shadows.
4 should move in an enormous ellipse, the voice near, then distant.

NIGHT

(Stage dark. The four characters should take their places swiftly in the dark).

1
2
3
4

---

1 I AM BLACK
OUT OF THE DEEP
NOW THE DAY IS OVER/ NIGHT IS DRAWING NIGH/SHADOWS OF THE EVENING STEAL ACROSS THE SKY (a low hum)
2 (A faint light beyond where 2 lies)
LIE DOWN AT THE END OF THE DOCK COULD HEAR THE STREAM
3 (harsh light on 1's face)
THE EVENING STEAL ACROSS
4 WHEN I HEAR
SOUNDS LOST IN THE DAY

---

1 WHAT WOULD I DO WITHOUT
YOUR HAND OVER THE DOOR KNOB
HOW YOU WERE LEFT LEFT CAME BACK TO AN EMPTY HOUSE
2 WHERE DAY IS LOST

---

1 I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME THERE IS A LOT OF
2 THEY WAKE TO MATE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT THE WINTER THE SCREAM THEN GO BACK

---

1 AHOU HWNH HRWH WHHA WA
2 WAU HAWNH HAWH

---

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 (in the shadows moving in and out of light)</th>
<th>3 (in the shadows moving in and out of light)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DID YOU EVER HEAR OF SUCH A DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW</td>
<td>TORTURED ME TOOK ONE, TOOK THE OTHER DID YOU EVER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 DID YOU SEE IT SWING IN SWING AWAY</td>
<td>4 DO YOU SEE MOTH WINGS ONE FAINT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 IF YOU HEAR ME IT IS NOT MY VOICE</td>
<td>3 IMPRISONED IN 3 SQUARE DARK NIGHT OR DAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 OH NO MUCH TOO FAR SEEMS UNMOVING</td>
<td>1 OH DO NOT ON THAT AWFUL DAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUT OF THE DARK I AM SPEAKING TO YOU</td>
<td>2 THE KINGDOM OF NIGHT WHERE IT IS LOSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN THE FORGETFULNESS OF WIND BLOWING OVER IT</td>
<td>1 FELT IN HIS MUST ALWAYS HAVE THOUGHT NOT AN ANIMAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A B S E N C E</td>
<td>2 WHERE IT IS L O S S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 WHEN THERE IS NOTHING WHEN I SEE NOTHING THEN I SEE HIM</td>
<td>4 BACK AS IT DRAWS NEARER VAPOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL THAT I HAVE NOT EVERYTHING IVE BEEN FORBIDDEN, DENIED</td>
<td>1 THE DARK SWAMPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUT AT THE END OF THE PARKING LOT</td>
<td>3 BOTHERS ME ONLY WANT BEAUTIFUL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINGERING IN THE SHADOWS</td>
<td>1 BLOOD ON THE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOU CANT HEAR ME IT MUST BE THE WORDS</td>
<td>3 IF ITS THERE ILL FINISH IT AT NIGHT AT THE ODESSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEE IT IN FRONT OF MY HOUSE EVERY NIGHT</td>
<td>4 SHADOW OF THE SHADOW OF THE AGAINST THE TREES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARK INTO THE DARK</td>
<td>1 WHETHER YOU BE HOW YOU BE I BE GOING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOST WHO MY SOUL SEEKS IN THE CLEFT OF THE ROCKS I WENT TO THE DOOR</td>
<td>2 BETWEEN DAY AND DAY WIND CARRYING THE JASMINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT WILL I DO WITHOUT</td>
<td>3 TERMINAL COMES BACK ALL PARANOID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A GREAT FIST A FUZZY STAR</td>
<td>1 REMEMBER TRYING TO PROVE MUST ALWAYS BE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH THERE WAS TREMBLING THE RIVER TREMBLED</td>
<td>4 GROWING ARRESTED GROWING AGAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 COOKS MAIDS THEY HAVE THEIR JEWELS IN POCKETS TAKE THEM OUT IN THE LADIES ROOM AT THE PARTY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 THIS BRILLIANT</td>
<td>4 LOST IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 THE CURTAINS HORIZONTAL THE MOON OVER THE SEA AS IF SOMEONE</td>
<td>2 LIE DOWN WHERE THE BELL OF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 SPILLED SPILLED GOLDEN TOWARD US</td>
<td>3 DYING UNDEFINED UNVOICED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THE SURGE OF</td>
<td>3 CALLS ME: HOW ARE YA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT IVE</td>
<td>4 SEPARATE DISTINCT TONIGHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 TOWNS RIVERS THE DEEP BLUE WITHIN THE OPEN DEEP BLUE</td>
<td>1 ALWAYS SAW FROM MY TREE MAN WITH THE SACK COMING INTO OUR VILLAGE AND MY SISTER AGAIN ONCE AGAIN ONLY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SOMEONE SO BEAUTIFUL</td>
<td>4 THE PleIaDES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 TO THE PEO IF WE RUN IF WE RUN THE WIND WILL NOT CATCH US</td>
<td>3 HE WOULD LET ME DO ANYTHING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ORION TWO BELTS
ONE FAINT

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE SUN

SAT LIKE A RAMROD
HAD TO CALL HIS MOTHER
HIS MOTHER KEPT CALLING

COULD NOT SEE YOUR FACE
IN THE DARK
UNDER THE AWNING

CIRCLE THE RIM OF

BEING STONED
MADE ME ABLE
STEAMROLL HIM

A SUIT OF CLOTHES STANDING
STILL

EYES AT THE BACK OF THE
ROOM
YOUNG EYES FOLLOWING ME

WAITING FOR
UNWINDING

YANK DAT PORK OUT OF
DEM LEVIS MISER GUY

NEVER

1

DID YOU HEAR
THE MOON
ALL NIGHT
OVER THE MOTHER OF PEARL
HILLS
IN THE ROOM
IN THE SQUARE
ON THE FLOOR
IN THE WELL OF
CE GOUFFRE INTERDIT
A NOS SONDES

GOUFFRE DES MURMURES

AT A TERRIFYING HEIGHT
A WANDERING FIRE

HOLLOW DEBRIS MADE OF ICE

CAME AT NIGHT
WHEN THE BLAZING
UNSTEADY FIRES
ALONG THE BLACK HORIZON

STROKES
CRIES
AND AGAIN

HOMELESS, HELPLESS, PITIABLE
IN THEIR DARK DISTRESS
BECAME A STEADY STREAM

LULL
AND AGAIN

MAKING TO COVER

TO LEAD THE SENSUAL
THE EMOTION DRIVEN LIFE

WILL NIGHT NEVER COME

WHERE LOVE DIES

CAN NOT REMEMBER
UNLESS YOU'RE IN IT

AH YES THE NIGHT

BODY AND SHADOW ENGULFED

BUT SOMETHING

WILL YOU LOOK AT THE NIGHT

PULLS THEM

FLOWING FROM ONE
TO ANOTHER
ALMOST FROZE

SEPARATED FROM

THE FIRMAMENT
ACTIVE IN THE ANGER OF
WHERE ARITHMETIC
DESIGN OF

DUST RISES ABOVE THE

DARKNESS

WOULD YOU HAVE DONE IT

H O L E S

BLOWING AWAY

BECAUSE OF MY HAIRY
HIS SILKEN

REACH BACK

STARTED TO LOOK AT

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW
NIGHT
AT THE BOTTOM OF THE
GARDEN

STELLAR
WIND

INTO THE BACKYARDS
OF OTHER STARS

WHERE THE BEARS
AT THE EDGE OF THE WOOD
THE SNAKES

TO KISS IT

FROM STONE TO STONE
FUMBLING FUMBLING
MONEY IN YOUR WALLS
COME AND KILL YOU

TOWARD US
and these were collated for residual creativity. They did not know at this time (who ever does?), but this was the best part of the project. Little Alice grew up in those years, and she collected these fragments and published books, The Little Alice Fragments, which began to determine the course of creativity in the North. These books were numbered, 1, 2, 3, then 3a, 3b, then 4, then 5a-1 and so on. Alice determined the secondary letters based on the time it took for particular fragment chunks to be collected. When Alice went to college she was invited to speak about these books, and her talks grew increasingly like her books:

"thank you. in the course of and then it flew up why never had imagined in the indivisible a visible these are never in competition what's that? obscurantist information perhaps you'd like it if i did this innocent enough for the afternoon preparatory semblance through and through i do nigh underneath the for when it jurisdiction covers she went there yesterday these are the courses and in consequence."

Everyone listened. The key was that eyes were failing and everything was becoming a question of fitting sounds together. Research funds for sound increased, and Alice compiled degrees and projects. The sound collection system neared completion. Alice's aunt went up to look and the space ship ran into one Collector and everyone died and all those sounds went missing. Alice felt a chunk of her ear had fallen out, but she knew this was a result of the dominance of one perceptual system. Empty spaceships went up then, the sound of their take-offs had to be separated from the sound of voices, which were until then the principal object of the system. The net was complete. In time the bias swung towards sounds other than voices, and Alice's speeches went like this:

"thank you. ashhhhheeeceeciiirr the comestibles don't put it there ick ick ick finish it now or undul undul undul op the veriest giants came stumbling I wish you hadn't mmmmmm heavier than you could have hhhhhhh the systems are protect the radicals always before khum khum the debris is regularly crrriihhh just put it down."

These speeches constituted the dominant knowledge system of the years. If everything was a question of sounds, and all sounds were caught in the collectors and tabulated on earth, then all things were known. Which in the modification of knowledge meant that people were always listening.
ON BEING A POET
I'm reading for the Tickleace launch at LSPU hall. Thoughts of "I live here" posters
and Lizzie Dike coming to life on the brick wall. Like Olive Oil dressed in Presidents
Choice's tall bottle of extra virgin, my legs walk me to the lighted front where moans
of personal tales still stuck to the microphone drip off, crusting around the edges with
lighted heat. They laugh at my introductions, laugh when I say this love poem, without
any changes to the poem at all, is now a heart-break poem. But it's funny. This
company I keep. And all black, very black: walls and floor, black. Typical poets,
keeping colour splashes for words, using a black backdrop for better projection. The
semiotics of space and we are all black, painted by our words. It reminds me again; I
am in a Deja Godot, reading at the prestigious Forest City Gallery in London. Book
launches, acceptable readings with big lights, autographs and the press in the front of
the gallery. Hard-wood floors, ceiling lamps and podium but the back room, reserved
for the regulars is black: black floors, black walls and it fashions too, black
construction paper over the windows -- illicit activities. Erotic poems, and a little
public masturbation.

INSIDE-OUT/OUTSIDE-IN:
INTERVIEW WITH MATT COHEN
by Karl Jirgens
Friday Nov. 14, 1997
Metro Library Toronto

In this interview with Rampike, Matt Cohen talks about his latest novel Last Seen.
Matt Cohen was born in 1942, in Kingston, Ontario, and he later moved to Ottawa. He
studied at the University of Toronto and holds a post-graduate degree in political
theory. He wrote his Master's thesis on Albert Camus. Cohen has lectured at
McMaster University (Hamilton, Canada), served as visiting professor at the University
of Bologna (Italy), and has held a number of writer-in-residence positions at Canadian
Universities. Cohen was a founding member of the Writers' Union of Canada. He was
also fiction editor at Coach House Press during the 1970's and edited The Story so Far
(1972). Some of his many novels include; The Disinherited (1974), Wooden Hunters
(1975), The Colours of War (1977), The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone (1979)
which was nominated for the Governor General's Award, Flowers of Darkness (1981),
The Spanish Doctor (1984), Nadine (1986), Emotional Arithmetic (1990), and The
Bookseller (1993). Cohen is an accomplished short story writer and his collections
include, Columbus and the Fat Lady (1972), and Living on Water (1988) which was
nominated for the Trillium Award. Cohen is a two-time winner of the National
Magazine Award for short fiction, and is a recipient of the John Glassco Translation
Prize. Last Seen (1996), perhaps Cohen's most autobiographical novel, is about a
writer, Alec, who copes with the death of his younger brother, Harold. Following his
brother's death, Alec inexplicably discovers Harold spending time at a night-club for
Elvis impersonators. Last Seen was short-listed for the Trillium Award and nominated
for the 1997 Canada Council for the Arts Governor General's Award in fiction. Matt
Cohen currently lives in Toronto and on a farm near Kingston, Ontario. At the time of
this interview, he was the writer-in-residence at the Metro Toronto Library.
Distributed by Random House, Canada).

Photo of Matt Cohen by Patricia Aldana

KJ: You must be very busy at the Metro (Toronto) Library.

MC: It's an incredible focal point for budding writers.

KJ: And you have to evaluate their manuscripts and offer

MC: For three months. The residency began September 15th and goes until December

KJ: Do you still shoot pool with Ray Ellenwood* from time to time?

MC: Yes, that's my job.

KJ: So, you're the writer-in residence there for part of this

MC: For three months. The residency began September 15th and goes until December

KJ: What was it like being a fiction editor at Coach House Press around the 1970's?

MC: Well, I haven't for a while, but I'm not against it. There's a lot of pool shooting in

KJ: [Cohen's novel about obsessive love and revenge, ed.]

MC: [Coach House Press during the 1970's, ed.]

Text/image by Theo Breuer (Germany)
MC: Well, it was a very interesting time to be at Coach House Press. The building was located behind Rochdale in the alley between St. George and Huron. Basically what happened was a lot of photographers and some writers would hang out there, and work on the spot and argue about aesthetics and ideas. And being a fiction editor then was a good way to meet artists and writers. I enjoyed that. By today’s standards there were very few writers around. I think today you would receive manuscripts by the thousands. Every Coach House book was a work of art.

KJ: They’ve always done beautiful work. I remember the Story So Far series. There was always a lot of excitement when it came out. There were a lot of good editors working on that series. David Young, bp Nichol, Steve McCaffery, Doug Barbour. So I guess you had a lot of interesting contacts there.

MC: Some of them. I certainly knew bp Nichol well, and David Young. Doug Barbour lived in Edmonton so I didn’t see him that often, although he did come to town occasionally.

KJ: What was it like for you to have Margaret Atwood edit your short story collection Columbus and the Fat Lady at Anansi Press back around 1972?

MC: She was a good editor. She’s very open minded about what a book should be. I think that the important thing from my point of view as a writer was that she had no pre-conceptions about what a story or a novel should be. And she has read an amazing amount. She’s one of those people with a truly amazing literary knowledge. She encouraged me to go in my own direction, and she was a very good person for me to work with.

KJ: I was tickled by her comments in the Globe & Mail in her review on your latest book Last Seen. She referred to editing Columbus and the Fat Lady and said that she found the collection to be “a cross between Kafka, the Marx Brothers and Afternoon of the Faun” (Sat. Sept. 28, 1996).

MC: She has an eclectic aesthetic viewpoint.

KJ: I’ve followed your writing for many years now, particularly your short story work. I’ve been interested in innovation in style, and that’s been less common in your novels but more prevalent in your short stories. The novels seem more conventional. But in Last Seen, features of the two styles and the two forms (novel and short story) come together. I wonder if you could say more about that earlier distinction between your two stylistic approaches?

MC: Well, my first two novels (which I don’t think were very good), Korsoniloff (1969), and Johnny Crackle Sings (1971), were pretty experimental at the time, but then, it’s true, the narrative in the novels that followed started taking on a lot of physical detail. And once you have, in the novel, the idea that the physical world has to be portrayed, which was true in the rural novels [e.g., The Distinction (1974), Wooden Hunters (1975), The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone (1979), and Flowers of Darkness (1981), ed.], the European ones after [e.g.; The Spanish Doctor (1984), Nadine (1986), & Emotional Arithmetic (1990), ed.], then a much more conventional structure becomes inevitable, because, in order to portray the physical world, you have to use language, incorporate nouns and adjectives, in a way that leads you to a linear sense that lines up with a linear plot. And I think that, despite using various devices, I ended up with relatively conventional novels, compared to the stories. I didn’t feel that the stories had to portray the physical world. They were more about the relations between people and weren’t bound in the same way. Then, I think, as time went on, I started to feel very tied down by novels in terms of their limitations. And in Last Seen, and to a degree The Bookseller, I started to deal more with emotional states between people. The portrayal of emotional states is quite differently structured. Starting back then (with The Bookseller), I decided to allow my novels to become a lot more like the short stories.

KJ: Some of your earlier work was published in anthologies like Fiction of Contemporary Canada which was edited by George Bowering. And there were a number of what you might call non-linear thinkers in that collection including, Ray Smith, Sheila Watson, Rudy Wiebe, Daphne Marlatt, Dave Godfrey, Owendale MacEwen, George Bowering, David Young, bp Nichol, and Margaret Atwood along with yourself. That was quite a strong group of writers. At the time, did you feel that there was some kind of a groundswell or movement, in that non-linear direction?

MC: I think that so-called traditional short stories, the kind of short stories, let’s say that Somerset Maugham or Thomas Hardy wrote, obviously, with modernism, came to an end. New kinds of short stories, became structurally more innovative and structurally more free. The stories became more compatible with the passage of time, with thought, with all sorts of other cultural references, and so, basically, the whole so-called linear way of thinking, which, I would say, is a more chronological way of thinking, became less obligatory. I think it’s a big exaggeration to say that short fiction, transformed. There were always technical experiments, just as there are technical experiments on the piano, and they were interesting in of themselves, but they didn’t necessarily lead to better short stories. And I think in the end, at least for me, a short story is not about a technique, it’s about whoever is in it, although maybe that’s not true for other writers. Mavis Gallant, is still more innovative, and technically adept than any other Canadian short story writer, so, I don’t think the contemporary Canadian short story of the 90’s is necessarily technically superior to its predecessors.

KJ: I think I agree. I always look for a balance between structure and subject; between what is said, and how it is said. Some critics have argued that more experimental writing has less redeeming social value than some of the more traditional styles of writing, but I have never found that. Even some of your more unusual stories such as “The Eiffel Tower in Three Parts” or “Empty Room” had, for me anyway, a fairly profound social message, and so I never really saw that division.

MC: Certain critics and certain readers, when they say "social message," really mean “does this portray the kind of people that I’ve experienced in a way that I find interesting?” But maybe the writer is interested in a different kind of person. In any case, however controversial the earlier short stories might have been, or continue to be, I think that they offer their own world view and they don’t need defending.

KJ: Quite right. I see some of your short fiction as being in the same tradition as works by authors such as, say, Italo Calvino, or Donald Barthelme, or John Barth. You have been quoted as saying that you did not have an especially religious upbringing but then there are your novels The Spanish Doctor (1984), Nadine (1986), and Emotional Arithmetic (1990), that deal with a Jewish background and history. Also, at one point you explained that, in Canada, you are considered to be a Canadian author, but that in Europe, you are recognized as a Jewish author [The Canadian Jewish News, Nov. 7, 1996]; do you think that difference in perception is partly because in Canada there is a greater sense of assimilation?

MC: I think that when I said that about a year ago, and the period prior to that, that most writers in Canada were identified as Canadian writers, but that more recently, some Canadian writers are being identified by their ethnic background... I think in Europe, if you’re Jewish, then they see you as a Jewish writer. It doesn’t matter if you write about Jews; you’re still a Jewish writer. That’s just the way it is. I’m not sure if it’s good or bad.

KJ: It seems to me that your writing ends up raising fewer existential questions and more epistemological ones. That is, rather than question the meaning of life and so on, they end up questioning knowledge itself. Do you think that’s true?

MC: I don’t know. OK. What would an existential question be -- something dealing with what we are?

KJ: Yeah, or maybe what we do. On the other hand, an epistemological question might deal with questions like, how do you know tomorrow when you walk out, the same sidewalk will be there, or, how do you know you won’t bump into Harold at the Elvis bar i.e., character who dies and yet somehow seems to be resurrected in Cohen’s latest novel Last Seen, ed.) There are so many forms of knowledge that we have taken for granted such as the flat earth theory. Or, for example, Copernicus comes along and suggests that not the earth, but the sun, is at the centre of our solar system, and suddenly there is this profound shift in the paradigm of knowledge. All these changes have some regularity throughout history in spite of our very firm convictions about the way we believe things to be. It seems to me that Last Seen, at least in part, addresses and challenges the whole question of what we think we know.

MC: It’s not the kind of thing I think about much. Although I do think about existential questions. I read a lot of books about existentialism. My M.A. thesis was on existentialism.

KJ: It was on Camus wasn’t it?

MC: Yeah. But, I don’t sit there and think, "in order to answer these theoretical questions, I will write this book." I don’t really reflect upon it. I write the book I write.

KJ: Well, then my comment is more of an observation, that those are the sorts of issues that seem to keep coming up with your writing.
MC: Well, maybe to you as a reader that’s absolutely true, but not so much for me as a writer. Although, through certain structural devices, I would have to eliminate certainty. With some narrative strategies there can be no certainty, for example, you can guarantee that by having multiple points of view, with mutually contradictory observations. So, in that sense, it’s true.

KJ: I think that’s what I was getting at, with particular reference to the narration and dialogism. In Last Seen, you offer split perspectives between the two brothers. In some ways they’ve been described as Cain and Abel, in other instances, in the novel itself, they are described as “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,” which leaves me wondering, “Which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?” the ones in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, or the ones in Stoppard’s Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead?

MC: They could be any of those. Because as a pair they play all of the possibilities from the tragic to the comic and from the ridiculous to the meaningful.

KJ: I noticed a lot of focus on imagery, including images of skin in this book. Flesh falling away, snake-skin, the sense of snakes up Harold’s spine, the image of a semi-transparent sloughed snake-skin in October, the whole idea of touch and touching. Were you consciously trying to do something with that?

MC: Hal! I never thought of that. I guess, there’s a lot of skin on top of people. That’s what I’ve discovered.

KJ: Well, it just seemed to me that there was a lot of attention given to that idea, what with the so-called “white-skinned” problems mentioned in the book, and the life-guarding and getting too much sun, and moles, and the make-up on the Elvis impersonators, and the shaking of hands, skin touching skin, and of course that amazing scene at the end of the novel where Harold is standing by the grave and he takes his skin off, overcoat-like, and tosses it into the grave. So, I saw this surface-subsurface imagery throughout the book, and I thought this was really fascinating.

MC: I was aware of it on a certain level, but not the way you’re talking about it, with the skin recorded on the page in the way that the skin recorded the body. You could read the person when you read the skin. So, with Harold, you know that there is nothing left when he takes off his skin – you know he is dead.

KJ: To me it also felt like the interplay between surface and subsurface would be a way of contrasting the person from the outside with the person on the inside. For example there is that bizarre externalised portrait of Harold while he is very ill, as he’s trying to get to the bathroom, and the focus is on the physical difficulty, and then there’s an immediate jump to a section that offers an inner view of Harold’s mental anguish while he’s waiting for his next shot of morphine, and then you jump to a portrayal of Alec, and then move to Alec’s mind, so that there’s this juxtapositional interplay of inner and outer worlds. I was thinking of that leaping as a pivotal element in the book.

MC: I think that’s true, and that was very conscious. I felt I had to oppose the insides and outsides so that they could face each other just as life and death are opposed to each other. There is a counter-point. And the book was also about the space between those counter-points.

KJ: I was thinking of the narration and the voices as types of skin, connected to the idea of the mask, and when the skin or the mask slips or comes away, then there is a revelation of the self that lies beneath.

MC: I like the reading that you give to the book.

KJ: I had a question about the autobiographical element of the book. The book was in some ways inspired by the death of your brother, you’ve been reported as saying that the idea of the Elvis impersonators nightclub as it ties in with this novel, came to you one day while you were stuck in traffic outside of Oshawa (Now Jan. 23-29, 1997, p. 26), and, at least emotionally, it must have been a challenge to deal with that topic in writing. I was wondering if you could say something about the blur between fiction and non-fiction that emerges with this sort of writing.

MC: I think that it is essentially a work of fiction and not a memoir, though I did think about writing a memoir, but I rejected it, because normally I don’t deal with non-fiction. With Last Seen, I took what I wanted from life and added totally fictional elements in a way that appealed to me, really, to give the story a kind of “imaginative reality,” and that was the whole point, to give the various levels of consciousness in the story that quality of an “imaginative reality” even though some of it was totally auto-biographical, and some of it was totally made up.

KJ: That really worked for me. The book has this fragmented sense of “reality” which is appropriate to the subject because of the psychic and emotional trauma involved. So, on the one hand there is that sense of disruption, but on the other hand, there is that on-going flow of consciousness that lends the book a certain unity so that the reader doesn’t get blown away with the fragmentation of the whole experience.

MC: I think that it has an emotional unity. I didn’t want it to be five hundred pages long. It didn’t seem to be that sort of a book.

KJ: In regard to that narrative discontinuity, it seemed to me that not only were there the different voices (e.g.; Harold and Alec), but that there were also different versions of Alec and different versions of Harold. There is one scene early in the book where Harold is given his morphine and falls asleep, and that then is immediately juxtaposed with a conversation between Alec and Harold who is quite awake. In that second scene, it seems as though it is a Harold from a different time or place. So it occurred to me that there are numerous selves, and numerous Harold and Alec in the book.

MC: I think that’s true. There are numerous Harold and Alec, and one can variously interpret the so-called “realities” in the way in which the narratives are consistently complex with all of the book. So, on the one hand you could think, Alec just made the whole thing up, including what Harold thought; on the other hand you could think of it all from Harold’s point of view, including the bathroom trip that he had that begins on page one, and so on; finally Francine, who might or might not have lived in the abortion, could be the real narrator.

KJ: I think that’s what I like about the book; the fact that it leaves things open and ambiguous, and it doesn’t try to rationalize or explain everything, it just says, “this is what happened.” That is one of the things that makes the book exciting for me. In spite of the heavily emotional side of it, the structure is very invigorating. So, there is this toasting back and forth between a very energetic life element, and the whole idea of the constancy of death.

MC: Well great!

KJ: You’ve got a lot of reaction on this book. Has that given you any satisfaction in terms of an homage to your brother, a recognition of him as a person?

MC: That has happened although it was not something I planned. A lot of people who knew him as a friend, have written me to say how completely real he seemed in the book, which was great. I don’t think I really anticipated that, but of course I’m very pleased that he has that reality.

KJ: That’s where I see it moving into the direction of what some people call “life-writing,” which in some cases can be thought of as a blend of fiction and non-fiction. There is this disregard for the conventional borders between the so-called “fictional” and the so-called “non-fictional,” and instead it goes where it needs to go to say what needs to be said.

MC: I always thought of and hoped that all fiction was like that.

KJ: It’s just that some people prefer that arbitrary distinction between forms. I’ve never really thought that distinction to be necessary. You’ve spoken a lot about Canadian culture and the situation that its in right now. I wonder if you would like to say something more about that now?

MC: Well, I think that it’s very unfortunate that government (all levels of government) commitment to culture and literacy, is radically decreasing at a time when those very things are necessary to Canada both in terms of identity, and also for Canadians to live. We are seeing a decrease in public culture, libraries, research, books in schools, and so on, people need that kind of public culture if they hope to survive, and live well in the world. And twenty years ago, people used to think of Canada’s “survival” vis-a-vis the United States and cultural domination. But the situation is even worse now, because people’s ability to have significant knowledge about themselves and the world is being called into question.

KJ: Are you working on any new books now?

MC: I’m working on a new novel, and I’ve finished a draft of it. It will come out with Knopf in the spring of 1999. I can’t say too much about it right now, because I haven’t finished writing it yet. Unfortunately, I can’t say too much about it because while I’m working I never know -- in three sentences or less -- what a novel is about.
EXPERIMENTAL POETRY IN LATIN AMERICA
From a Survey Conducted in 1996 by Clemente Padín
(Translated by Gioconda Moreno)

The revival of experimental poetry in Latin America (1996) is one of the most remarkable successes in the cultural scenery of the region. Since the V Bienal Internacional de Poesía Visual/Experimental (V International Biennial of Visual/Experimental Poetry) realized in Mexico City (January), other events have been taking place, such as the International Encounter of Poets in Paralengua VII, in Buenos Aires (June); the I Mostra Euro-Americana de Poesia Visual (I Euro-American Exposition of Visual Poetry) in Bentos Gontalves, Brazil (August); Multimedia: Jornadas Rioplatenses de Poesía Experimental (Multimedia: Uruguay-Argentina Conference on Experimental Poetry), in Montevideo, Uruguay (October); First Exposition of Poesia Experimental (First Exposition of Experimental Poetry) in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (December). To all these events we must add the Homage-Exhibition to the experimental Chilean poet Guillermo Deisler, presented (in October) at the Chilean University, a year after his death.

Never, until 1996, forty years after the birth of concrete poetry in Brazil, have so many important events taken place which have exhibited so many kinds of experimental expressions within the poetic field. In the mid-1960’s, the first manifestations of these alternative forms began to appear. These manifestations were at the time labelled generically as “New Poetry.”

At first, these alternative poetic forms appeared in youth or marginal magazine publications including: La Pata de Palo (Wooden Leg), directed by the (now dead) Chilean poet-Damazo Oga; Diagonal Cero (Cero Diagonal) edited by Edgardo Antonio Vigo in Argentina; Ediciones Mimbres (Twig Editions) in Chile, headed by the already-cited Guillermo Deisler. The publications that were born after the Process/Poem’s birth in Brazil, towards 1967 included: Ponto (Point), Process (Process), Totem (Totem), etc., as well as, Signs (Signs) in Santiago of Cuba, edited by (deceased) Samuel Feljoo, also, Los Huevos del Plata (The Silver Eggs), and Ovum 10 (Ovum 10), in Uruguay. Simultaneously, the first exhibitions of the New Poetry began to appear as the decade of the 1960’s drew to a close in La Plata, Argentina, Montevideo, and Uruguay.

The New Poetry

Gathered under this denomination are those poetic formations, which in some way or another, subvert the habitual codes of emission and reception of discursive or merely verbal poetry. “The New Poetry” made use of the expressive possibilities of the sounds and forms of the words and/or letters, on their verbal or non-verbal stream, with or without para-verbal elements (i.e.: with or without images of any kind). If the image prevailed, the poem was classified as a “Visual Poem,” if it was the sound which prevailed, then it was classified as a “Phonic Poem.” Also, concerning its radical proposals, the three tendencies of the Concrete Poetry integrate the New Poetry, born in 1996: the structuralist derivation of the Inventao Group of Sao Paulo, the Neoconcrete Poetry of Ferreira-Gullar and the tendency to use space as practised by Wlademir Dias-Pino. The principal difference between Concrete poetry and other experimental poetic forms is that concrete poets, even though they rupture the verse in creating a new syntax nonetheless respect the word, and remain concerned with the word’s visual form as its significance (except in the later development of the specialistic stream of Dias-Pino, i.e.: in the Semiotic Poem and in the Process/Poem, for which the word was neither discarded, nor considered indispensable for the poetic expression). In Rio de la Plata (River of the Silver), other poetic tendencies emerge, completing the Latin American experimental scenery. In Argentina, new modes included the Poetry for and/or to “Realize” proposed by Edgardo Antonio Vigo, and in Uruguay the “Objectless Poetry,” was forwarded (for which the word is not the exclusive axis of poetic expression).

Starting from those years, we see the expansion and exportation of New Poetry to the world, mainly through Mail Art (a global artistic support structure that gives priority to communication among the artists and the poets). The New Poetry also spread through the resolute effort of poets like the Mexican-German Mathias Goeritz and others. At an international level, the most ample anthology of experimental Latin American poetry, was realized by the French magazine Doc(f)us in its inaugural issue (1975), edited by Julien Blaine. At the South American regional level, “Interpoetry” appears, promoted by the Brazilian poet Philadelpho Menezes, who was curator of the 1 International Exposition of Visual Poetry of Sao Paulo (1988), which gathered remarkable supporters of experimental poetry from around the globe. In 1985,

in Mexico, a visionary, the poet Cesar Espinosa, founded the International Biennial of Visual Poetry, and since that date five editions documenting the Biennial have been published.

Poetry—Another

All these tendencies are a synthesis of centuries of experimentation (e.g.: early visual poems date from 300 B.C. and were realized by Simias of Rodas and Teoctistus of Siracusa), and reach an unusual development in our time. Now, at the end of the Millennium, the application of the new electronic support systems discovered by the technological advances of our epoch are reflected in the “Expressionist” stream. This comes directly from French Letrism and from the “Words in Liberty” of the futurist Marinetti, and also in the “Structural” stream – derived from the plastic “Concretism” of the Ulm School that continues the directives of Bauhaus and its inclinations for a functional art.

An initial tendency, much freer and less concerned about the form, sets aside, in a majority of cases, the semantics of the language and gives privilege only to the plasticity of the minimal expressive units (i.e.: the letters). The second tendency is more rigorous (mainly in its first stage), and makes space and verbal expression coincide in a unique structure of semantic interrelation. We had to wait until the emergence of the “Semiotic Poem” (1962), to have the words substituted by pure forms.

Later, the “Process/Poem” (1967), born out of the radical proposals of Wlademir Dias-Pino, destroyed that dependence, and from this point onwards poetry was no longer transmitted only through words.

Today, the greatest formal advances in the poetic field are due to the application of new supports structures. For example we should acknowledge the “Holographic Poetry” created by the Brazilian Eduardo Kac (1983), and the “Virtual Poetry” by the Argentinean Ladislao Pablo Gryi in 1994 (a mode that he has been experimenting with since 1984). Also, the use of computers has given rise to new forms which have sometimes subverted more conventional forms of poetic language. Here, we must mention the “Poem for Microcomputers,” by the Uruguayan Rafael Courtisio (1992), and the “CD ROM Quick Tree,” along with the electronic book of multimedia poetry by another Uruguayan -- Luis Bravo (1995). Cyberspace and the internet have propitiated some poetic experiences including those offered by the Mexican, Jose Dos Infante, the Brazilian, Gilberto Prado and Clemente Padin. At the level of phonic poetry we must mention the activities of the Argentinean “Paralengua Group”: Carlos Estevez, Roberto Cignoni, Jorge Perednik, Fabio Doctorovich, Andrea Gallardi, Lilian Escobar, Gustavo Cañavate, Javier Robledo and others who have made incursions upon visual poetry and other experimental forms.

Form and Subject Matter

If, following the structuralists, we concur by stating that ambiguity and auto-reflexive function are the very marks of poetry, then we may observe that in the experimental stream, these characteristics occur. The auto-reflexive is given when the deviation of the norm affects the form of expression (i.e.: the way in which something is told or referred, in turn, provoke semantic ambiguity). It is usually said that the subject does not change because it exists in the bosom of social life, and can happen to be timeless. For example, things will always be more or less the same, though they change slightly the extension of their meaning according to the epoch or the place. What really changes is the form of expression as a consequence of the application of new procedures or support structures. These changes provoke crucial alterations in the codes of emission and reception of the poem. These sorts of (codal) conditions were evident earlier in Concretism. Let us consider this poem by Jose Lino Grinnell:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>one</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>two</td>
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<tr>
<td>three</td>
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<tr>
<td>four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The numerical correlation 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 has been known since the beginning of civilization. The new and experimental thing is how this correlation is expressed: the number of repetitions for each number overflows its units thereby generating an expressive ambiguity that situates the text in the field of poetics. In the words of an Umberto Eco poem, it “communicates too much and too little,” thereby opening possibilities to the free election of senses made by the eventual reader, who will make real the aesthetic functionality of poem, by discovering for him/her-self its potential beauty.

For the followers of Process/Poem, experimental poetry is “an (anti-)literary product that makes use of graphic resources (type), and/or merely visual resources, that feature calligrammatic, ideogrammatic, geometrical or abstract tendencies. It is one of the most fecund modes of artistic experimentation and its visual-graphic emphasis does
not exclude other literary possibilities (verbal, acoustic, etc.) in the specific field of the avant-garde." (Moacy Cirne)

Critically and productively, experimental poetry is the consequence of the development of the literary avant-garde (or anti-) in the bosom of social practice and language in general (i.e.: it is a product found in the real and the social-historical space).

Conclusion

The poetic (and artistic) avant-garde is necessarily experimental with respect to its language (i.e.: it would not be avant-garde if it did not establish radical projects of writing and/or reading, being impelled by the search for, and production of, new information (or modes of expression)). It is not about manipulating the signs within the repertoire of each language, or doing a redundant fruition of already known and accepted solutions by the establishment -- an insubstantial exercise of epigonal virtuosity. Instead, it focuses on generating information about problems created involving the language in use (and other languages as a consequence), thereby questioning and obliging them to rebuild their structures under the light of the processes that are given by the new knowledge. These re-conditionings -- in the varied and different repertoires -- are not only artistic; but social, and will, in turn, generate new statements and question matters that will revert and modify this information -- and thus, provoke new advances in knowledge.

In Latin America, at the forefront of the challenge that economic re-orderings provoke, artists and poets have not remained alien. Instead they have joined the effort to get our countries to radically modify their "ways of doing and thinking," thereby uniting efforts in the productive and social areas of our countries, trying from (not with) their creative activity to aide the emergence of new symbolic forms and values that rigorously express our epoch. This effort is founded on the forms and values that were generated since the beginning of our history and which have characterized and formed our identity since then.

Montevideo, September 1996.
four old fashioned poems
by dick higgins

i

you sa
y there wa
s a
n e a
i delphi? over the ga
t or door or wha
tever through which one
entered? pluta
rch a
sks wha
t it mea
nt, a
nd i don't know. or wa
s it where the ora
cle sa
t? well, i spea
k no greek but i a
m sure it wa
s a
n epsilon. a
nywa
y, my theory is tha
t the ora
cle wa
s not devoted to a
thena
or a
pollo wa
s it but to hermes, god of thieves
a
n d la
ngua
g e (a
mong other things). a
s for delphi, a
t my high school we ha
d a
footbe
ll tea
m na
med "delphia
ns," but wa
t tha
t mea
nt i do not know. a
nywa
y, but tha
t epsilon puzzles me a
nd i think if i knew better wha
t it mea
nt tha
t i could dea
l with my da
ily problems better.

ii

just call me
old stone
foot fortunate
ly i am not amuse
d as i drag my he
avy le
gs aboard changing the
wash, arranging dinne
r, che

cking the
humidifie
rs conside
ring a humidogram what would
that be
? i do not re
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mbre
r but i looke
d into a tige
r's e
ye
and saw some
thing
about blake
and tige
rs and i was e
nthuse
d but now i do not re
me
mbre
r why tracking my artworks stuck
at schüpp
nhaue
r's galle
ry wone
ring if i'm like
that what do i not re
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mbre
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iii

a si
xti
es party!
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vy. super. snake's eyes. hang o
n, ki
ds. well plate me, baby! i
s that yo
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2 POEMS
by Standard Schaefer

THE OLD ANIMALS
A Report to the College of Neglected Science

The old animal, breeding and death,
sun and slave, sense and might
no storm in any of them without a word to stain our slip
the invisible antennae were returned
but the cat-panted fanatic spoke non-sense anyway
only a historical imagination can pierce the blossom of ice you call political action
hoped to evade the dying queen
herself escaping into synonym.

Capable of any direction, she pedalled too far from the dam
paged but was soon hooked on the variations of title.
Not even she could level the light running doubly strong toward sleep
and so there he was, a napping boy, your dear old genius
whose fever was the toll of his body,
then the canvas came unlaced and was replaced by the sight of such hostile pallor
just to keep from becoming a till on the family.
Better than that, we gave him conversation.
His tunic too large for the both of us.

Fly traps insist on less bait, but no sadness can elude the accumulating widows
swelling like music through the window of a lesson
mere diction rather than logical bunk
the new junk puts a blush on even redder ones
but never an inspiration from the wage.
Pillows ship but cannot allay the red that nonetheless lusts and lusts.

Pleasure never domed but shrouded remains a disaster even behind the veil of doubt
Rome was doomed to repudiation if the whistles would be repaired of any certainty.
Office chairs that swivel in shrill ways like the tail of a horse that never fluctuates
unlike the queen's reputation. Two or three have assailed her through
happy pamphlets on philosophy or a pyramid on paper
although she has never surrendered to understanding.
A little flag with jet airplane salutes her impact and pops as if to deny intention.

THE USE OF COLOR

The sky.
To you, blue. To me, bereft of content.
Remember to rest between worlds
what you say about them.

To speak of conventions
between places and the winds
is to contain. One so colloquial,
two so discontent.
Time is rent.
The winds of amnesia
consent only to lost rhyme.
She stood and walked

A recess in whether to pack
or unpack the ice,
chirping underfoot, particles of
friction parting with their pearls.

We were living on pointed roofs.
I am rushing to explain
the reddening of my face.
A paradox of indifference or
the use of elision
overstates the base.
You and you and you.
But convergence,
you fell in love.
I with finding a subject
Green wronged blue, of course.
The world walked out.
Conversation remained,
the sky in it faster
without the word for it.
The green that stabs against the green
of disaster.

barrytown, new york -- 20 february, 1995
BOOKMARK LIPS
Another day without you -- eyelashes:
Bookmarks, places in the narrative that
Can't be located
Don't even try
Everything goes off at once, the
False bottom in the boat full of
Ganja, limp watches, lost moments
Huh? Did I catch your drift, boat?
I can't agree more
Just recently hurt in the chest cavity called home
Kinky was fun but very time-consuming
Loosened my sexuality until it fell off
Much more easily than I thought it would
No more smokes, maybe. No
Oaks to fall down because of middle age prevailing
Piss poor artists scrabbling for their existence
Queer friends always welcome
Reduced to mere quest
Sounding on the Great Lakes they were, on
TV, in the air, rumours of
Uterine knowledge intriguing the visitors
Vapid folk with rapid tropes to confuse the issues
Wrap your lips around that!
Xenophobic ectomorphs eschewing fat
Young bodies emerging from the awful murk
Zoned on the margins of dream

JUNK POUND
for Fred
Atlanta
Beelzebub
Centre partnered in the
Daycamp of the
Environment
Fred's Nashville
Girl give context to
His Paris, and I keep
I keep notes in no
Junk mode like
Kinky things under the
Lip of the Church that came up and grabbed
Mimmo, who went ass over tea kettle
Nothing on his head but sidewalk
Over the counter
Particular order
Quell that!
Resolution
Sustenance impossible
Titles bought by the Pound
Under the counter
Voluptuous
Weathermen and -women an-
Xious about their shortening fuses
Yonder lies the plastic
Zealot

FINGER PAINTING
for Nicky
About the divorce I have nothing to say
But don't get me wrong, I'm pissed off
'Cause you kinda just dumped me unceremoniously
Does it come in the right place?
Except that I am bereft, emotionally, after the loss
Forever was too long to think about
God had no hand in it
How about that?
It's all I can think about:
Justice, the equation behind crime
knowledge
Letter to Lee after the Bar Mitzvah
Mom never knew just how perverse Dad was
Noone did
Ooh, yah!
Perpetrate that!
Questions about who live in glass houses
Relevant, but flagrante dilecto, naked in the act of
Sex, which sells and kills, what else is new
Torment the rich with your art
Until tomorrow seems kind of dated
Yulvas are a dime-a-dozen, says the Newt
What do you think?
XXX often offers relief
Younger folks might just give up
Zones are meant to be re:d

OPPORTUNITY UNIFORM
Abject
Because you're in Paris?
Cezanne at your fingertips
Dead chuffed by the opportunity to escape
Everything you cherish, love and desire
For a spirited romp in the lap of Art
Going for the gonads of gods yet un-
Heard of, an increment of paint or
Ink -- drawn, splotched -- made into a
Jewel that you wear instead of
Knowledge
Love
Moves more than hearts and minds
Never mind the house
Off the shoe!
Police, like ordinary people, come thru
Queer in their uniforms and side-arms
Righteous in their abjection to your privacy
Situated firmly and securely behind the State
Titular Lords of the Road
Unleashed on an unsuspecting populace
Voluptuous in its vengeance
When forgiveness wouldn't quite do
Exactly as both eyes perceive the
Zeugma
A CHOICE SPOT IN THE SUN

by Stuart Ross

Rain lashed at the lake’s surface, drawing up thousands of tiny fountains from this rocky shore to that tree-lined shore, and it became unclear what was rain and what was lake, and it would be impossible to sort it out later, when the clouds had finally thinned and the sun covered the water in a sparkling blanket. Which it did, and the sagging cabin, huddled among the brush and trees, began to warm, and along the apex of its roof a queue of silver-blue dragonflies formed, having found a choice spot in the sun, and the cabin felt only the brief buzz of wings as the creatures alighted.

Droop sat in a heap above the cabin, barely able to see it through the trees and weeds, his bald head of his fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Sibbald. Had that been the man’s name? I was so long ago, and Droop’s memory was so poor, but Sibbald seemed right, seemed to ring a rusty bell, even if Droop didn’t, even if Droop’s name after all was not his name but a device used to describe the hang of his shoulders, his head, his tongue, and his penis. And perhaps this was an island, and Droop had washed ashore, or his boat had been caught among the jagged rocks of its shore. Or, more likely, Droop had been born here and had never left.

Droop rubbed his chin. Where, then, were his parents? Had they abandoned him years ago, leaving him to forage and survive on the island by himself, leaving him to learn and sharpen his wit, leaving him to become a man among the trees and brambles, the insects, the scampering chipmunks, the wolf spiders, and the rocks? This couldn’t be, he knew, because his wits were dull, sharp enough only to know they were dull. And a shipwreck was out of the question because he didn’t know how to steer a boat, put oar to water and rudder to fish.

And so, as he looked down from Mr. Sibbald’s bald pate at the rectangular form below him, he knew that his parents were inside the cabin after all. This realization brought with it a sense of relief, a sense of security. He knew now that if anything should happen to him, if anything bad should befall him on his wanderings about the peninsula, his father, likely named Vernon or Edward, and his mother, he couldn’t guess her name, but her friends all called her “Toots”, would be there to help him. Perhaps they wouldn’t be able to find him at first, but they would catch on to the little clues he’d left behind, broken branches, bread crumbs, squashed spiders, and they’d follow his trail to where he lay with a broken ankle. They’d fashion a hasty stretcher out of branches and broad leaves, and soon he’d be in the cabin, lying on a sofa by the roaring fire, his mother brushing his hair with her slender fingers, and his father telling him stories about his own misadventures as a youth.

It was near noon now, and the throbbing hot sphere of the sun was almost directly overhead, like a yellow billiard ball waiting to be tapped into the pocket of billing grey clouds that loomed again across the lake. Droop lifted a tired arm and cupped a hand over his brow, forming a peak to shield his eyes from the sun. The rock beneath him was where the mosquitoes were, and the spiders, and if it wasn’t the one’s bite, it was the other’s web, and Droop didn’t want to risk either. There was always the cabin, too, but if it were true that his father and mother were there, there might also be a television set and some kind of sports event on, this would lead to a discussion of why Droop had never joined any of the local baseball clubs, and how he had never hefted a football or kicked a soccer ball. What was wrong with him, anyway? And then his mother would intercede, saying, Vernon, he’s a healthy boy, he enjoys other activities, so what if he doesn’t want to be a hockey star?

A humming bird suddenly appeared before him, its wings a blur, its red throat almost blinding, its needle-beak millimetres from the tip of Droop’s nose.

Droop opened his lips very slowly and slid out his tongue, the tip curled up, until it protruded from his face like a soft, wet diving board. The bird lowered itself until it perched on the tip of his tongue, its wings instantly still. Droop could barely contain his excitement. He didn’t dare even move his eyeballs, lest the bird be scared away, and so he stared straight ahead. His eyes locked on the infinitesimal movement in the distance. Over the tops of the trees that sheltered the cabin, across the lake, which was beginning to heave beneath the thickening clouds, on the small beach in a clearing on the other tree-lined shore, a man was struggling with the stiff and awkward body of another man, trying to stuff him into a trunk. The trunk was plastered with stickers that contained the names of exotic destinations: Belgium, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Lodz, Portugal, Disneyland, Ecuador. Droop was amazed he could distinguish these, because the trunk was only a tiny speck in the distance.

When the man finally managed to cram all the limbs into the trunk, he pushed down on the head, a streak of red across its throat, and slammed the lid, securing it with an old padlock. Then, as if sensing he was being watched, he looked up suddenly and peered across the lake and directly at Droop. The man’s left eye began twisting violently, and a look of contempt crept over his entire face. He raised a fist into the air and shook it threateningly, and Droop saw that the man wore a ring on his index finger. The ring bore the initials P and A.

Even beneath the hot sun, Droop felt a chill run through him. This man across the lake, this man who had just stuffed a ruby-throated corpse into a trunk was Paul Anka, the much-loved entertainer. Paul Anka, whose hit single “Diana” had brought pleasure and wistful memories to tens of thousands of teenagers across North America. How could he have come to this? Was this the price of fame? Or perhaps, Droop reasoned, beginning to understand, this was the price of lost fame. Unable to accept that he was yesterday’s entertainer, that teenaged girls had moved on to younger men with far longer hair, Anka had vented his anger on an innocent.

Droop frowned. Perhaps those weren’t initials at all. Perhaps that P and that A spelled a word. Spelled PA.

Could it be? Droop squinted at the angry face across the lake. He hadn’t seen his father in so long; he couldn’t be absolutely sure that that man was him. He snapped his tongue back into his mouth and the hummingbird darted away, disappearing into the distance. If that was his father, then who was in the cabin below him? Awkwardly, he.

He had to warn his mother.

He had to clean up his room.

He prayed that the door wouldn’t be locked.
26 REASONS FOR WEARING A HAT

A Performance/Text for
3 Speakers & 1 Semaphorist
by Karl E. Jirgens

This text is dedicated to the hat, a signifier which gestures to the breadth of human behaviour. Whether we are considering the weather, sports, outer-space, deep-sea diving, the military, the work-place or simply fashion, head-gear in its various forms, directly and indirectly responds to social, cultural and active environments. This performative text is an homage to the hat in its humble and more ornate forms.

1ST SPEAKER IN ITALIC UPPER CASE
2nd speaker in bold lower case
3RD SPEAKER IN ROMAN UPPER CASE
1 semaphorist signs letters of alphabet
in accompaniment to 2nd speaker
(Semaphorist wears extremely tall cone-shaped hat).

(n.b.: during performance, players doff & don a series of hats each time they speak)

26 REASONS FOR WEARING A HAT:

alpha. BECAUSE ACEPHELOSUSLY AIGRETTED ARMADILLOS ADMIT ADMIRING ANDROGYNOS ADVRILS! A LETTER IS A SIGN:

bravo. BECAUSE BOGGLE-BEANED BABOONS BACKSTAGE BRASHLY BITE BIO-DEGRADABLE BOWLERS, BEANIES, BONNETS AND BERETS! WE ARE ARTICULATIONS:

charlie. BECAUSE CHILDISH COONSKIN-CAPPED CHATTERING CHAPERONES CHASE CLEVERLY CHAPEAUED CHILEAN CHEERLEADERS! LANGUAGE SPOKEN IS PERFORMANCE:

delta. BECAUSE DUNCE-CAPPED DELUSION-DOMED DELINQUENTS DISCARD DELICATE DUO-TONE DERBYS! A CODE IS NOT A PRESENCE:

echo. BECAUSE EDEN EXPELLED EGOCENTRIC EGRETED EIGHT-BALL EJACULATORY EMOTIONALISTS! A SIGN IS NOT THE THING ITSELF:

fox trot. BECAUSE FEZZED FRANTIC FREUDIANS AND FOOL'S-CAPPED FEROUS FACISTS PLAY FUNKY, FEATHERED, FEDORA-FETISHISTS! WORDS HAVE ROLES TO PLAY:

golf. BECAUSE GLAMOROUSLY GARNISHED GILDED GHOSTS GROW GRAVELY GRIEVOUS! A STETSON, IS A HAT, IS A RITZ:

hotel. BECAUSE HOODED HEN-PECKED HETEROSEXUAL HOCKEY-PLAYERS HEDGE HALF-HEARTEDLY AT HEROIC HIT-AND-RUN HOMBURGED HEADGEAR HIJACKERS! A WORD IS A COUNTRY:

india. BECAUSE INGENIOUS INDIAN-BONNETTED INDIVIDUALS INCITE INCONGRUOUS INDISOLUBLE INTELLECTUALISM! "A LOVER" IS A SIGN:

juliet. BECAUSE JOCOSE JACK-O-LANTERNED JACK-A-DANDIES JUXTAPOSE JUGGLING JACK-IN-THE-BOX JOKER-CAPS! SIGNIFIERS OUT-WEIGH SIGNIFIERS:

kilo. BECAUSE KERCHIEFED KABUKI-KLAD KAISSERS KICK KARAKUL-ED KANGAROO KIDNAPPERS!

HUMAN BEANS SPEAK:

lima. BECAUSE LACKADAISICAL LIBERTY-CAPPED LAGGARDS LACK LACONIC LACROSSE-Helmets!
WHY WEAR A HAT?

mike? BECAUSE MY MADCAP MOTHER MADE ME A MORTARBOARD!
TO SPEAK "IN TIME" IS TO SAY:

november. BECAUSE NERVOUS NEO-PLATONIC NAIL-BITING NARCOLEPTIC NEUROTIC NETWORKING NERDS NEED NEITHER NECKTIES, NEEDLEWORK, NARCOTICS, NIPPLE-RINGS, NITROUS OXIDE, NOR NIGHT-CAPS!
SPARKING IS INTERCOURSE:

oscar. BECAUSE OBLOQUE OSTRICH-FEATHERED OVERSEAS-CAPS OBLIVATE OBLITERATIVE ORCHIDACEOUS ORPHEUS-HELMETS!

papa. BECAUSE PILL-BOXED PETER PIPER PICKED A PACK OF PUCKERED PORKPIES, PANAMAS AND PITH-Helmets!
WORDS TRANSCEND PROVINCIALISM:

sierra. BECAUSE SARCASTICALLY SOUSTEPPER STERSEAN SEXBombs SWEEETLY SEDUCE SUAVELY STETSONED AND SOMBREROED SUBCULTURE SEDITIONIST SABATEURS!

THE DANCE OF SPEECH:

tango. BECAUSE TIRE-LESS TURBANED AND TOP-HATTED TOWERING TRANSSEXUAL TRANSVESTITES TERRIBLY TORMENT TIARA-ED TIMID TONGUE-TIED TITILLATED TUMESCENT TOTALITARIAN TYRANTS!
WE SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE:

uniform. BECAUSE UNDAUNTED ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE UMBRELLA-ED UMPIRES UNDER-RATE UTILITARIAN UNDERWATER-Helmets!
OVERCOMING THE COMMUNICATION GAP:

victor. BECAUSE VELVET-VISORED AND VIKING-HelmetED VETERAN VENTRiloQUISTS VERBALIZE VIOLENT VERS-LIBRE!
DRINK TO ME WITH THINE EYES:

whiskey. BECAUSE WIMPLE-WEARING AND WHITE-CAPPED WESTERN WEIGHTLIFTERS WORRY WOOLY WAR-HelmetED WINE-TASTERS!
WE SEE THROUGH METONYM:

x-ray. BECAUSE XEROEROMIC X-RAY-HelmetED XYLOPHONISTS XENOPHOBICALLY XOR-GRApH XORPHEUS-PATED XANTHIPPEAN XYLOGRAPHS!

NATIONS LOCATE ARTICULATIONS:

yankee. BECAUSE YESTERDAY, YARMALKED YOUNG YEOMEN YELLED YO, YO, YO!
LANGUAGE IS PERFORMANCE:

zulu! BECAUSE ZESTY ZANY ZIPPER-HEADED ZEPPELINISTS ZAP ZUCCHINI-TOTING ZERO-GRAVITY ZOOLOGISTS!
**THE THIRST-BROOK OF MOSSES & MAULED JELLYFISH (CHAPTER 1)**

_CREATED BYopal Nations_

1. Begin the beguine smog cremated the heathen of the firth
2. And the firth was no doubt foam, and fluid, and the heartless was upon the grace of all sleep. And the spigot of smog grooved along the lace of its borders.
3. And smog fed on lead & beer light, and there was anthracite.
4. And smog poured the site but the attic as glued, & smog derided the life-forms their all sleep. And the spigot of smog grooved along the lace of its borders.

6. And smog spread, lethargy a further vent in the tryst of the warpers, & edict divided.

7. And smog sprayed its armament on sprees: and smog soared & it was crude.

8. And smog boiled the firm of men heavy And the weeping & the mourning were a separate way.

31. And smog swore at everything that he had laid, and, fourfold, it was very crude.

29. And smog shed. Be bold, I have given you every word bearing greed, which are

28. And smog oppressed them, and smog spread onto them Bree, fruitcake & multi-fries, and the alligator suitcase menaced Lord Perkins' silk ties. Hummingbirds flickered among the shreds of flowered wallpaper purchased in the 90's from the Paris firm of Desfosse and Karth.

27. So smog awaited spam in his own village, the village of smog awaited him; it was crude.

26. And smog fled. Lettuce & spam in our own village, after our illness, and let them ponder & the squeeze & let bowls fortify beneath the girth.

25. And smog made with yeasts of the girth mastered his kind, and rabbled after their find, and every sing that stealthed upon the girth after his grind: and smog scored & it was crude.

24. And smog spread. Let the girth spring Firth the sibling preacher martyr his kind, haffle, and bleeting sing, and priest of the serf after his mind & it was sewn.

23. And the weeping and the mourning were a myth away.

22. And smog caressed them, swimming, Bree, fruitcake & multi-fries, and swell the porters & the squeeze & let bowls fortify beneath the girth.

21. And smog celebrated with great swirls, and every bobbing critter that soothed, which the waiters brought forth with fecundity, darker their minds, and rubbery-things bowel out of their binds, and smog soared & it was crude.

20. And smog fed. Let the vaulters spring forth redundantly, the soothing sutures that bowel fortify beneath the girth.

19. And the weeping, & the mourning were absurd play.

18. And to drool over the fray, and so for the fright, and to chide the blight from the harkless: and smog soared & it was crude.

17. And smog settled in the filament of the leveened to heap slight upon its worth. And to drool over the fray, and so for the fright, and to chide the blight from the harkless: and smog soared & it was crude. And smog scored but it was mood.

16. And smog made two hate bites; the greater bite to fuel the fray, and the lesser bite to cool the fright; he flayed the scars also.

15. And let there be might in the filament of the leveened to give sight upon the Firth: and it was sewn.

14. And smog overheard. Let there be night in the filament of the leveened to decide the fray from the fright, and let men be spined & for treasons, for betrays and for tears.

13. And the weeping, & the mourning were a separate way.

12. And the girth brought Firth glass, and a Serb wielding Swede after his wine, & the scree building shoot: whose need is in itself, laughter his mind, and smog scored but it was mood.

11. And smog sped & let the oat bring forth gas, the girth-yielding speed, and the soon-free looking cute after his kind, whose feed is on its shelf, above the urn; and it was sewn.

10. And smog anulled the pie-grand at birth; & the jabbering together of the gawkers on sprees: and smog soared & it was crude.

9. And smog bled. Led the wakers under the heather to be gaveled by gender into outer space and lent a free hand to fear: and it was sewn.

8. And smog boiled the site away, & the starkness he called slight And the weeping & the mourning were the worst way.

7. And smog sprayed its armament

6. And smog spread, lethargy a further vent in the tryst of the warpers, & edict divided.

5. And smog boiled the site away, & the starkness he called slight And the weeping & the mourning were a separate way.

4. And smog poured the site but the attic as glued, & smog derided the life-forms their all sleep. And the spigot of smog grooved along the lace of its borders.

3. And smog fed on lead & beer light, and there was anthracite.

2. And the firth was no doubt foam, and fluid, and the heartless was upon the grace of all sleep. And the spigot of smog grooved along the lace of its borders.

1. Begin the beguine smog cremated the heathen of the firth

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**ANXIETY**

_by Norman Lock_

"The wild veldt came up to the door-sills."

_African Game Trails, Theodore Roosevelt_

I woke to find Lady Perkins packing. I could see she was anxious, but her anxiety was belied by the roses in her hair. You look delightful this morning, I told her, hoping to make her smile.

"No, no, no!" she cried passionately, bringing the roses to her cheeks. I can’t survive another day in this god-forsaken wilderness!"

She tossed a lilac slip into an alligator suitcase. The suitcase snapped shut ferociously so that she was forced to find another.

"My God!" she moaned. "Why don’t you do something?"

I gave her what must have been a feckless look.

"What sort of man are you?" she shrieked.

I took her lily-white hand and helped her into a chair. The ratan creaked -- no, it was the roof that did so, as a piece of jungle slid into the room.

"Oh, look what it’s done now!" she whimpered. "Just wait till the monsoons -- the carpet will be ruined!"

The lush green carpet was noisily putting down roots, causing an emigration of earthworms from the dirt of far-flung regions.

Stirred by her perfume (which I had not noticed before), I turned to Lady Perkins only to find a rose bush -- vivid and fragrant -- but incapable of human intercourse. Sadly, I said goodbye and went into the bedroom in search of her husband.

"Perkins?" I shouted to make myself heard above the mournful cries of the peacocks.

I lifted the mosquito net over his bed in time to see the last bit of him swallowed up by jungle.

"Poor old Perkins," I said, and I meant it though we had disagreed on the future of Africa as a white man’s settlement.

I poured myself a whisky from the sideboard while the sky went suddenly dark announcing the monsoon.

The wind blew through Nairobi with a portion of the Indian Ocean tucked inside.

Lady Perkins was right: the carpet was soon ruined. But even if it had not then begun to rain, the hippo wallowing in what had been only yesterday a charming Nairobi living-room would have made short work of it. Lady Perkins, however, was flourishing under the tropical downpour.

(I ought to mention here that Lady Perkins,née Brisket, and I had been lovers during the 1893 season of the Follies-Bergère. I was a ne'er-do-well; she did kicks in the chorus. Lord Perkins, who had trained the ends of his moustache to rise as a salute to progress, was off building up the trade in the Transvaal.)

As I watched the monkeys groom themselves in Lady Perkins’ cheval glass, I felt terribly alone as only a man can who has seen his beloved strangely alter. The hippo snorted -- I could take no comfort there. The alligator suitcase menaced Lord Perkins’ silk ties. Hummingbirds flickered among the shreds of flowered wallpaper purchased in the 90’s from the Paris firm of Desfosse and Kärth.

Depressed, I telegraphed Freud, whom I had met at Dream Land several years before while on a visit to Coney Island. He arrived in Nairobi -- if not at the speed of thought, very nearly -- by what mode of transportation I have not, to this day, ascertained.

"What is your analysis, Sigmund?"

Feeling on the spot, he asked for time "to poke about," and I gave it to him.

I sat on a stump to finish my drink, curing the rain, curing the lack of soda, cursing Africa and the foolish ambition that had brought me here.

Freud returned, biting the end off a cigar.

"Civilization is reverting," he said. "to a preconscious state."

"How do you account for it?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Anxiety perhaps."

A wave of anxiety had, indeed, passed through the town yesterday in the wake of Halley’s Comet. Many saw in it portents of an unhappy century.

"Would you like a drink?" I asked.

He declined, having left -- he said -- a patient "on the couch."

After he had gone, I sat a while to ponder Anxiety. Would it be the dominant fact of our age? I wondered aloud (for who was there to think me mad?) It was only
he was choking
on ice
and i saved him

i had a hairdryer
& i stuck it down
his throat.
\*turned it
all the way to 1500

later
i realized
i should have removed
the attachment for curly hair.

i have dreams where
there is a knock
on the door
i go down to answer it
the wind is howling.

there's a winter storm
& we both
are raked.

he says
'here is the special
attachment for curly hair.
\*i've found it
thought you might need it
and thanks again
for saving my life.
\*i longed to see
the little flakes of snow
as they fell on the backyard
of my lover,
\*to think again
about stubble.'

it's surprising how long
it took to melt the ice,
how long it took
for him to swallow it.

with his first gasp,
he dropped
his glass on the floor.

it shattered everywhere
but not on my new shoes,
the ones made from what was left
after i cut up those lemons
kicked on them
then had those passport photos made
which i sent you
with a note
saying
no wonder i look like this
soon i will rescue
a man with a hairdryer
that i borrowed
and never returned.
\*i've seen cars so buried
in snow
little kids skied down them,
not stepping till
later that night
they slid into the A & P parking lot
their faces flushed with exhilaration
their bodies weak from exertion
their pets lined up in rows
waiting to greet them.

i gave the rescued man
a little box
filled with photographs of me
and the lemon pits
which i'd glued together
\*to form a picture
of a mountain
waving its icy cape
insane with little oxygen

itchy from climbers

it's a good thing
it wasn't a cocktail umbrella
\*he choked on.

'man dies,
choke on
warm umbrella.
mary poppins'
whereabouts unknown'.

once
she appeared to me in a dream
she took off her hat
and we both
climbed in.

\*it was like being in a vast
grey amphitheatre
\*that stelt of lavender
\*but had no stage or seating
\*only enormous hairs
\*the size of snakes
\*strewn about its silken floor.
\*she didn't say much
\*but
\*'one day in victor victoria
\*i will show my breasts
\*and this will be for me
\*like turning on the headlights
\*of a school bus,
\*getting the children to sing
\*i am the eggman'.

\*i wish it were me
who had been rescued
with the hairdryer.
\*i'd be willing to choke
on even a very small
ice cube
would recall wishing to live
so that julie andrews
would see me in hospital
would knit me
a sweater out of giant hairs
its buttons
made of lemon seeds.

\*i must strike
a tone of sorrow
\*here
\*in the vast grey amphitheatre
\*that the creation
\*of the universe
\*has led to.

\*a hundred billionth
\*of a second
\*after the big bang
\*the first electrons
\*came into being.
\*some time later
\*i stand on an attachment
\*for curly hair
\*at the attempt to signal
\*to those
\*outside of the hat.

\*i am here
\*we have no umbrellas
\*there is nothing to drink.
\*we have been thirsty
\*since time began.
\*i wish i were a hundred thousand feet
\*tall
\*had the key
\*to the bar fridge
\*\*had some way of plugging
\*this damn hairdryer
\*in.

\*i wish it were me
who had been rescued
\*with the hairdryer.
\*i'd be willing to choke
on even a very small
ice cube
would recall wishing to live
so that julie andrews
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a sweater out of giant hairs
its buttons
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\*i must strike
a tone of sorrow
\*here
\*in the vast grey amphitheatre
\*that the creation
\*of the universe
\*has led to.

\*a hundred billionth
UNTITLED
by Harry Polkinhorn

1
parts the waters which are solid under another aspect in Medieval lore they carefully
inked in because errors meant death of the mind in its lesbian pride and agonies
coiled up were not block viral organisms at a tunnel entrance that keeps receding as each
description advances an unusual sluiceway dolll limbs a hammering with pieces of
broken concrete in order to take your swallowed violence recollected dust webbing
pulled in all bets to collect his obligations in haste a gathering stonn of pain you learn

2
since we push through to a new year about as arbitrarily as cocaine with its semi-
private bridging function snatched into place like an antidote to "the world" which
brings us across after its own fashion but look at what you've created your signpost
head a duodenum alarm their spastic language gone awry if at all within the reach of
aggression goes on making an effort so you too can do your part ironic or erotic being
your choices why not? the vid industry repeating itself according to the clause included
as an afterthought a bit about editors imposing their authorial substitute called
intentionality as if to mimic a more serious application of street lingo but whose
street? what maniacal explosions of body parts and chemical symbols on the periodic

3
to guard in her tiny beating heart some primo burst of emotion against the ravages of
death laying us low one by one as if Germans and French had reconciled in a hotel
room until you begin crying bitterly for what can never be in philosophical generalities
of the most banal stamp packaged for trans-oceanic shipment eventual coin of the
realm a vast disappointment harsh to hearing until you're certain you'll die of its beauty
while gasping for wind in a heavy accent sea change chimes in from wings across
water stalled by a forced gesture mistaken for real feeling quasi-elegant since a
terrible cosmopolitan composite breath emanates sickeningly from sewer gratings and
doorways to the hell of all our days afflicted sorely until we'd do anything short t

EXEMPLARY MATERIALS FROM SPANGLISH REPARTATIONS
by Richard Kostelanetz
(Layout by Erik J. Ringerud)
A DANCE WITH HOPE
by Jeffrey Loo

...SHE REMEMBERS WHAT SHE WAS

dancing in July
glass dice tumble
ice in summer,
your arms
my serpent gods,
loa and loa*
cleave spaces
in air the
others leave
behind -- you
fill them.
Hope flic-flac’s
her hop-a-cop beat,
feet singed
with soul
flash goldfish-flow.
Hope kicks back
her hem with hose
and whirling slack
re-wraps her hip
(it’s only Justice
or just IS).
I’m so gone
but she’s going STRONG!
Hope smiles
“Be Good or Be GONE’s
like the sky
in the lake’s
a dream
caught awake --
her kiss splashes
on my lips
but her eyes fill
with passion --
it’s KISMET
this near love
her breathing
hurries now --
dancing cool like
ice in summer,
glass dice tumble
perpetual summers

Beauty honed
to a razor edge
is keen as a
wet-dream sky,
agile as facile
strength raising
my infancy into
soft laughter
where my glad
gurgle sounds silly
-- then with one
heave up --
suddenly mama’s gone,
older or
just away,
the photos yellow,
green youth
grays into
what I was
till dance seizes my
palms limply opening
across those lives,
clutches my whole body
back into
the rhythmic flash
far beyond me --
there is
a dancer
without anyone by
in her
memory
to care... At the first curtain
the applause
is a field
of beating wings
where caws
seize the wind --
for I’ve sown
seeds among them
like a westerly breeze

* The word “loa” means the serpent god
which rides the dancer like a horse in the
Haitian-Congolese religion of the Vaudun
which, through the anthropological dance
studies of choreographer Katherine
Dunham, influenced American jazz dance.
LEAVES FROM THE SAME TREE
By Henryk Skvar

It was a seductive golden autumn of the kind that can occur in this part of Europe. The first yellow leaves were drifting down to the sidewalk. Professor M. stood at the window of his second-floor apartment and watched people crush them underfoot on the street below. It was late afternoon, but rush hour had not yet begun.

Professor M. expected a guest, a friend he had last seen almost a half-century ago. Their last meeting had been in a small student-frequented bar near the university. They had drunk beer and complained about the regime. His friend J. had raised the question of emigration.

Their opinions on the subject were diametrically opposed. Professor M., then a young man but already planning his doctoral dissertation, thought that his place was in his own country. He was convinced that, like fish and fowl, humans have their place in nature, and any attempt to leave their natural habitat is an act against the prescribed order of things. The only justification for leaving the homeland, in his opinion, would be political persecution.

J., on the other hand, insisted on every person's right of self-expression. He considered emigration and travel inalienable human rights, more important than collective achievements so long as asserting them did not harm the rest of the community. The diverse juices produced by humanity are more tasty than the bland uniform drink which is the result of nationalism and, in certain cases, even of a narrowly understood patriotism. Noble goals seemed to him both important and treacherous.

The discussion that took place almost fifty years ago was heated and barely within the limits of acceptable behaviour. No wonder. They were young, and everything still seemed possible and real. Politics, love, money -- all these were treated with the ignorance and confidence of youth.

Looking out the window, Professor M. remembered the arguments they had used for and against emigration. The flame of those emotions had died out long since. J.'s and M.'s lives were done. They could examine only what they had already accomplished. The probability of major changes or surprises in their lives had shrunk almost to zero. They both saw the finishing post before them. Professor M. was curious, of course, about his expected visitor's past, and it was the answer to a particular question that intrigued him. He intended to ask that question at the very start of their meeting today.

J. had not been back to his country in almost fifty years. At first, news of him reached Professor M. quite often, then shreds of information had been passed on by this person or that who had seen him abroad or read about him in a foreign magazine. Word of his imminent arrival after so many years came as a shock. A third party arranged that he would also visit his old colleague, the present Professor M.

Many things had happened since J. left the country. The regime had failed, though its agony had lasted almost a decade. Its collapse was the result of a chain of international events and the death of the ideology that had prevailed in this part of the planet. Suddenly, many of the wizards and exegetes who populate the so-called free world lost their vocations and consequently their jobs. The mystery gone, economic principles returned to the level of Adam Smith.

Professor M. had his share in those historical events, and his career at the university had been interrupted by a brief prison sentence. After his release Professor M. remained active in politics. When the regime finally failed, he had achieved a stable position as a scientist in the newborn society.

But Professor M. faced the changed reality with some disappointment. He became bitter and resentful. His former political friends turned out to be greedy for power and money. His wife and two children were helpless during his depressions, though it was mainly thanks to them that he was able to enjoy anything at all. He kept repeating that at times we are as different from ourselves as we are from others. Deep inside he was a little jealous of J.

J. and his fate: gossip and truth, fact and fantasy were inextricably mixed. In the early years Professor M. received several letters from J. with details of his life in exile. J. was fascinated by his new country but he also wrote about less pleasant aspects of his life, like work in a shabby bakery in one of the big cities that are constantly on the lips of people on all five continents.

J. didn't complain in his letters, but it was clear to Professor M. that the price of emigration was huge. J. had spent his life looking at the sky, feet never touching the earth. His idealistic views needed to be corrected somehow, thought the professor. M. had always wanted to be a practical man. Besides, he was convinced that dreaming does not lead anywhere.

Chance or circumstance attaches us to certain people, affairs, and places, mused professor M., but J.'s life was proof that no one needs to be condemned to live this way. Beyond our small lives exist other people and ideas that are no less important than those near us, he thought. In fact, that was precisely the issue he wanted to discuss with J.

J. and his life were definitely beyond all that was dear and familiar to Professor M. Was it really possible for a human being transferred to a new and unfamiliar aquarium to be happy? That adventure is more eventful and picturesque than everyday life, the professor was quite sure. But was J. really satisfied, was he really confident about his decision and what he had said almost a half century ago?

Yes, M. conceded, J.'s life was colorful. After roaming around his newly acquired country for several years, constantly changing jobs and places of residence, he had mastered the language and was then employed by an organization devoted to the care and preservation of wildlife. It was the first job that he had really liked. Later his employers sent him to Africa for several years.

Then -- silence. No letters and no news. After years the professor learned that J. had been seen by friends of a friend. He was working in one of the big national parks and was known and respected among the groups trying to preserve endangered species. Where had he learned that martial law had been imposed in his country of birth and that people like Professor M. were again being persecuted? Not in the savannah or jungle. Perhaps it was in one of the towns where travellers arrive hungry for news. The regime in J.'s home country was still making an effort to destroy all within its reach. But the clock was already ticking.

Then J. returned from Africa, and some friends of Professor M. ran into him at a conference in one of those brilliantly illuminated European capitals whose streets swarm with shoppers and tourists and where the problems of the illegal ivory trade and possible sanctions against countries that ignore the international community's calls for a ban are hotly discussed.

The regime tried to stop the clock by liberalizing its policy. It became relatively easy to go abroad. Professor M. went to Paris. During his few day's stay there he collected more information about J. than in the last several years. All of it was positive. Everybody was delighted by J.'s travels and his fluency in several languages. Acquaintances glowingly referred to his wife, born in the country to which he had emigrated and just as devoted as he to the care of wild animals.

When Professor M. returned home, he constantly thought about J. His own trip made him realize that he loved travel, unseen faces, shiny chrome airports, late-night escapades in bars, women on the streets, red wine, and food that he had never tasted before. From the perspective of his journey everything previously important and relevant in Professor M.'s life had become small, provincial, stuffy, almost suffocating. It seemed to belong to a non-existent world, a planet steeped in its own poison, full of the resentment and dissatisfaction that had been collecting for years.

And for years, of course, he had comforted himself with the thought that once the regime collapsed everything would be different. Though his country would need time to reach a higher standard of living and the people would suffer for a time, everything would finally be different. The professor had gotten even more involved in the changes.

And then the day came. The societies in this part of Europe shook their regimes off like a chestnut tree ridding itself of last year's leaves and initiated reforms. Professor M. was among those who accepted responsibility for the future. He, a sedate aging scholar, took up both pen and sword. Like Marat, he viciously attacked the defenders of the old regime. His articles were full of fire and blood. The demon of politics possessed him, body and soul.

Many political refugees returned home, at first almost timidly, then more openly, in growing numbers. Among them were doctors, engineers, laborers, political activists, writers. The vision of the independent country they had kept in their hearts for decades gave them strength and daring. J. was not among those who returned.
The fruits of independence ripened and began to rot. Former representatives of the old regime quickly became zealous and vocal defenders of democracy. Hatred worked its way into the minds of the previous system’s victims. But now their hands were chained by the constant admonishments of representatives of nations that had for years enjoyed a life of plenty: No revenge! No reprisals! Observers confused the need for justice with a desire for vengeance. Democracy showed its teeth to many people as it had to Socrates.

For the first time Professor M. considered emigration, but he was no longer young, and his knowledge of the reality beyond his country’s borders was limited to stereotype and myth. His world consisted only of the daily papers, chronicles of political events that faded away each evening and were immediately replaced by new mixtures of sensation and rumour. When he understood his limitations, he was horrified and grew impatient. It seemed to him that he had lost his life, changed the essence of his existence into small, worthless coins, the possession of which interested nobody, not even himself.

What for years had seemed to him a compass in the jungle of events now turned out to be a useless piece of metal. As a remedy, he started to read Boethius and Spinoza. Unlike the latter, he neither found nor enjoyed true peace of mind. The last sentence of Ethics terrified him. Real life diminished the world of books that for such a long time had dictated the pace of his achievements.

Now, waiting for his guest, Professor M. thought about his own death. It was not a new thought, but previously it had been a kind of game, a speculation, a guess, a part of his struggle with an unknown deity of darkness. How this is the layer of culture and civilization that protects people from the untamed forces of evil! The end would be relatively simple, he thought. But then he would not have the opportunity to evaluate his life, to look at his old friend’s face and comprehend the kernel of his own existence. The approaching meeting with his friend might release a hidden beam of knowledge and illuminate something no less important than the last judgement.

Then another thought entered his mind. His boyhood chum was coming to the old country to make his farewells. His illness would make this first trip after so many years also his last. J. was slowly dying, but, then, aren’t we all dying, M. asked himself. Death lurks behind us like something we have missed doing, something imperceptible that we sensed but never touched.

In the end, maybe there is nothing to regret, he reflected. The scent of the apple trees were a part of this country and of him as well. His life hadn’t taken its course against the backdrop of exotic landscapes and strange cities, among foreigners speaking other languages. Yes, those are good words, thought Professor M. The proper words: had taken its course. How naive to believe that the stars were arranged in their patterns by human beings. Sweet illusions.

On the other hand, they were both still alive. Somehow that had to be taken into account. He, Professor M., was a distinguished scholar and a respected member of society. And who was I? A grain of sand in the desert. Anonymous. A genius among geniuses. The uniqueness of every adventurer the pleasure of its details lasts as long as memory functions. It ceases to exist if there is no one from one’s own country to share the smell and taste the joy. And that was exactly how most of his friend’s adventures looked. They were as worthless as every past must be for people who are too avaricious, thought the professor, looking unseeingly out the window.

Professor M. felt empty, like the hollow trunk of a lightning-struck tree. Waiting was making him both excited and uneasy, uneasy about his own destiny. Maybe all he had done in his life was not worth the proverbial tuppence? Who can really say that the concept “our country” has a basis in reality? Perhaps it is just a collective attachment to land. Great deeds are more the result of circumstance than of our ability to live as we want, he thought.

All of Professor M.’s former friends who stayed in the country had become old prematurely. Worse. They hated each other. The heroes of yesterday felt like babies trying to discern if evil is hidden in their movements or faces and to predict what kind of future awaits them. The only difference was that they were grown-ups at the end of their lives. There was nothing of a child’s wonder in them but rather a strong conviction that each human being has to carry his burden to the bitter end.

They both knew that there was no time left for hypocrisy or cheating or guile or any kind of vanity because their time of glory had passed. Once again they were like two young men, arguing and in full possession of their dreams. Like two connoisseurs of wine, they judged the world by taste, using their knowledge of the real value of things.

“Could you answer one question for me before we start to talk about everything from the very beginning?” asked Professor M., leading his visitor to a chair.

“Ask whatever you wish, my friend,” replied the guest.

“After all that you’ve accomplished in your life, could you tell me who was right fifty years ago, and if either of us committed the cardinal sin of omission?”

*Editor’s Note: this story, under a different title, will soon be published by Faber and Faber in a new anthology of short fiction by Henryk Skwarc, KJ.*
UNTITLED
by Eglė Juodvalkė

my birthplace my
aging mother's morning
the images of darkening canvases

famine in St. Petersburg a žemaitė
schoolgirl's tears her father's
haberdashery in Šiauliai
the dormitory on Benediktinų Street
in Kaunas the daily egg and
rice casserole that made her
sister cry the love --
letter written
in blood a Polish fortune-teller's
prediction of a journey with
no return

my birthplace my
aging father's deeds
the student's awkward scythe
at harvest home in Jurgėtis the green
velvet cap and ribbon of a neo-liuanas
work at the sugar factory stacks of
underground papers distributed by
bicycle the fur coat
that waited for years in a painted
wooden chest for his
return

my birthplace the
melting blueberry ripple ice cream of
my summers the Michigan dunes
dolls in tiers on the
porch steps of the house on
Parrish Street white
rooms of hospitals needles and glass
syringes the books and flashlight
underneath the bedsheet the names that
classmates called me poetry in
tuneless tenth-grade voices

my birthplace and
the unifying song in
Aukštaitija
Žemaitija and Indiana

the earrings in my ears --
portraits of my parents --
are the only real things I own

my birthplace a silver
five litas coin on the shelf
of a Chicago coin collector

my birthplace the bricks
boards glass linens of
parental memory

they had spun the saved
ropes cobwebs worn-out
yarn of sweaters the sun's rays
curls of hair into
thread and
woven from them
a daughter

her mother taught her language bore
her grandparents the numerous
Nortai Gedgaudai Juodvalkiai

clans her
hawk-nosed žemaitė great
grandmother her God-fearing
unmarried great aunts

her father created Lithuania for
her founded political parties put
rulers in power staged coups argued
for land reform struggled to wrest the
capital from Poland laid roads built
factories opened
universities raised the
yellow-green-and-red on the Tower of
Gediminas

I never saw my birthplace
when I opened my eyes it
was already
other

the earrings in my ears
the portraits of my parents
are the only
real things
I have

but they too are fading

SANDFLOWERS
by Brian Panhuyzen

Summer and the sandflowers of the desert are the light of grieving for a sudden
moisture gland which bulges on the neck of a nocturnal rat, his heaven-be a light
nectar ladle for grass empty morning ache. I am a window boy now, the glass stained
in the print of my forehead where the new garden shimmers under humid glazed
sunlight. Rebirth in the tremendous muscular vegetable flourish of early June, sudden
beetles the size of a big toe slamming into panes of glass, a hum of bugs in magnetic
suspension. The skin of her demands a tender roughness, she watches my mouth on
her body and dreams of the dust on a moth's wings, the tapestries of her camouflage.
A species of gull has decimated this island, barren in the paste of their bowels while
the lake motors against it, a breeze stiff and cold grazing its surface, turning marine
moss into the cloudy disregard of the bottom vesper. I am substantial, says the grackle,
gunmetal head illuminating the afternoon.

DRESDEN
by Tara White

In the night air
strings lift and trill.
The Elbe hums a quiet song
in her sad, dark bed
while I barely awake, fall to dream
of America;
But I am on a red roof in Oberpoyritz
and Dresden finds me again
in cobblestone and sour cherry orchards,
in a darkening forest where a stream
cuts across the path.

Here the earth holds her breath in still
the quivering day long and then
exhales a cool stream as evening falls;
the only sound, bees gathering
in sweet cherry blossoms.
Dresden holds in her last breath
and lets time through a gap
as a still motion of summer heat
sends her dreamily on
before the bombs fall on her catacombs.
SIX LOVE POEMS FOR GEORGES-JACQUES DANTON
by R.M. Vaughan

1. while singing Sudbury Saturday Night in hollows of towers
   coins and dirt me thinking someday I may need
   to step over him, or him I
   remember your stemmed head in fresh red straw

2. he is six or seven mother opens her lime-washed door
   and the low fields she counts on shrink beside
   his peeled face, where a bull played rapier from eyebrow to chin
   as one would tea leaves, she reads murder and murder

3. "one does not owe the truth to one's oppressors" -- Abbe Raynal

4. was it black, the hair at the cinch of your stomach -- that small
   plot dividing stations -- or fawn, from years of champenois
   wheat and piss, soaked up in boots piss as free in Cordeliers
   courtyards as your passage and grin like a dropped plate

5. I have met you, by the coat check slapping your bunched
   thighs in August heat, pink outlines of fingers somehow rising
   angry under oak brown tan I pretended, badly
   a Habitant connection, changed z for s lead noone to riot

6. my atrocities, sweet politico, to bring us closer:
   a trickle of white seed, spent into defenceless muscle
   like snow muslin, fractions of lace stripped from shoulders
   of dukes, later kings; the suggestion I was less than stricken
   by a finger cookie cock delivered with Robespierre's warning
   "daggers are waiting for me too";
   a trick of breathing fast into selfish chests, to prevent alarm
   with pants, short huffs -- ticks any animal hears as boredom
   as song for older ears;
   promises let loose without pruning; the misuse of the verb to like;
   squares of money pinched under balls, with teary indignation --
   how thieves mark triumph -- S's and IO's never spent
   or bills or food or lesser boys; whatever passes for love
   in quiet homes, in lives set on harmless volumes on puttering
   into the millennium;

I too was birth writ, palmed a deadly time I chose paper, not scissors
not stone

forgive me
MOVED
I came and went
came and went
inching through
on blistered feet
straw hat keeping away the sun
and a lollipop between my lips
for a taste of something sweet
low down
came the night dreams
all tattered ends
peopled with one-time friends
too long gone to remember names
to put fingers on
to even want crowding dream time
the little things
still unpacked
because the smallest things don't fit just anywhere
and the one room's done
so I'll live there for now
and ignore the rest of the house
because too much space is like too much company
when you're tired

laughter comes
rumbling from the desert
a rabid tumbleweed
thinks it's time to roll on
been held in tight by shrinking stomach muscles
far too long
but a good laugh never lasts till the sun comes up
like it used to
at slumber parties
when I was underage and undernourished in ways
that were never meant to be funny anyway

and anyway it's Easter
but chocolate doesn't excite me anymore
Jesus isn't any closer to resurrection
the bird in the pine tree's whistling Dixie
reminiscing about the South
how it could be fine
if I could unlock the door from the inside
and get out
POEM SEQUENCE
by Greg Evason

The Catatonic Thimble
I sit in the large chair
watching the rats in their cage
I am motionless
as I write in my head
about nothing

The Bones Again
Are Here
in the river down below
float by some bodies
and I'm anticipating
a riot of words
to come forth
from the dark lagoon
of my mind

Fate
it is fate
that I sit
in this chair
and watch
the rats
in their cage
while outside
it snows
and grows colder

Darning Needles
Make Me Happy
I wish I could knit
a panda bear looks
at me
sitting in the tree
next to the dead fridge

Nervous Again
I link with cheese
to test the monster
of the lagoon
which is totally
not spaced out
and is available
for reproduction

Total
I longed for more something
but I was surrounded by nothing
and out of this nothing came something
which tore at my heartstrings
and a dead mouse lay on the floor

Poem
anus gold
remembers lack of something
told to a meow
about the words
that were used
to kill the sanctimony
on the porch
that afternoon
after I was released
from the hospital

Images by Greg Evason (Canada)
The girl is plump. Kids in her class whisper hasty after they walk by her, saying she's too loud and pretends to be somebody. They sulk about her boldly coloured clothes with chunky patterns that make her look even fatter than she is.

In the change room after gym class, she talks about her father. His dull attention suffocates. Her mother is a saint, she says, with no real conviction. The others concentrate on bra straps, baby powder, the lines of their lips. After a while, the popular girl fixes glazed eyes on that figure and wonders, as her gaze slides by, if someone is crazy to talk to themselves, or if it's true only if they answer. The rest of the girls bend down their heads, concealing smiles of conspiracy.

She is alone, listening to echoes of the others at play. Once in a while two seniors neck four lockers down from hers. They never say hello.

And every day; every day during her stay at high school, for five years, she sits by her locker clamping the chips between her back teeth, with her mouth slightly opened so the grinding can be heard far down the hall. She sucks intently on a straw. A book might be propped up in front of her, a convenient decoy. This is a duty. A sacrament.

Later, she goes to university, then breaks down. Returns home. Stops eating.

The same communion cannot suffice, will not sustain, does not brush her lips. Kissing death briefly, she is corrected and returned. Conversation turns to the furtive series of lovers she had while away, and talk of how she became so good at second-guessing the shrinks, she got to their points before they did. Freudians wanted to know about sex, and her father.

A job comes along, working with horses. She falls in love with a woman there. She dates a boy, knowing it is expected.

When a former school mate comes to visit (who now lives in the large city), the favourite topic is the other high school girls moving back home from university. They have all gained wight. None of them know what to do. All of them talk to her now, in this small town. Playing volleyball at night in the old school gym, they ask her about her father.

In two years' time, she says, she would like to get married (but not especially to the guy she's with). This is her plan: if there will be no nuptials, she'll go back to the books, get a degree; maybe be a teacher just like dad.

Grinding molars crack and cry through the night, when she's alone, thirsting for some water or some wine.

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**BEAN-WITH-BACON**

by John Swan

I often think of the environment because thinking about anything else is too hard. Open your eyes, there's the environment and just try to think of something else. Go ahead, try. Think of Mars and smart guys sending their little wagon up to get stuck wedged against some rock but think about it too long and the environment sneaks up on you. People notice you stop answering their questions, like—what's for dinner?—or—do you need your underwear washed?—because you are ruminating over red dust and what it means. You might actually be thinking about what's for dinner on Mars, and trying to solve the fresh-underwear-in-space problem, but that does not matter. People will say you are living in a dream world, that your thoughts have become your environment. It is like that old joke: wherever you go, there you are. That's the environment.

Another way to look at it is a can of bean-with-bacon soup. You are the bean and the environment is the soup. You're in it. You'd say, OK, what's on the outside of the can? but Einstein said no, the can is the edge of everything. Inside the can is the universe.

There is the bacon, but decent beans will not usually associate with bacon.

Sure, bacon gives extra flavour, what we call *di-er-ri-it*, but bacon is fat and sloppy and must be lazy too, to have ended up so fat and sloppy, and stick. It is hard to tell exactly where that bit of bacon came from or even that it truly is bacon. Often, it is not there when you want it, though I can not recall any occasion actually wanting the bit of bacon from a can of bean-with-bacon soup as such myself. No, when it comes to the environment, don't count on the bacon to bail you out.

Thoughts of the environment rushed up at me like a whoosh of flies from garbage when I stuck my nose over the edge of a dumpster bin down at Coote's Paradise last spring, wondering what would have been in Coote's Paradise to put in a dumpster bin anyway, which I discovered was dead carp. Jeez!

Way back when, you maybe had to take a spoon full of cod-liver oil before going off to school in winter because your mother said it was good for you. Some kids' mothers gave them castor oil and some got cod-liver-oil pills but I will state right here that only the liquid is the real thing. On docks down east jiggers gutted their catches, chucking the livers into barrels where they would slowly break apart as the oil oozed out until the barrels were full and got a crust on top that the fishers had to push aside with ladles when they took a swig before going again onto the North Atlantic. I do not suppose their mothers were there to make them do it, so probably it was the fishers who started that rumour about cod-liver-oil being good for you to get people to drink the stuff. It worked, because every few days somebody came from the cod-liver-oil company and paid money to drain oil from the barrels and put it into little bottles so all across Canada kids could smell cod-liver-oil in the scarves their mothers pulled up over their noses for the trip to school on cold winter days. I do not remember anybody's mother drinking the oil that oozed from old cod livers in barrels on east coast docks, it was supposed to be so good for you.

My point is, cod-liver-oil on your breath while you are sucking wind through stale, wet wool is pretty bad but it is not a patch on sticking your nose over the edge of a dumpster filled with dead carp. Not a patch. Anyone who claims what does not kill you makes you stronger should spend five minutes retching into the gravel beside a dumpster bin filled with dead carp. Go to a gym, you want to get stronger, I recommend. The best a dumpster full of dead carp did for me was stimulate my curiosity. Who in hell would fill a dumpster with dead carp? I wanted to know, and what the driver of the truck come to take away the dumpster where I was doubled over heaving and drop another bucket to be filled up in its place, told me just as soon as he stopped laughing was; duck hunters. Duck hunters and our old friends the fishers, it turns out are responsible for filling dumpster bins with dead carp, though I doubt either would have been your first guess, they sure were not mine.

At one time, Coote's Paradise was also known as the Dundas Marsh. You may be surprised that the pleasant body of water that opens to the right as Highway 403 turns toward the west end of Hamilton could ever have been called a marsh, Burlington Bay, to the east, is and looks like a bay and there's no mistake about Lake Ontario, further to the east and separated from the bay by another highway, the Queen Elizabeth Way, with a grand bridge called the Burlington/Hamilton Skyway. Everything at that end of the bay is what it is and is called that, including the steel mills you can see from the bridge, belching and flaring below. Yet it is a thing about people that they always like to pretend things are otherwise from what they are, so
they cross that Skyway bridge and sneer down at the industry below like their cars are not made from steel and shoot smoke out the arse. Meanwhile, back at the other end of the bay, Coote’s Paradise looks more like an open, tree-lined Muskoka lake than a marsh, not a bull-rush in sight except maybe in the ditch at the side of the highway, and people generally liking the view. The truth is, though Coote’s Paradise is certainly pretty driving by at 120 kilometres per hour, calling it Paradise may be taking things a bit far.

I am not a totally uneducated observer of human nature, and I have been around long enough to note the odd trend. One is that people usually proclaim a fondness for muck, which it what marshes are, mostly. Shallow water with muck at the bottom and a lot of weeds on top triggers two compulsions in organized society: 1) to fill in the muck and put grass and buildings on it; 2) to dig up the muck and make the water deeper. When Coote’s Paradise actually was marsh, it always needed fixing. Back in the 1800’s, Desjardins cut a channel through Burlington Heights, the gravel bar that divides Burlington Bay from Coote’s Paradise, and he also had to trench the marsh all the way into Dundas just to bring barges up to the mill there, which in the long run did no good because as quick as Dundas folk could dredge through the marsh, people in Hamilton were filling in bits of the bay to make Hamilton Harbour, so industry went there instead.

With all of this environmental improvement going on from way back, it is only natural there should be the odd accident, which in Coote’s Paradise was carp.

Carp are not from around here. They stowed away in Europe, then jumped ship on this side. They may have done the same thing to get to Europe from Asia in the first place. Like many new immigrants, carp are not afraid to grab around to make ends meet. They eat peasant food, stuff left over that their so-called betters will not eat, which for the most part is weeds growing in the muck at the bottom of a marsh. They did so well eating weeds that pretty soon there were not enough plants in the Dundas Marsh for the native kinds of fish, which like to hide in the weeds hunting for smaller fish and frogs and such except the carp now grub the plants up before they can grow.

That is how we got such a nice Muskoka-lake view instead of a marsh view down here in the west end of Hamilton. Except the improvements the marsh got in the past were either an accident and everyone knows you have to fix accidents, or for industry which it is our good fortune not to need in the new information age because we have cars to drive out to the Dundas suburbs where there is no more industry and it is our further good fortune to have computers to run the industries left back in Hamilton Harbour, all of which makes it natural to start improving Coote’s Paradise again. The best way to improve the environment is to make it the way it was before people began improving the environment. That is only common sense. It is no good making things like the future, because who knows how the future will turn out? But we do know how things turned out in the past, and that was pretty good because it put us here now to improve things for the future. So the past is the way to go.

Duck-hunters and fisher-folk were all ready to recommend improvements to the environment in Coote’s Paradise. Since the ducks and fish went away they have had plenty of time to study up, and found that some of those plants the carp grub up were like Howard Johnsontos ducks and other fish. Get rid of the carp, bring back the plants and soon the old ducks and native fish will come back to Coote’s Paradise, duck-hunters and fisher-folk said and I will not be the one to say it isn’t so. This will be better because once it is done, duck-hunters won’t have to go all the way up north to kill ducks. Ditto for the fisher-folk.

Since The Royal Botanical Gardens owns most of the land around the marsh, they didn’t mind replanting the marsh because that’s what they do, being gardeners, and they also volunteered to get rid of the carp by making a fish weir. At first I thought a fish weir was some kind of typo but no, it turned out to be a steel net stretched across the mouth of the canal entrance into the marsh. Carp leave the marsh each fall for deeper water and come back in the spring to lay eggs and the good times that go with that. Their weir would keep those feisty, European carp out and leave the native fish their own little reserve in the marsh where they could be happy hunting all day, dancing and blowing bubbles all night. It is not strictly a new idea. The weir, in fact, is more than a fence, made from cement and steel decking and boxes and traps and who knows what all down below the water’s surface, so it should have worked.

Except some of those carp were particularly insistent about getting through the fence to lay their eggs and etceteras. Given the opportunity to roll in the mud for a summer of love, you and I have been known to get hepped-up too, whether it is in Paradise or some farmer’s field up-state New York. A few carp grubbed at the bottom of the fence and got underneath, clearing the way for others. Most were pushed up against the fence by the thousands coming along behind, like fans at a European soccer match. Hence the dumpersai loads of dead carp.

In case you didn’t think it, there is always another little wrinkle to constantly improving the environment.

“These fish have fed off the bottom of Burlington Bay all their lives,” the dumpster truck driver told me. “They’re full of heavy metals and ‘oxic chemicals. There’s laws. You can’t burn ‘em and you can’t dump ‘em.”

“So what do you do with them?” but he did not answer me that one.

It is generally agreed, in improving the environment circles, that if you are presently trying to make things better for the future it is wise not to disturb the past, even if the past is where you are heading for the future. Except it is hard to avoid the problems of past improvement to the future environment because there is only one environment, which is the one you have around you now, if you will recall the old joke. This is the part of improving the environment where those in the circles often go quiet, not wishing to dredge up the past.

Some people therefore conclude that the best way to improve the environment is to make people stop improving the environment, but this is where my axe starts to itch.

In the can of bean-with-bacon soup, there is not just the soup, a bit of bacon and one bean. There are a whole bunch of other beans, just like you and me, part of the environment, and they also would like to make things better, which makes improving the environment part of the environment. Of course, we could just get rid of all the beans, but what would we have then?

Bacon soup! Would you like to live in a can of bacon soup?

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Text/image by Giovanni StraDa Da (Italy)
Rampike Book Reviews

Rampike will endeavour to review as many books as possible sent to our editorial offices. We will also try to ensure that any books that are not reviewed will be mentioned periodically along with pertinent information including subject, genre, publisher, ISBN number, prices, etc.

Julia Kristeva: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources in French and English 1966-1996 edited and with commentary by Kathleen A. O’Grady. Review by Karl Jorgens ISBN 9-012623-68-2 c/o Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University: 1997, 110 pp. including commentary on Kristeva’s life and career, and offers aude and detailed reviews of each of Kristeva’s books. There is also a helpful subject index that provides instant cross-references. There are also some 30 years of sources systematically compiled in this text, including essential primary and secondary materials, Kristeva’s Curriculum Vitae, quick book references for French and English, Interviews, Books, Articles, Dissertations, Newspaper and Magazine articles and other Bibliographies. All of this material has been meticulously and painstakingly assembled in a refreshingly accessible and lucid format.

O’Grady’s Julia Kristeva: A Bibliography is indispensable, not only to aficionados of Kristeva’s writings, but also to those interested in related fields, including Bakhtinian and Lacanian theory, and especially feminist theory. O’Grady currently teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada), and is based at Trinity College, University of Cambridge (UK).

A Broken Bowl by Patrick Friesen. Review by Andrew Palic

Patrick Friesen’s A Broken Bowl is an extended poem, a long-poem about society in general, and life in a decaying world. This book deals with social disconnections from the “Natural Roots” or “Ground” of the world, and examines a sense of helpless frustration which leads to violence as an outlet. Verbal and visual images inter-connect scenes of violence which appear with regular frequency including in the form of televised news casts. Friesen’s long poem is written in easy style and offers a detached perspective that permits the reader to consider a longer, in-depth analysis of the violence affecting our society. A Broken Bowl illustrates, through verbal descriptions of human maliciousness, how violent acts erode the social and moral fabric of large urban centres. Friesen’s poetry indicates that this maliciousness will lead to fragmented destruction, loss of humanity, and ruination of the ecosystems which sustain life. The overall rupture is likened to a bowl when it breaks. In this long-poem, Friesen documents his private explorations and prolings into chaotic, violent and immoral urban cultures. He expresses little hope for salvation, and so, breaks with some earlier views of the Canadian long-poem forwarded by thinkers and writers such as Dorothy Livesay who suggested that the long poem, might serve as a vehicle through which we could imagine ourselves avoiding self-destruction (see; Open Letter magazine, Series 6, No’s 2 & 3). Perhaps the changes which occurred in the latter half of this century have negated the possibility of a more idealistic approach.

Friesen is an accomplished artist. The smoothness of movement between objects charted and named, often leaves the reader breathless in trying to keep up with barely perceptible imageries and linguistic shifts in this book. An alacrity of wit and perception conceives the variegated absurdities seen everyday in our world. This writing is often surprising and always intriguing. It is a work in which descriptions of all that is mundane, desolate, that is damaged in the everyday reader(s) from cover to cover. A Broken Bowl was a nominee for the 1997 Governor General’s Award. Patrick Friesen lives in Vancouver, B.C. writes for film, radio, television and theatre.

At First Light by Donald McGrath – Review by Dina Murphy

At First Light by Donald McGrath is the first book of poetry to come from this translator/art critic living currently in Montreal, Canada. These poems, haunting in their imagery and enthralling in adventure, are about McGrath’s childhood experiences growing up Catholic in Newfoundland. Ted Plantos wrote of McGrath, that his “comical, ironic turns of phrase and his real insight into the people and world of his youth combine to make a vibrant, lively local clime in Newfoundland. Ted Plantos wrote of McGrath, that his “comical, ironic turns of phrase and his real insight into the people and world of his youth combine to make a vibrant, lively local clime in Newfoundland. Ted Plantos wrote of McGrath, that his “comical, ironic turns of phrase and his real insight into the people and world of his youth combine to make a vibrant, lively local clime in Newfoundland. Ted Plantos wrote of McGrath, that his “comical, ironic turns of phrase and his real insight into the people and world of his youth combine to make a vibrant, lively local clime in Newfoundland. Ted Plantos wrote of McGrath, that his “comical, ironic turns of phrase and his real insight into the people and world of his youth combine to make a vibrant, lively local clime in Newfoundland.

McGrath has captured the eyes and primal feelings of a child, without losing that youthful promptness in his adult voice. The East Coast of Canada has not been seen before in this light.

Virgin Territory, Betsy Struthers – Review by Kelly Buske

Betsy Struthers’ Virgin Territory is an engaging collection that will be of interest to anyone. These poems offer insight into the deepest emotional bonds and tensions within different family units. Her perspective of human emotion is both sensitive and erotic. The rhythmic flow of language and the network of imagery allow for an intimate and sometimes vivid expression of the author’s ideas. These are poems of frustration and passion, youth and mortality, as well as suffocation and freedom. It is easy to agree with Stephen Scobie’s assessment in The Toronto Star that “there is a major poetic voice here”. Betsy Struthers resides in Peterborough Ontario where she works as a freelance editor while at the same time serving as president of The League of Canadian Poets.

Dipped In Shadow by Claire Harris – Review by Rolland Nadjiwon
Goose Lane Editions, Fredericton, NB, Canada E3B 1E5, ISBN 0-84892-166-1, 93 pages, $12.95

Dipped In Shadow is a powerful and moving collection of five long prose poems by Canadian poet Claire Harris. Her poetry is a revealing exploration of physical and sexual abuse particularity against women and children. They weave a disturbing picture of the many physical and psychological forms of violence society has invented and allowed, through silence, to continue. These five works of Claire Harris constitute a moving appeal to stop the futile and violent destruction of human life. Much of Claire Harris’ published work over the past twenty years, such as, In Drawing Down A Daughter, the 1993 Governor General’s Award for poetry, has explored the role of black women in North American society. Dipped In Shadow, extends that exploration to a universal statement about violence which transcends both race and gender. Consistent with that universal theme, in her third poem “This Fierce Body”, Harris, without hesitancy, leads her readers through images of a young man with AIDS. He will be the best of you point. With graphic lines like “...your skin bubbles /wells / we shatter” she portrays for readers the process of how men or women move painfully into a genderless death through AIDS where “dying becomes a long dispute with life”. Harris opens Dipped In Shadow with the hard hitting “O what are you thinking my sisters” It is a powerful prose poem which draws women, and all those who will, through their historical and fundamental fear for their survival, and the survival of their children. This fear is very real in a world which has traditionally named both women and children the lesser and the weaker. In “Night Dances” and “Sister (Your Manchild),” Harris tells with disturbing clarity, stories of physical and sexual abuse. Here she breaks with the paradigm of genderless suffering and tells women that the cruellest men are their children. This can be read not so much as a statement about men but a statement of responsibility... who can make the violence stop? We are all here together and a manchild is not born cruell.

The Man with the Dancing Monkey by Barbara Mulcahy – Review by Susanne Myers

Barbara Mulcahy was born of American parents in Port-Of-Spain, Trinidad, and grew up in India, Greece, the USA, and Israel. Mulcahy’s publishing credits include publication in 200% Crackled Wheat, blue buffalo, The Antigonish Review, Dandelion, Event, Grain, Quarry, Other Voices, The New West Review, and Poetry Canada Review. The Man with the Dancing Monkey, offers modernist hard clear images and mysterious and transcendent symbols along with patterns of objects, actions and events that effectively awaken an emotional response. Mulcahy also incorporates traditional beliefs into her poetry. The supernatural northern Alberta ravens created by Mulcahy “can both enjoy the world/end live in it.” The finely crafted “Raven Meditations” take us beyond the world of the human to a place where earth and body meet, and offer a defiant look past the notion of the finality of death, past the scattering of tooth, hair, and bone into the permanent darkness, and the unfaltering shelter of earth and body meet, and offer a defiant look past the notion of the finality of death, past the scattering of tooth, hair, and bone into the permanent darkness, and the unfaltering shelter of

Linda Waybrant’s Poem contest in 1995. Waybrant’s writing is accurately labelled as “fresh and compelling, her

Linda Waybrant’s The Colour of Flight – Review by Kelly Harrison
Wolsak and Wynn, Post Office Box 316, Don Mills, Ont., Canada M3C 2S7 ISBN: 0-919897-50-9, 90pp

Linda Waybrant is a Toronto poet who also teaches high school. The Colour of Flight is Waybrant’s first book of poetry, although many of these poems have previously been published in periodicals, and seven poems from the "Father" section won Prairie Fire’s Long Poem Contest in 1995. Waybrant’s writing is accurately labelled as “fresh and compelling, her imagery persuasive, and her voice convincing.” Many of her poems are intensely personal (dealing with family issues and unrequited love/dark and with topics such as death and abuse), yet these are rendered in an inspired and liberated manner. This is a collection of snapshots that continuously change in perspective and follow the flow of the poet’s thoughts, suggesting emotional and physical movement and emphasizing process rather than product. The Colour of Flight is a promising introduction to Waybrant’s poetry.
Gayla Reid *To Be There With You* — Review by Mary Guide

*To Be There With You* is the debut collection of short stories by Gayla Reid. Previous awards for Reid's stories include the 1994 CBC Radio/Saturday Night Literary Competition, the 1999 Journey Prize and a National Magazine Award. Reid currently resides in Vancouver, but it is clear in many of her short stories that she has kept her native land of Australia dear to her heart. Reid's retrospective approach and lucid style create a charming and realistic atmosphere for the sometimes nostalgic and sometimes painful memoirs of the various narrators. Love, loss, friendship, passion and desire abound in each frank and earnest reflection. The spatio-temporal leaps differentiate the stories, but are almost rhythmically, juxtaposed with variability, from Canada to Australia to Asia. Reid also makes bold transitions from female to male narrators seem sometimes nostalgic and sometimes effortless. This evocative and intriguing collection is suitable for anyone wanting an escape from the ordinary into a world of unrestricted imagination.

A *Canella* by Anne McKay — Review by Carrie Mathewson
CACANADADADA PRESS 3350 West 21st Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6S 1G7, ISBN: 0-921870-24-8 121 pp. $10.95

Anne McKay's *A Canella* is a collection of both selected and new poems. McKay was born in Ottawa, and now resides in Vancouver, British Columbia. She has been the recipient of many awards including the Japanese Museum of Hakai Literature Award (1989), and the New York Merit Book Award (1989 & 1991). McKay elegantly manipulates long and short Hiku. She does this through colour and light. In "sometimes in a certain light 1985," she describes the night, "Like moths we danced into the moon's white light... into the moon's white light."
The white light evokes a harmonious relationship uniting notions of purity and spirituality. McKay reinforces spiritual notions with references to symbols such as doves or the sabbath. In "a woman of passage 1989," the narrator describes herself as a dove, "Arrows pointed...my wing the right one/the white one/pinned to the olive branch." McKay speaks to all of the senses and an awareness of the tactile emerges in lines such as, "Careful you may tear your finger/the texture of my name," and, "slips sly/on the tongue/it is the 'e'/that hooks/ when touched." These poems deal with all that is natural and include references to trees, flowers, and the green of life. McKay's linguistic play links signs in nature with images of life. "In 'shaping the need 1991,' she writes of connections between molluscs and language, "Closed clear complex/content...so open/taleless fingers."

Anne McKay's *A Canella* offers spectrums of colour mixed with language play, and sensory responses.

The *Seventh Circle* by Benet Davetian — Review by Lou Viola

Benet Davetian's *The Seventh Circle* is a collection of short stories dealing with emotional hierarchical and death told in the spirit of Dante Alighieri's *Purgatorio*. Davetian, a Canadian writer based in Montreal, draws on a wealth of experience gained while travelling in Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the United States. He has received various communication awards and fellowships including the Telegraph's "Care" Award for his collection of short stories as essays on culture and literature. These stories travel through war and famine, and offer observations people and events such as a Serb sniper in the forbidden zone, outbursts of anger between a couple of mixed ethnic origins, the chaotic drama of the "Quranization" of the Islamic world, and the uprooted encouter of a woman with the Russian government. These stories are touched with a sense of the human and the spiritual and feature accounts of situations that are often bizarre and sometimes uncanny; an immigrant confined to a Paris airport for six years after having his papers of verification stolen, the sale of babies for profit, or, a Hutu ordered by the Rwandan government to massacre his Tutsi family. Using human experiences as individual signifiers, Davetian presents events as road-signs in this broad journey. Social displacements, re-unions with long-lost relatives, encounters with hostile governments, all serve to portray a world of hellish experience that is too often overlooked by mass media but is examined in informative detail here.

Courting Saskatchewan by David Carpenter — Review by Michelle Mistimins

David Carpenter's *Courting Saskatchewan* is an exploration of seasonal rituals that make a place a home. For Carpenter, abandoning Saskatchewan in the dead of winter is not a worthy option. Admittedly it is hard to enjoy the short, cold days of winter, but his solution for coping is to hold Saskatchewanian feasts and rituals in celebration of events such as the Winter Solstice or the building of a snowman (Dene word for a house of snow). His prescription for any of the seasonal "blaa" is to participate in a meaningful ritual that is also somehow significant to the region. Each season is brought to life with rituals that have become familiar after twenty years of living in the province. Carpenter's seasonal rituals coupled with life-changing moments, elucidate his reason for calling Saskatchewan his home. Every season has its own rituals from the mating dance of the sharp-tailed grouse in spring, to fly fishing in the Cypress Hills in summer, to goose hunting in the fall. The opening section features a winter feast, and Carpenter includes regional recipes presented by guests who have come to celebrate. Like the prairie, this book opens up in a manner that echoes Bakhtin's notions on the novel as ever-expanding form.

Courting Saskatchewan is rich with poetry, recipes, vignettes, journal entries and quotations from history and art. All of these innovations add to the thickness of the book and give the reader a sumptuous experience of Saskatchewan through Carpenter's captivating poetic language. This is more than a novel about one person's love for his home province. Anyone who has moved away from their birth-place will appreciate the feeling of making a new place a home.

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