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EDITORIAL: Rampike Heteroglossias

In memory of Henri Chopin 1922-2008
Since the 1950’s, Henri Chopin developed poésie sonore through multi-layered audio works dubbed “vocal micro-particles” and “buccal instances.” He published the review Cinquième Saison, devoted to sound poetry (1958 to 1961), and Review OU (1964 to 1972) featuring concrete poetry, art manifestos, and a range of expressions by major electro-acoustic artists of the time including Brion Gysin, Bernard Heidsieck, Raoul Hausmann, François Dufrêne, Paul de Vree, Bob Cobbing, Ladislav Novak, Hugh Davis, Sten Hanson, Bengt Emil Johnson, Jacques Bekaert, J.A. de Silva, William Burroughs, Åke Hodell, and Charles Amirkhanian. Chopin’s investigations into audio-tape recording liberated and developed the frontiers of 20th century sound poetry. For an introductory background, see: Henri Chopin, les 9 saintes-phonies: a retrospective (Amsterdam: Staalplaat STCD 070/Korm Plastics KP 4694, 1994). Compilation curated by John Hudak, and containing an interview of Chopin by Hudak in 1990, with essays on Chopin by Hugh Davies.

In this issue of Rampike we investigate heteroglossias and various open texts. Included here are visuals and graphics combining text and image, selected drafts, transliterate, redacted, translated, and transnational texts. Gracing our cover we have the art work of Natalie Mayville (Canadian). Her work was recently featured at the Art Gallery of Windsor in a one-woman show titled “Painted Surfaces” (Dec. 2, 2007 to Jan. 20, 2008). Working with large-format wooden panels using mixed media, Mayville combines latex and oil paint, sometimes collaging portions of text and other materials, into multi-layered abstract compositions that generate palimpsests of a poetry in decay. In this issue we feature the writing of Daphne Marlatt who’s newest remarkable book The Given will be released later this year (M & S). We also feature an interview with David French, one of Canada’s most celebrated playwrights. In addition we present a variety of vocal textures including Erin Moure’s translation of the writing of María do Cebreiro, cross-cultural textualities from theorist/writer Stan Fogal, neo-Surrealist textual pieces by Norman Lock and Stan Rogal, new fiction by Rosemary Nixon, and book reviews by blogster rob mclennan, as well as literary aficionado, Fausto Bedoya. We include a play by Armand Garnet Ruffo, while new poetic forms are explored by Gerry Shikatani, Chris Dewdney, Brian Henderson, Anne Compton and Katerina Fretwell, among many others. Visual texts supplied by Miguel Jimeniz, Gary Barwin and Carol Stetser add another layer to this glossolalia. Sit back and listen. These multiple tongues generate manifold sounds, a dialogical plurality of voices, acoustic waves, licking the ears.

Karl E. Jirgens [Publisher/Editor]
Excerpt from “late in the day”
Final movement of The Given
[Forthcoming from McClelland & Stewart in March 2008]
by Daphne Marlatt

you forget – what is it you forget?
not deliberately. contours of memory-landscape, significant features of its stories, shift with the years, eroded by changing weather systems. so home. so the more and more homeless, now that it’s late in the day. darkness surrounds us with the heavy machinery of increasing rain. if sleep calls, it’s to shelter your face in the pillow of a brief respite from the news.
i hear your familiar sounds in the bathroom getting ready for bed. the tap running – you brushing your teeth. long pause – you’re reading something. there’s the flush. soon you will pad into our darkened room, slide into your side of the bed, and i will turn over to greet your kiss, its gentle, persistent question.

we? at its farthest ebb.

in the still of almost evening, something to burn for those who have left, who go on burning in us. tsa sur. brimming bowls and incense. water and light.

it was July – no rain, no flooding streets. the brilliance of this city basking in blue infinity over our heads, mountains hunkered down in hot rock-slow time as if they knew nothing of shift. traffic streams. radio reaches. plush, all plush we think, until the body blinks, taking mountains, air and traffic with it.

don’t go without saying goodbye. it’s not about Ps and Qs or even the simple social need to recognize connection. a hole in the day sudden departure leaves.

we were cleaning our brushes under the running tap when i asked why do you think they want to punish you? she worked at the bristles for a minute longer, working out specks of blue latex. because i’m still here. what do you mean? (what does mean mean?) just wait, she said, just be glad you don’t know.
in the home country a daughter sings in her untried wisdom, wanting to know:
*Things, a bird skimming across a window, were a sort of writing on a wall.*

disaster fears. dis-astre.
up against the stars and their foregone orbits. conclusive.

... *this heavy, leaden body... whatever became of the indefatigable, birdlike body that had been hers...?*

snow underfoot late in earth’s day and unseasonably early. mauve clouds dusking deeper over the rooflines sun has dropped below. as we approach the end of the park, a couple separates from behind a pine tree. he stoops to chuck the dog’s soft ear and strides off, leaving her to avoid our eyes, fingers nervous at her tight jeans.

at the other end of the park, a massive snowball hulks alone at the bottom of its green path down a slope. someone’s stuck a twiggy branch on top and dangled a silver pencil flashlight from it – Xmas mockery? a public greeting with what’s to hand?

if home represents what is dear to us...

such soft pink light is hard to read by. glancing away from the tea she had just sipped, that amused half-mocking smile with its embarrassed edge when she declared they were out to get her hid a dare under the flyaway hair, soft sag of cheek, the look that slid off truth, posing it there: can’t you see what’s under your nose?

home truth. *domestic; opp. to foreign*
the lay of the city, memory setting the distance straight if we can call it up at all under the lie of hoardings hiding cavern-holes in the ground mammoth equipment slopes down, (vacancy), dozers, dump trucks, crane erections towering – memory deconstructed so that we end up asking, well, what used to be here?

couldn’t talk about her body in its presence. couldn’t talk about the softness of her hair on the pillow, lashes stuck to her cheek, eyes dead asleep. couldn’t talk about it wrapped in her private cocoon, so we stepped into the hall and stood between the doorways to their separate bedrooms.

should we call the morgue?

what morgue? where?

maybe we should call the police.

dying in your sleep isn’t a crime.

but we don’t know . . .

maybe we should call a funeral parlour.

he came out then from the kitchen. you’ll have to call her doctor.

her doctor? what can a doctor do?

he has to sign the death certificate.

public words at last to break it open.

you are gradually speaking less and less of elsewhere. that sharp pang of the place you didn’t want to leave is fading. the you i know stretches its recognition network into these streets, their ghosts and echoes. amazed at how the wintry ribbing of mammoth chestnut trees on the corner has canopied out from an early photograph where those same trees stood small by a picket fence outside the carefully-carpentered house that Harris built and Zitko took over, turning what had been a stable into a bakery. house and bakery long since levelled, along with the rest of the block, to make a park to replace another park levelled and built into anonymous low-cost housing.

close up. as if a blanket and jacket sodden for nights now in the rain and left on a log between still-standing trees might hold the transient shape of one who took shelter there.

the mother sings in her silence: learn to read, my daughter, read the signs as you sit in the endless waiting room.

* The above text is from The Given by Daphne Marlatt. Available in bookstores Saturday March 22, 2008. Published by McClelland and Stewart Ltd. Reprinted by permission.
TWO POEMS
by María do Cebreiro,
Translated by Erín Mouré
from the Galician of The Hemispheres
(Os Hemisferios, Vigo: Galaxia, 2006)

FEVER
It alters bodies.
It’s grave.
It shuts out what it knows.
Dances on the surface.
Calculates itself in the fissures.
Doesn’t think.
Sometimes it endures.

THE POEM
It’s stillborn. Not born.
We’re incompatible.

Don’t judge me till later.
Don’t think otherwise.
Don’t lie. Don’t end.
REACHING THE UNIVERSAL THROUGH THE PARTICULAR

An Interview with David French
by Marissa Reaume

Rampike magazine is honoured to include this interview with David French, one of Canada’s most popular and critically-acclaimed playwrights. Among his best works are the semi-autobiographical Mercer plays: Salt-Water Moon, 1949, Leaving Home, Soldier’s Heart, and Of the Fields, Lately. Leaving Home was named one of Canada’s 100 Most Influential Books (Literary Review of Canada) and one of the 1,000 Most Essential Plays in the English Language (Oxford Dictionary of Theatre). A recent revival of Leaving Home by Toronto’s Soulpepper Theatre played to sold-out houses and was nominated for five Dora Mavor Moore Awards. The Mercer plays have received hundreds of productions across North America, including a Broadway production of Of the Fields, Lately. This quintet of plays about a Newfoundland family has also been seen by audiences in Europe, South America and Australia. Among French’s other works are the smash-hit backstage comedy, Jitters, the pool-hall drama One Crack Out, the memory play That Summer, as well as translations of Chekhov’s The Seagull and Strindberg’s Miss Julie. His work has received many major awards. In 1989, he was inducted into the Newfoundland Arts Hall of Honour, and in 2001 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada. French is serving as the Writer-in-Residence at the University of Windsor for 2007-2008. His play Jitters will be produced by the School of Dramatic Art, University of Windsor (Feb. 7-10, and Feb. 13-17, 2008: Directed by Brian Taylor). For a list of David French’s recent productions, please see the appendix at the end of this interview.
**MR:** When you were in Grade 8, you read *Tom Sawyer* and decided you wanted to become a writer. How did this particular story spark your interest in writing?

**DF:** I think it was the first book I read in which I identified completely with the protagonist. I was Tom. I understood him. I’d done comparable things and felt exactly the way he did…It shocked and excited me that a writer could write a story about me a hundred years before I was born.

**MR:** *Jitters* is your first all-out comedy. How did you come to write it?

**DF:** It was 1977, just before rehearsals were to start at the Tarragon Theatre for my translation of *The Seagull*, directed by Bill Glassco…Bill and I went to New York to see some plays. One of the plays we saw on that trip was David Mamet’s *A Life In The Theatre*, a two-character play. It was at the Theatre De Lys down on Christopher Street in the Village…When we left the theatre that day, we walked up the street, not speaking. Finally, Bill said, “Well, what did you think?” I said, “I didn’t care for it.” He said, “Neither did I.” He said, “You know what? You could write a better play about the theatre than that.” I said, “You think so?” He said, “Sure.” Bill was like that. Always encouraging. He had so much faith in me that I never wanted to let him down. Often I’d do things that I wasn’t sure I could do. Like the translation of *The Seagull*…Anyway, I went back to Toronto and immediately began making notes for *Jitters*, which was inspired by what Bill and I went through putting on my first play, *Leaving Home*, at the Tarragon.

**MR:** Does your past acting career have any relation to the plot or storyline of *Jitters*?

**DF:** No. Only in the sense that my experience as an actor obviously helped to inform the play. My experience as a playwright did as well.

**MR:** Do you feel that *Jitters* is a realistic portrayal of the Canadian theatre community? And how do you create your characters?

**DF:** Absolutely. I hear it all the time: “All the things that go wrong in the play-within-the-play actually began to happen in our production of *Jitters*. Of course it’s a comedy so I exaggerate things. The playwright, Robert Ross, is not really me. It’s an exaggerated version of myself. I never freak out in productions the way Robert does. If there’s a problem, I talk to the director out of earshot of the actors. The portrait of Bill Glassco is exaggerated as well, though one critic claimed to understand Bill much better after seeing *Jitters*. Phil Mastorakis is based on my good friend George Sperdakos who died a few years ago. George was Phil. He played Phil in four different productions, including the two in New Haven and Costa Masa, California. Patrick Flanagan was based on two actors. The dark side of the character came from Sean Sullivan who played the father in the first two Mercer plays, *Leaving Home* and *Of the Fields, Lately*. And the rhythms of speech and sense of humour belong to Gerard Parks, an Irish actor who played Wiff Roach in the TV version of *Of the Fields, Lately*. Jessica Logan, of course, was based on Kate Reid, a wonderful Canadian actress. Kate never played the role, but she did play Mary Mercer in *Leaving Home* at the Vancouver Playhouse. She’d been to Broadway. Big star in the States. Tom is any one of a number of people I know, including myself. Nick, the stage manager, is an interesting case. Stage managers are
really not like Nick. But the stage manager Nick was exactly like that. He was a little dictator… Sometimes I’ll base a character on one specific person, base being the operative word. I also create characters who are composites of two or three people. And I put a lot of myself in each character, plus what I know about people from observation and experience. But ultimately, all the characters are the playwright. It doesn’t matter if you’re talking about an eighty year-old woman or a five year-old girl or a ten year-old boy or a fifty year-old man, they’re all the playwright.

**MR:** What do you do as Writer in Residence at the University of Windsor?

**DF:** I see people one on one and I try to help them in any way I can with whatever they happen to bring in. Sometimes they simply want to talk about a problem they’re having with a particular piece…That’s basically what I do.

**MR:** It seems as if Newfoundland, where you were born, and Toronto, where you live, inspire or appear in your writing? Might Windsor have the same effect?

**DF:** I don’t know…Right now I’m setting a play in Uxbridge, a place I’ve never been, though I’ll visit it soon. I wanted to set the play in a small town outside Toronto. Uxbridge seemed to fit the bill.

**MR:** You are currently working on a novel. Can you provide any information about this work in progress?

**DF:** The novel is a thriller. Set in a fictitious town on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. And bad things are happening there. *Scary things.*

**MR:** Do you feel that being located in Windsor will influence your current novel or play in any way?

**DF:** You’re influenced by everything you read and every person you meet and all the things you go through in life, day by day, including the places you live. Everything influences you.

**MR:** Does your new novel relate to any of your past works?

**DF:** Back in the eighties, I wrote a thriller for the stage. It was called *Silver Dagger.* But I’ve never written a novel in that genre. I’ve always wanted to, but I never have till now.

**MR:** *Leaving Home* was presented this year at Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto, wasn’t it?

**DF:** It opened in late April and ran until the middle of June. It sold out, which is why Soulpepper is starting its new season in January with *Salt-Water Moon.*

**MR:** Soulpepper Theatre is located in Toronto. *Leaving Home* is set in Toronto as well. Do you think that presenting the play in its actual setting enhanced the audience’s experience, or not?
DF: The Soulpepper production was simply a revival. The play was done originally in Toronto in 1972 at the Tarragon...Soulpepper was established ten years ago to do the classics. And for a time they did nothing but those kinds of plays. However, a few years ago they did a couple of American classics. And then this year the artistic director, Albert Schultz, decided it was time to do a Canadian classic, and he chose *Leaving Home*. That's how it happened.

MR: The goal of Soulpepper Theatre is to present the world's classics. What makes *Leaving Home* a classic?

DF: It seems like a question best suited to Albert Schultz, but I'll try to answer it. I think Albert chose the play because it still rings true to this day, thirty-five years after it was first produced. It still moves an audience to laughter and tears, and still packs a powerful emotional punch. And it deals with an immigrant family, and the problems of physical and spiritual dislocation that are universal and still very much with us today. Problems that transcend race and religion and sexual gender. The immigrant's story is the great story of the twentieth century...When I wrote the play, I intended only to write a play about one specific family, my own. I had no idea it would resonate the way it did...I remember when it was done off Broadway at the Theatre of the Riverside Church, up near Harlem. The director said to me one day, “The most amazing thing is happening. Black families from Harlem are coming to see the play two or three times. They told me they identify with the characters. They're going through the same things coming from the South to New York City as the Newfoundlanders were going through in Toronto.”

MR: So, basically, anyone can relate to your characters?

DF: Absolutely. That’s my point. They really are universal. The way to get the universal, of course, is through the particular. And the way to get the abstract is through the concrete.

**Appendix – Recent productions featuring plays by David French:**

*Soldier's Heart* – reACT Theatre Ensemble, Vancouver, BC. Oct. 30 - Nov. 11/07.

*That Summer* – Stone Circle Theatre, Ajax, ON. Nov. 1-17/07.

*Of The Fields, Lately*– Lady Smith’s Little Theatre, Ladysmith, BC. Nov. 21- Dec 8/07.


*Salt-Water Moon* – Soulpepper Theatre, Toronto, ON. Jan. 7-31/08.


*Jitters* – Surrey Little Theatre, Surrey, BC. Jan. 24- Feb. 23/08.

*Jitters* – University of Windsor, Windsor, ON. Feb 7-17/08.

*Silver Dagger*– Lakeshore Players, John Rennie Theatre, Pointe Claire-Dorval, QC.

   Apr. 30- May 10/08.

*Salt-Water Moon* – Rural Root Theatre Company, Fitzroy Harbour, ON. May/08.

*Salt-Water Moon* – Osterhout- Henry Hall, Mt. Tabor, ON. July 16-27/08.
“Words and Things Have Drifted” Textual Image by Carol Stetser (USA)
(For an Impossible Attempt) Textual Image by Carol Stetser (USA)
From PIECES FOR SMALL ORCHESTRA
by Norman Lock

9.

For Andrea
How is it the hotel is without an astronomer? we say – one to another – beneath
the ballroom ceiling, whose elaborate chandeliers remind us of Lamaître's, which
are said to be rushing, with us, through the universe. Surely, if we are to be a
dying civilization’s ark, we must have an Astronomer to enchant us with the
radiant beauties on our way, such as the Pleiades, who count among their
lineage Night and the titans who rule the outer seas! Our hopes for the Municipal
Engineer, whose planetary obsessions were nurtured assiduously by the hotel
barman, have come to naught because of his addiction to gin slings and Victor
Herbert operettas. He sleeps now, his cheek resting on the wet rings imprinted
by his glass – his head filled, perhaps, with cosmic dust and dreams of Naples
and naughty Marietta. My God! we cry, beating the air with our fists. We are
hurting into a japanned jar! Wakened by our lamentation, the orchestra ceases
a serenade whose principle theme is the heart in winter. It has stirred in me
yearning for summy loves (pitiable in the ice-cold pockets of space!), scarcely
realized – intent as I am on questions of travel and astronomy. I call for an
anchovy sandwich (love and anchovies joined in my mind by an obscure
equation of desire). This is not the time! the Prime Minister, in his striped
trousers, rebukes me. This is not the time for small fish! Sullenly, I fold a
railroad timetable into a diminutive steam-locomotive. Charming! the General
declares – a perfect evocation of the Steam Age, in which I reached maturity. A
sudden ragged blush betrays an amorous memory. The orchestra troops noisily
into the casino to play baccarat. The Prime Minister admonishes us, thus: If we
are not careful of digression, we'll lose ourselves among the unpredictable
trajectories of a French curve! I adore French curves! says the General slyly, so
that even the Prime Minister laughs. The dumbwaiter door creaks open, and an
Astronomer is delivered into our very midst! We know him at once by his
telescope. I have been visiting the moon, he tells us. I measured its luminosity
and fed it sugar-cubes. It sits in the trolley-barn with its light turned low and
moos. I do not think it is happy. (The moon is held hostage by the enemies of
poetry and love.) We beg him to stay with us and be the hotel Astronomer. He
agrees but must – he says – rest a while before taking up his duties howsoever
light. A room on the top floor is quickly prepared, and the Astronomer lies down
and begins to recite the history of his losses, which are also, somehow, ours: a
comet seen one evening when he was young; a planet beyond Pluto, known only
to himself; stars swum off long ago beyond the reach of even the telescopes of
nostalgia; an old love, named – no, he cannot say her name. Her hair, though,
was the color of anthracite, India ink, black pearls, night.
10.
While enamored still of night, the Astronomer no longer cares for the sky and its shining stenographs, preferring the hotel's fifth cellar, which is kept dark for reasons known to the Sommelier, if not to us. There are edible roots to be considered, says the Agronomist, such as the turnip and potato whose eyes, like those of children with measles, must not be exposed to light. But his opinions are radical, and we send him to count aphids on the potted palms. Let us banish the Astronomer to the streets! the Prime Minister fulminates. The General tickles my ear with his cavalry moustache as he whispers the story of the P. M.'s latest folly — this, with the Chambermaid, who spurned him. To be made an object of derision by young women infuriates him always, but he is helpless against their enchantments. We give him money for the Soubrette, who will allay his injury with comic songs. The Astronomer ought, at least, to be impeached, the General affirms when the elevator cage has closed on the Prime Minister. We allowed him sanctuary so that he might score the grand recessinals of space. Instead he spends all his time underground with the Hydrologist. Good God! — says the General, putting his hand on his hilt — you don't suppose they are in love? I answer that the Hydrologist is faithful to his obsession. Which is? To discover an underground lake like that beneath the Paris Opera House, where the Phantom rowed his boat. The General draws his sword and reminisces: I saw Christine Daë the night of her triumphant debut. I was a young lieutenant of horse at the time. Gad! I was smitten! (Time is a rubber band.) And in homage to his youth, he cuts a sash cord with a single magisterial swash. The window falls, a dirty pane shivers into light. Look there! the General exclaims, pointing to a wheel of phosphor. A new galaxy! I shall name it after me as is my right. He preens myopically in the lobby mirror. I shall be Astronomer as well as General! He asks for my admiration, and I give it to him gladly, although his galaxy is a clock atop a warehouse roof — half its numbers cold as space itself through which we, inside our hotel of illusion, drift. We must drink to it, he says. And do.
11.

For Kathryn
The anemometer, which operated by means of belts a bellows organ, has been dismantled. Weather, as a phenomenon outside the hotel and its influence, has been abolished. To be exact, our interest in it, once paramount, is no more. The organ, however, will be missed, now that the orchestra’s recalcitrance has made a hash of our musical evenings. We must have music if for no other reason than to fence in time, which last week was dismissed as superfluous. Anarchy succeeds tyranny always; and we who fled the thralldom of the Absolute approve the succession with our minds, though our hearts may yearn for clocks and snow and the ironed precision of a military band. The General fears we may have gone too far; but he is enamored of weather, having fought in winter during the Russian campaign. The Meteorologist is aggrieved. You’ve made of my life a Zero! His unseemly shout causes the orchestra leader to raise his baton a moment before letting it fall, as does he fall also back to sleep. Weather is, for me – the Meteorologist asserts – a passion, a vocation, an infatuation. I will hang myself at once if it is not restored. To stay his hand, I hypnotize him with a fat gold watch. (Illegal, yes, but I am sentimentally attached to it by a fob.) The Prime Minister, euphoric after an afternoon with the Soubrette, inclines toward mercy: He may woo his weather inside the hotel – he says, tugging at a French cuff. How so? I ask. We shall allow him to introduce inclemency into the equable atmosphere of our hotel. A tropical depression – a sudden fall of millibars – will complement our otherwise obstreperous condition. Chaos, gentlemen, a soupçon of instability will be tonic and may – who knows? – wake the orchestra. We cheer his good sense and elect him – by acclamation – to another term. (All but the General, who is dreaming of vodka and the Russian Saber Dance.) The Fireman lights an Abdullah; and tricked by its smoky blue arabesques, the sprinklers in the ballroom ceiling rain. O! This is more like it! exclames the Meteorologist, dripping wet. I shall get my pluviometer and issue bulletins on the hour! Ecstatic, he skips away to his weather station – all thought of grievance put away in his heart’s drawer. The Hat-Check goes about the ballroom distributing black umbrellas. There stirs in every one of us a moist sensation akin to love for the old earth and the life – no longer possible for us – outside the hotel. Under his ministerial brolly, the P. M. exults: The orchestra is awake! The musicians have indeed taken up their instruments and stagger, in the rain, into a funeral march. Our eyes shed rain of their own; but we are not downcast, knowing that the weather of the heart is variable and absurd. And tomorrow may not the orchestra delight us with a samba so that I may hold again in my arms the Funambulist and dance?
Moustache stiff with macaroon, the General spirits the Chanteuse down the cellar stairs, as if delivering her from the gallows. He is no more in step than Clauswitz with modern military science, yet it pleases her how his sword rattles on the floor when he dances the *mazurka*. His breath is pepperminted, his boots shine, his epaulets quake in expectation of her kisses, which are almost always chaste. He has promised her, if not the moon, a lunar simulacrum, until he can work out to the last detail a brilliant strategy for lifting the siege laid to the actual moon (with a *divertissement* supplied by the musicians, if they will only, all of them, wake). Where the Astronomer is – he declares – there must inevitably be astronomy! He draws her dreaming after him down flights of ringing metal steps into the fifth basement where the black lake is. He longs to take her in still puissant arms and press, with strength of ardor, her lissome body raptly to his decorated heart. (For displays of parade-ground equitation, valor against the Hun, for protocol on clay court and lawn, for shuttlecock diplomacy and the severity of his trousers’ creases.) But where – the General wonders – is the Astronomer? Gone, answers the Engineer, who is winding a clockwork swan. Where gone? Beneath the black lake. How gone? In a submarine belonging to Jules Verne, replies the Engineer, nesting the swan among a wedge of his mechanized kind. (The feathers are real! – a gift of the Taxidermist, whose heart and blood are warm.) What is this place? the General asks. A pleasure park, a tryst and rendezvous for lovers. You are the first. The General blushes, but in the darkness who is there to see it? Look! exclaims the Chanteuse. Stars! Stars, indeed, are trembling on the surface of the lake (or so it seems). The General is delighted: I expected a moon – tin painted with radium, hung from a wire. Such a thing as that would have been enough to make my Chanteuse sing. But stars – how can stars be where there is no sky? Reflections of the glittering mica and the shining schist, explains the Geologist, who with a little hammer was hiding in a seam of rock. Geology is also beautiful, though our eyes are focused mostly on the ground. A gondolier sings a *barcarole* in the dark. The Chanteuse swoons into the General’s arms – overcome by emotion, the engine by which all things move inside our hotel. Song at an end, the gondola drifts among *arpeggios* of silence, disturbing a mineral galaxy, which might have entranced Orpheus during his infernal hunt for Eurydice.
Unnecessarily (and unfortunately) there is a Hooters in Caracas where even the store mannequins appear to have undergone cosmetic surgery. If Hugo Chavez, Venezuela’s president, is to succeed in his radical transformation of the country’s body politic, perhaps he should consider adding breast implants to the list of accepted procedures in the universal health care plan he is implementing. Accessible medical treatment is one of the Chavez’s ambitious major goals; before he assumed leadership of his country only a small percentage of Venezuelans had health insurance. Other recent progressive policies that have been implemented and which have possibly been overlooked in sensationalistic media accounts of his time in office include paternity leave and a higher minimum wage. No doubt unimpressed by this are the grumpy rich who have probably already packed away their silicon and who will, regardless, continue packing for Miami to join the equally irritable Cuban exile community in place there these last forty-plus years. Ads swamp the Caracas dailies pandering to this migratory urge by offering Florida properties for sale in bolivars, the currently inflating Venezuelan currency.

In one sense, though, Caracas retains all the ingredients of a chaotic Latin American city as yet unaltered by what Chavez and his supporters call the “revolucion bolivariana.” The nightmarish traffic is a symphony of horns and stasis; red lights, should gridlock momentarily cease, provide no compelling reason for drivers to slow down or brake. The abundant hawkers from the slums called ranchos peddle gum and what-not mainly to their own reflections in the tinted windows of the SUVs powered by Venezuela’s oil bonanza. Or, dirty and disheveled, they cadge containers of food from restaurateurs skittish about the repercussions of enforcing “no shirt, no shoes, no service” policies. There are 77 cell-phones for every 100 citizens of Caracas, all of which seem to be in use all of the time, so car and restaurant occupants probably don’t even notice the fleeting pleas and disruptions.

The violence here is significant (a travel guide to South America calling it “shocking”): one newspaper report after the long weekend stretch in July, which included the holiday celebrating Simon Bolivar’s birthday, estimated the murder total for the four day period at 80. The downtown district of Sabana Grande—think a pedestrian version of Yonge St., Toronto, with infinitely more athletic shoe outlets—is a no-go zone after dark, with gunshots often accompanying the drug and prostitution transactions that replace the shoe trade. In the various neighbourhoods where the monied live, Conrad Black’s dream of a minimum-security prison materializes, with guards, gates and barbed-wire eliminating hoi polloi’s visiting privileges.

The difference, though, between Caracas and other Latin American cities of a certain reputation, and what makes the city fascinating, is the contentious socialist-capitalist battle playing out on the streets and in the media. A few days after the Bolivar holiday, I happened upon a demonstration of perhaps fifty people in the relatively upscale district of Altamira. They were yelling and clanging their support for RCTV, the now infamous television station that supported the abortive 2002 coup against Chavez. (RCTV, at the time, refused to broadcast Chavez’s return to office, instead choosing to televise doctored images of chavistas purportedly shooting unarmed coup supporters.) The next day “El Universal,” one of Caracas’ leading dailies, prominently featured the
protest by the smallish group—one of whom happened to be a Cuban friend of mine mistakenly caught up in the crowd who compensated for the error by chanting (softly) “Fidel, seguro, a los yanquis dale duro [Fidel, for sure, you'll give it to those Americans].” A little earlier that day along the same avenue, far more people turned up for a triumphal cortege feting a woman who had just then graduated with a degree in orthodontics. Despite the promise of many dazzling Miss Venezuela smiles capping upholstered bodies, this event failed to make it onto the Society page, a vestige of the old order and still one of “El Universal’s” staples.

The new order, however, elbows its way onto the pages of “El Universal” and other papers with full-page government-sponsored ads dominated by splashes of red and featuring the slogan which boldly proclaims “Construyendo el Socialismo Bolivariano.” In fact, facing the article reporting the pro-RCTV gathering was a glowing announcement celebrating the opening of a new emergency ward in a city hospital. Also, unapologetically and forcefully, on his weekly interactive television show “Alo Presidente” and on every other occasion he speaks in public, Chavez enunciates in clear anti-capitalist terms the society he and his political party are determined to construct. It is not a coincidence that this recently conceived party, PSUV [Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela] appropriated a name and initials reminiscent of PURS [Partido Unido de la Revolucion Socialista], the pre-communist party Fidel Castro formed in the early 1960s to provide an organizational framework for, as well as propel, his vision and ideology.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cuba, not Bolivar, is the most potent signifier in Venezuela these days, galvanizing and polarizing the citizenry. On July 26, Cuba’s (not Venezuela’s) national holiday, Chavez went on the air to announce the launch of one of the many socialist co-operatives springing up throughout the country. Invoking Fidel in his speech, he stressed the linkage and continuity stretching from Bolivar, the symbol of South American independence movements, to Jose Marti, the father of Cuban nationalism, to Fidel...and was not dismissive of someone in the audience shouting that he, Chavez, was the inheritor of that mantle. “Viva Fidel” and “Viva la Revolucion Cubana” were part of his peroration.

Indeed, the Cuban influence in Venezuela is as pronounced as the Venezuelan presence in Cuba. Rick Mercer, in one of his comedic tours de force, may have longed wittily for the magical kingdom of Canuba surrounding the imperial power reduced by him to a hole in a donut; however, Venuba is much more of a reality. A number of hotels in Havana are now hospices for Venezuelans in need of urgent—and free—medical care. A few months ago I went to one of my favourite Havana hotel bars and thought I’d wandered into a convention of cast-wearers, only to be told of the hotel’s transformation and ordered out. Cuban doctors, nurses and teachers, not to mention a friend of mine who is a baseball coach, have had extended tours in all parts of Venezuela. The medical staff, one can be sure, have as their priority operations that involve, say, removing cataracts instead of padding B-cups.

Non-governmental Venezuelan media seem especially traumatized by the Cuban influx. To cite one example: after a poor performance by Venezuelan athletes at the recent Pan-American Games in Brazil, soul-searching at “El Universal” went so far as to blame Chavez. “El presidente es responsable directo de la crisis deportiva del pais [The president is directly responsible for the sports crisis in the country].” Why? It is because he brought in Cuban trainers to prepare Venezuela’s athletes and boost its medal count. That Cuba, with said coaches, produced outstanding results was not factored into the columnist’s rant. Another example: a column on one of “El Universal’s” editorial pages entitled “Viva Fidel!” extolled the qualities of a principled leader, one committed to
democracy and human rights. Of course, the Fidel lauded was not Castro. Playing on
the bourgeois reader’s horror (not to mention that of the 30-40 percent who, polls say,
don’t support Chavez), the article’s punch-line touted...Fidel Ramos of the Philippines:
“Entre los fideles, evidentemente me quedo con el Filipino [Between the Fidels, the
faithful, I’m obviously with Ramos].” There is a Thrilla in Manila who, according to the
writer, would not cause the ruckus in Caracas. Fidel Castro is, in other words, the
bogeyman to those Venezuelans (by no means a majority) who are antipathetic to
Chavez. To those same people Chavez is not only Castro’s stand-in, but he is also a
caricature, manufactured with the aid of one-note mainstream American media. (Who
can forget U.S. correspondents during the Afghanistan war frequently introducing the
phrase “loya jirga” or tribal council into the skimpy vocabulary that accompanied the
coverage of that war.) He may occasionally quote Gramsci (whom he evidently reads)
during “Alo Presidente”; regardless, Chavez is reduced by unsympathetic journalists to
the right’s version of the left’s George W. Bush.

Overlooked in the obsessive concern with Chavez are the many inspired people
called up in and working to fulfill the “revolucion bolivariana.” Theirs is not an attempt to
install a dictator, rather it is to reform Venezuelan society in order to minimize the
disastrous gap between rich and poor. My vantage point from which to observe their
efforts and commitment to the revolution has been, curiously enough, as a member of a
Cuban delegation participating in “mision cultura,” a Venezuelan Ministry of Culture
project. Operating from within the bowels of the Biblioteca Nacional, this mission has as
its mandate to transform the way culture is framed, produced and delivered. Mainly
young, energetic and leftist, its members have, among other projects, produced a
“Curso Basico Para Aspirantes A Militantes,” a basic course on 2 cds that educates
those who wish to commit to and spread the revolution’s goals. Preceded by stirring
music, the lectures cover topics such as socialism, anti-capitalist economics,
sustainability and the politics of identity, especially as they impinge on people of colour
and the indigenous, those who haven’t benefited from the revenues produced by the oil
boom. Jose Guariguata, himself from the Caribe peoples, delivers the talk on
Amerindians wearing a native-styled shirt with “mision cultura” embroidered at the
throat. A former student of Jesuit missionaries who claims his village’s shaman cured
him of cancer after he returned home to die, Guariguata has spoken of the importance
of the indigenous being alerted to issues of nation rather than tribe, as well as to a
socialist perspective on these matters.

Under the aegis of the “mision cultura,” Instituto Superior de Arte, Cuba’s leading
university for the plastic and performing arts—as well as for interrogation of the
relationship between culture and society, has begun to formulate and offer postgraduate
degrees in Venezuela. (Being a professor at ISA and an honorary degree recipient from
there, I was permitted to join the committee overseeing the courses.) Because
Venezuelan universities, many of them private, have not embraced the goals of Chavez
and the PSUV, ISA has assumed a leading role here in the creation of the kind of non-
hierarchical, non-elitist higher education that Cuba is known for promulgating. The aim
is to create at the university level what Chavez has attempted with Telesur, the leftist
Latin American alternative to CNN he has bankrolled. While CNN en Espanol still
flaunts the White House as its dominant and repetitive icon, Telesur provides a
distinctive point-of-view, a strong cultural shift, instead of simply translating an
American-saturated world view which, it is clear from voting patterns in Bolivia and
Ecuador as well as Venezuela, many people resent.
THREE POEMS
by Jim Johnstone

Field Note – Passing through

The afternoon spreads out in fractals, blowflies devouring anything that doesn’t move. Passing through Apsley we’ve learned not to stop for long, pick at fuselage or clouds of sour air. Droning quietly, the heat’s a wasp’s kiss, stitched octaves of venom. You leave the passenger door open, haul hospital green bags out for the bears. Evidence even common cockroaches can lift ten times their own weight.

Spatial Recognition

\[ \psi(I) = \kappa I^\alpha \]

*Stevens’ Power Law*

Dog eared, water blinking, carp surface to a cluster of lead jigs – a closed volume of mortar and clay. There are birds in this land, the language of wings in summer, vowels of momentum. Moored, the inertia of your hand bears down on the lake, insists on love – the composite arc of touch. Surface tension is a coarse fingerprint, a congruent map. It’s been three years since you lay your ear to the bricks, shout an arrow pulled from your side, resonance quickening your accent to a bell. Stimulus and response. You tilt your head towards mine – see a length of ocean, the salt at my pores. Wedding ring on the wrong hand, you bend at the waist, laugh. Rocking forward our boat is unsettled, slices a discontinuous channel to the shore.

Field Note – Echocardiogram (ECG)

Arrhythmia, 4 syllables wrestling in the punchbowl of my chest. Swamp song, more tone than melody. Yesterday my heart a dependable telegraph, an old acquaintance. Now my knotted blood is delivered early, morning paper and bicycle spokes. Third floor, cardiology. Breath an analog recording, dubbed in. No more familiar than a brown bottle in brown paper – liquor freed in a sea of muscle.
Selected drafts from
mortar rake glove sausan broom basin sansui
Second Book, niwa
First drafted in Kyoto, Japan, 1996
by Gerry Shikatani

IMPERIAL palace, June 10

1. A place of stones.
a bridge to sever
each crossing, an
island is shortened
to distance. Orange & white
mottled the carp
swim to shore,
a bridge to sever side
to side tremors
heft,
object
of despair, a laver
this my leaving.

5. Track no mizu
bike across
gravel grip firm
on chrome feet against gravel handlebars steer
overcast morning.

mizu, water

6. What I know about haiku is zilch. So to
return yet again to aborted poems, light chained
blade of space, the “haiku” of Nisei. So much
I know little of the garden, the positioned
landscape, stones that in some one’s hands
carry us who think, not miss our steps, to leave
the world, our open umbrellas to above.
RYOAN-JI temple, June 10

12.
A text to cross-hatch
a line, the test
of strength of paucity
empty
basket

13.
Cross-hatched

birth, the suppleness
of bamboo, the tie
to strengthen no
duplicity lotus wet
   intermittent rain
leaves brushed raindrops
to shoulders, suddenly.

14.
School groups watch
garden of stone.
Stone garden what
a photo’s not read has flashed
wet upon stones
   haphazard difficult thoughts
this by how in rain
to wend - island is
stone, rake
around each red-eye thought
to forget. Ingression.

15.
Just above the frame of reference, view. Just
out of view, a wedding shower
an umbrella,
a family album
of tear-stained years.
KATSURA IMPERIAL villa, June 11

from KATSURA
Imperial villa*
The Footwear Stone at the entrance is just large enough to accommodate six pears of wooden shoes. It has been rounded just enough to allow the rain to flow off so it will remain dry, and it also has been placed slightly under the step above for ease in slipping back into one’s shoes as one leaves the building.


22. To view from one place a screen is opening, to sit, a place, the water, the next preserve, shelter to gigantesque of here, leaning, a direction.

This house roofed is if the boat’s bottom to ship out, a way, floating world of dreams.

23. From the former, from to continue...
a country house a garden house a field house house in these fields house over the water house over the house the entrance to field, the bound bamboo and shacks, the thatch-thought to continue, a standing thing, a thing standing, a house
to continue…

24.
how slow this
thought makes its way, a butterfinger,
cup, slip, clasp
tasks, how slow thresh
through words, the woodpile there, gain
a view how slow the thought plus thoughts
escape these this
ink-fed hands.

DAITOKU-JI,
Daisen-in

25. 25 25

26. (for shaunt basmajian)
a) ,
b) ,

33.
barely tipped but

34.
barely tipped but
camelia
barely tipped but
azalea.

35.
barely but

36.
no reminder:
shoe’s gravel.
inside eye.
TWO POEMS
by Brian Henderson

The Before

It is precisely in what remains
there speaks to us a language
of the perishing of things. And what is perishable
has always been placed on the outside
of the circle of meaning, on the outside
of the eternal, but the feather, the hollow
bone is the soul of flight.
Watch any vulture
tilting and rocking on a late September sea of wind.

I can do no more than this watching,
with a word, microscope,
spectacle of a word, I keep putting off
the idea of your not being here,
the interminable elusiveness of a life
now as paper-thin as your scalped skin,
the sutured list of operations
when one thing is becoming another
into which too much pain cannot be written.

Remember “Dig that lady with the crazy hat”
all around the sunny shores of Lake Superior?
Remember snow on your prize-winning dahlias?
Remember Dad shouting to us not to panic,
the lee rail running deep?
The boy you released in the dusk of a summer evening
from the prison of the neighbour’s garden shed?
(How did you know I was there?)
The yellowness of the evening grosbeaks
alight in the crab apple,
the September light pausing on the limit of summer,
passacaglia of light aloft in the pines
as if it were the experience of a single drop of darkness?
How to Free the Past for the Future

One light, six truths; two names
twelve months; one world, spilling
across this desk. An iris, five fingers;
the spun coins of 24 words.

What to do with all this wanting.
The long sear of caress that I will have
lived with so long, dropping its petals
(beyond count?) onto the surface of the water,
moaning with the body
wizened with its coming home
to forgone wisdom.

They say that time is dreamt
by the waking
to backfill the moment’s mine
of the infinite,
they say the mind after death
begins to dream
and that the dream seems a life
time long,
they say it is only time
that separates us,
its heartless beating
threaded shuttle weaving telling.
TWO POEMS
by Christopher Dewdney

Intention

Was it your intention
to move your hand just then,
to nod, to scratch, to look
at your watch?
Or was it a confabulation
a reassurance that
you had so moved yourself
after the fact? Certainly you can
test and retest, flexing fingers,
tightening your jaw, calmly,
voltarily. But attention recedes
and soon these willed thrusts, and more,
return to that unattended realm,
that place where the span of you,
is no more than coincidence,
a place against all odds
where you had moved your hand,
as if you actually had.
The End Of This

She wanted what the wind knew, the rushing sweep, the whistling insurrection of branch and rock.

Moonlight interprets the waves, she said, not the water. Our love was a landslide of darkness with no wheel to bend us. And besides

she said, lovers are like astronomers, who cast their nets into the stars, as the wind knows only how to move the waves, not to stop them.

She had abandoned our lust, she denied even our decline, the gradual end of us, as if it were an abstraction in the history of a single glance.

If I could have swayed her then, I would have, but I could not pierce her, the wind pouring from her eyes was haunted, and her heartless gaze remote, like waves on a deserted beach.

And beyond this end, invisibly, she reached her glass hands into my heart, and with the wind, with what the wind knew, she pulled, scattered what was left into the ocean.
HISTORY
by Stan Rogal

A man – late fifties, Caucasian, round build, five feet ten or eleven inches tall, balding, loose skinned, ruddy-cheeked with a large purplish nose, obviously used to the good life; the tasty life: rare steaks, creamy sauces, single malt scotches, fine wines, rich coffees, crème brulées…likely prone to indigestion, heartburn, clad in pale grey suit with white shirt, turquoise tie, black shoes – had stood at relaxed attention, hands clasped behind his back, rocking slightly on his heels a few short seconds before politely making his presence known by raising a hand to his mouth and gently clearing his throat.

What was it this time, he wondered?
Mr. President.
The President dropped his pencil, gathered his papers in a neat pile, flipped them face down on the desktop. There was a full tumbler of amber liquid next to his elbow and a half-finished bottle of Wild Turkey next to the tumbler.

Yes, he said.
You called for me.
I called for you. He hesitated. Yes. Bill. He pointed a finger; said the name as if seeking verification. Bill, can you keep a secret?
The President had always seemed surprisingly spry to Bill, overly for a president, to his mind, figuring a person in the highest office should be a tad more on the hold-back-&-consider-the-situation side, like: am I an open target? a sitting duck? is my fly undone? food on my chin? not already out of the chair and around the desk, one arm cradled behind Bill’s waist, the other nested on his shoulder, his lips at the man’s ear.

I could’ve been anyone, thought Bill. Anyone at all. Though I’m not.
I am your Chief of Security, answered Bill.
Wrong response, said the President. Not the question. Not even close. No. I repeat, can you keep a secret?
Yes, Mr. President. Of course.
Good. I knew that. Just checking. Let me ask you something else. The President eyeballed the room; drew Bill in tight. Which nation does the world despise most?
Why, the United States of America.
Exactly. And which world leader is most despised?
That would be you, Mr. President.
Right again. And even in my own country, the world is 100% divided straight down the middle, neither pro nor con, either for me or against me, and yet, there are those undecided few who are loyal just the same. You see my point. Something must be done. It’s not enough to take no prisoners anymore, we must also bury the survivors.

Bill nodded. He clearly didn’t see the point, but he knew there was no use arguing when the old man was buzzed on bourbon. He turned his head a soupçon from the reek.
There is an election in the wings. Not center stage. Not today, not tomorrow, not fer chrissakes next week, not yesterday. Not yesterday, for damn sure. If it was yesterday it’d be over and done and that would be the end of it. I wouldn’t have to concern myself. I would be your President, which I am, anyway, and no denying, despite the vote. No,
in the wings; sometime in the future. Still, close enough that if it is to be, then it will, and nothing to be done except prepare for the worst. The readiness is all, Bill.

*The readiness is all, thought Bill. What the hell?*

Face it, my popularity, if it ever existed, which I doubt, is at an all-time low. No matter I have them waging good old-fashioned, solid American, CNN-type war on sundry fronts, with more in the offing, they are not appeased. No matter I have said repeatedly, no President wants to be a war President, but I am one, and that the only way we can win is to leave before the job is done, I am attacked from all sides. What more can I offer? Blood, it appears, is no longer thicker than flood waters and the dykes have broken. Time to slam the goddamn barn doors shut so the horses have nowhere to return. You understand what I’m saying. Where’s my drink?

Bill pointed to the desk. The President deftly subtracted from the man’s waist and repositioned himself in the chair, near his highball.

Phenomenal, thought, Bill. Almost athletic. He considered the fact that the President had played a bit of football in his time; perhaps even chased down a dogie or two on horseback, which may account. Still, a certain expectation and only so much Bill could do in his position. He considered that partnership offer from an old college buddy to get out of the rat race, resign his loose association with so-called political life, forsake the city to run a chicken ranch somewhere in Colorado: maybe be neighbours with Neil Young – BBQs with the wife and kids over a few beers and a campfire, singing: “Sweet home Alabama...” or: “After the Gold Rush...” Not that he knew anything about chicken ranching. Then again, how hard could it be? They were only chickens for Pete’s sake, not soused-out politicians bent on world domination, *buk, buk.*

Are you OK, Mr. President?

Tip-top, said the President, and banged back his drink. Join me? Bill shook his head, no. The president filled his tumbler. You’re a bit of a tight-ass, aren’t you Bill? Or are you? “This is your rifle, this is your gun,” he sang. “One is for killing the other for fun.” And never the twain shall meet, is that it? Huh? No matter. I’ve been thinking.

That was never a good sign. Why couldn’t he be content attending celebrity golf matches or photo op luncheons with pop stars or getting his knob polished regularly by a young intern like previous Presidents; get off the pot and allow the real powers to do the job of running the country. Save everyone a lot of grief. How long until retirement? Ah, well. Bill spotted a thumbed copy of “Hamlet” pushed to one corner of the desk. From the First Lady, no doubt. Would she never learn? *If it be now, Bill recalled, ‘tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all.* Of course, now it makes sense. Sort of.

The President pressed forward.

Time is of the essence, my friend. I feel it out of joint, as well as in. These are dark days and no denying. I mean, how put food in the children when yesterday’s funeral meats are laid out in the marriage bed? It’s father against son and brother against brother and every man for himself. The rats are boarding the ship and even mothers cry uncle chasing tail between the sheets. Oh, the horror, the horror. Something must needs be done; something big; something so unexpected, so behind the curtain that everyone will see it coming; something that will upset the imbalanced and enable me to slip in through the back door unimpeached.

Bill never once blinked through this; never fazed. ‘Something must needs be done’? his mind echoed. Goddamn Shakespeare. Goddamn.

You have a plan, Mr. President?

I have a plan. I also have a date and a place – November 22, Dallas Texas.
The Kennedy hit, said Bill.
Bingo! said the President, who tapped his nose with a fingertip while topping up his glass with his free hand.
And what, exactly, did you have in mind?
The President raised his eyebrows. History, he grinned, repeats itself. Twice.
I’m not entirely sure I follow.
The President was absolutely gleeful.
You’re aware of the similarities between the Kennedy assassination and that of Lincoln.
Vaguely. Mostly conjecture, coincidence, urban myth sorts of things, yes?
True. And yet, the stuff of dreams; the stuff of which Americans hold near and dear; the stuff of which powers election votes. Forget platforms, forget policies, Americans want mystery, they want drama, they want grand illusion made real.

He was positively rabid with his own cleverness. Meanwhile, Bill concentrated on an image of snow-white chickens, thousands of them, pecking the ground gratefully at kernels of golden corn which Bill distributed to them by hand from a wooden bucket; scene of peaceful mountains in the backdrop.

We know that 92% of Americans believe in God, 85% believe in heaven, 82% believe in miracles, 65% believe in the devil, 50% in ghosts, 25% in witches…it goes on. As well, over 60% believe in aliens from outer space, alien contact with humans and human abduction by aliens, though few have ever witnessed or experienced these phenomena personally…someone who knew someone who had a relative who heard it from a friend…, yes? 6% of separation rule. More. Stop me if I’m boring you, preaching to the convicted and so on.

No, go on. I’m interested, Bill lied.

Add to this the 20 year curse, or zero factor as it’s also known, where a President has died while in office: Harrison in 1840, Lincoln in 1860, Garfield in 1880, McKinley 1900, Harding 1920, Roosevelt 1940, Kennedy 1960… Reagan survived an assassin’s bullet in 1981 – close but no cigar – bringing us to the present and yours truly. The President smacked his chest. I’m primed.

The old man had definitely gone bonkers. Bill flashed to a William Carlos Williams’ poem: the chickens were rapidly increasing in appeal, whether stood beside the red wheelbarrow glazed in rainwater or not.

For an assassination?
For an attempted assassination plot. We set it up. We follow the Kennedy script and do the tie in with Lincoln. A play within a play within a play. The twist is, the bullet misses, and, within this mythical framework, I become an icon, almost a god. My popularity soars. No one tries to kill the President of the United States of America – not in this country, at any rate – for whatever reason, whether good or bad, friend or foe. The President swirled his drink, very pleased. It’s brilliant. What do you think?

Remind me, said Bill, the further connections; you and the other Presidents, so I have it straight in my mind.

The President was only too happy. He began: Lincoln was elected to Congress in 1846, Kennedy in 1946, I was born in 1946.

A stretch, but, OK.
The names Lincoln and Kennedy both contain seven letters. Bill gestures with a finger. The President interrupts. Uh-uh…what name am I commonly known by? George W. Do the math. Bill nods, almost impressed. At this point, we toss in the little known goodie that during college, I was a member of an obscure society known as
“Skull and Bones”. Our secret number was 322, celebrating the year of the death’s of Demosthenes and Aristotle. Notice that the individual numbers total seven. We leak to the media that Kennedy and Lincoln were once part of this society, however loosely. They’ll eat it up. Both Presidents were directly concerned with Civil Rights. I consider myself among this company, though from a somewhat opposite disadvantage. Lincoln had a secretary named Kennedy who told him not to go to the theatre. Kennedy had a secretary named Lincoln who told him not to go to Dallas.

Is this true? asked Bill. The secretaries?

There’s some skepticism and little proof. It doesn’t matter. As a piece of the greater scheme and attached as it is to the whole, it’s as good as true. Maybe more so. In any event, I’ve recently hired a secretary by name of Sarah Rose Johnston: ‘Rose’ obviously the first name of Kennedy’s mother, ‘Sarah’ being the first name of Lincoln’s stepmother, full name ‘Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln’. Let the press boys wade through that nasty kettle of fish.

Bill was past questioning at this point. The old man was on a roll and no stopping him. He wondered if it was too late to take up the offer of a drink? He watched the President take another hit, then splash more into a second tumbler.

I can’t say I hate to drink alone. In fact, I most often prefer it. On the other hand… He hoisted the glass to Bill, who didn’t hesitate. Fine, fine. I’m enjoying this.

The image of a simple life among clucking chickens was fast dissolving behind a screen of smoke, mirrors and general bullshit.

Lincoln was shot in the Ford theatre, Kennedy was shot in a Ford Lincoln. I’ll be shot at while riding in a Ford Lincoln driven by a man named Abraham Kennedy. Nice touch, huh? John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln in a theatre and fled to a warehouse. Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy from a warehouse and fled to a theatre. Both assassins were known by three names, all of which were comprised of fifteen letters. Both men were killed before being brought to trial. Theories abounded in each case that the assassinations were part of a larger conspiracy.

So far, so good, said Bill. I’ve got the picture in terms of the connections. How do you propose to carry it out? It would involve a whole hell of a lot of people.

It’s as I’ve frequently said more than once in the past: one has a stronger hand when there’s more people playing your cards. I believe this.

The President shot a foggy wink at Bill, who stood, unsure as how to respond. The phrase had made no sense to him previously and it made less sense to him now.

Duly noted, he said.

The main thing – keep it as complicated as possible. No shooting fish in a barrel. Not unless they’re red herrings, get me? The more loose ends, the better. Operation Velcro.

I think you mean Teflon.

What did I say?

Never mind. The President had achieved lift-off and Bill understood there was little time to gather more information before the old man plummeted into la-la-land. How do you see the operation played out?

Glad you asked. As we speak, Dealey Plaza is under reconstruction to return it to its original November 22, 1963 form. Coincidence? I think not. So, we set up an event: a commemoration; a memorial. But first, we do Houston, Rice University Stadium, fly to Fort Worth, stay at the Texas Hotel for a steak dinner, proceed to Dallas Love Airport, exactly as Kennedy did. The pieces of the puzzle fall into place, plank, plank, plank.
Everyone will make the connection. Imagine the anticipation. America will be holding its breath.

The President used his glass to represent the Lincoln.

The idea is to motorcade straight down Main Street to the Trade Mart; avoid Elm Street and the Book Depository Building altogether. Security up the wahzoo. Snipers in every tree, armed guards on the running boards, plainclothes police milling about. The top is down on the Lincoln and we wave to the crowd. The President fluttered his fingers. At the last moment, a problem up ahead wired through the chauffeur’s headset and detour along the fated route.

The glass veers right then left, Houston to Elm, across the desk.

Ohmygod, ohmygod! Everyone’s a’buzz. We slow down to allow for this shift in detail. Chaos ensues as security forces attempt to catch up and get into place even as the crowd of spectators jockey for position, cameras and cell phones poised at the ready. We round the corner, creep forward. Suddenly, shots ring out from the sixth floor Book Depository – **POW! POW!** What the? How could this happen? How could someone have known? They couldn’t, unless...unless...there’s something rotten in the state of Texas. Conspiracy, conspiracy! Could it be Iraq? Iran? Those North Korean bastards? Or an inside job? A coup? CIA? FBI? Mafia? The Skull and Bones society?

The President makes the sound of gunfire through his teeth.

A guard is hit! Another guard! A Governor takes a bullet in the chest as he throws himself in front of me and the First Lady. Weapons are drawn. Bodies scatter, either ducking for cover or speeding toward the Book Depository Building.

The President sniffed his glass and sucked back the bourbon. He smacked his lips. The shooter – three aliases comprised of fifteen letters each – takes it on the lam. He leaves behind an Italian-made 1938 Mannlicher-Carcano 6.5mm rifle with empty casings on the floor. Photos will be discovered later of him in his backyard holding this same rifle. Shades of Lee Harvey Oswald! Next – and this is the best part, you’re gonna love it – he flees to the Cattleman’s Steakhouse, a restaurant which hosts a Murder Mystery dinner theatre, and, guess what?

Bill can’t guess. The chickens have taken wing; they’ve been co-opted; they’ve been bought out by a nameless multinational conglomerate; they’ve been abducted by aliens. Wasn’t it true that Colorado claimed more UFO sightings than anywhere else on Earth? He shook his head.

The play they’re doing is about the assassination of the President of the United States, “The Murder of Bonzo”. Sweet, or what?

The President squeezed the last drops into the tumbler.

Uh-huh. Then what?

Then all hell breaks loose. The shooter gets captured, later shot and killed by some patriotic American chalk full of loyalty and stomach cancer. The Lone Assassin Theory gets played off with the Grassy Knoll Theory as hundreds of upright folks swear they saw puffs of smoke rise from a dozen different places while thousands of innocent Zapruder’s with Mickey Mouse cameras catch twenty-six seconds of misdirected bullet action. In the final analysis, a trail of blood as witnesses turn up dead, either by accident, suicide or so-called ‘natural causes’. It takes years to go through it all and no one ever comes up with any concrete answers, one way or another.

You’ve done your homework, Mr. President. Tell me, if you don’t mind, where did you dig up all this information?

Google.
Goddamn Google, thought Bill. Proof positive that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Especially in the wrong hands.

Can I assume that you want me to carry this out?

That’s the beauty of it, Bill. There’s nothing to carry out. It’s already done. It’s done and over with. The media have had their fill. The courts are up to here. It’s been talked to tears. It’s been written up in the schoolbooks. Children have studied it; they’ve memorized the facts and figures. People remember where they were the time it happened. They tell their children and their children’s children. It’s been imprinted on their brains. Scholarly papers have been written; PhDs gained; tenure granted. There’ve been documentaries shot, movies produced, awards given. It’s been taught at all levels; taught to death. People are sick of it. They’ve moved on. It’s a dead issue; a gone deal. Been there, done that, bought the T-shirt. It sits in five thousand thick volumes on the sixth floor of the Book Depository Museum. It’s history, bud.

Then…?

Just fill in the blanks – people, places, things.

I’m not sure how easy it will be to find that many constituents willing to die over an election ploy.

Not willing to die – already dead. Send me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, your wretched refuse, your homeless and tempest-tossed…sound familiar? There’re out there all right. Waiting. And those you can’t reach with patriotism, offer bribes – million dollar insurance policies with reputable companies back-dated just waiting for a name to be inscribed. There are many desperate souls out there who would be more than ready to drive head-long into another vehicle if only they could provide their loved ones with a brighter present and a more secure future, Bill.

I understand. Bill turned to leave, then paused. Oh, one other little thing…what happens if someone twigs onto the beauty of the scheme, you know, wants to be a major player in this grand, mythic History and decides to do you in for real?

Now, Bill, a person would have to be plumb crazy to try to do this for real, right? Right.

Good. You’ve got about six months. Plenty of time. The President pulled another bottle of Wild turkey from a desk drawer. Remember, the readiness is all.

Again with the “Hamlet” quote. Goddamn “Hamlet”. It was giving him a pain in the gut. What Bill clearly recollected about “Hamlet” is that it ended in a bloodbath, and no altering that foregone conclusion. He thought once more about those chickens, the story that, if you draw a chalk line on the chopping block and lay the bird’s head down, the thing would remain fixated on the line, its neck stretched, almost begging for the axe to drop. Bill lifted a hand to his throat and tugged at the collar.

And Bill…

Mr. President?

Remember – you can’t make an omelet with soft-boiled eggs. You gotta be hard.

The President gave the screw cap a twist: Crack!

Yes, Mr. President. I’ll remember that.

Good. And remember me to the wife.

I will. Bill vacated the office and reached into a pocket for some Tums.

Remember me, he muttered. Remember me. Remember me. Remember me.

The voice trailed.
TWO POEMS
by Anne Compton

Plutonic

Cumbered with clothes, blood puddled, we succumb again
to the great leveller’s lecture: *The temperature drops on rich and poor,*
*numbs the pretty and the plain.* An oxymoronic brightness in his glance
though we know there’s more to it than rotation. Some sport of his devising.
We’re tipped away from glory. A tease. Could be, one day, he’ll leave us there
on the far side of kindliness if that’s what you call love so exothermic.
Our warm-weather bodies – elastic frayed – will slip from us.
An outerwear gone in its fastenings. Fleece down to its lining:
A cheap satin that’ll do as sailcloth as we aviate the dark between planets.

The Waiting Well

*John 4:5-42*

A lone woman at a well draws water for a traveller.
They’re both outsiders, which means the book of phrases is abbreviated. Codes mostly.
She knows he knows what she is: The solitary have a history big as a tent that sleeps a
half-dozen.
Serial wife, or whatever, she’s shunned by the others, what’d be called kinsmen in good
times.
Even her apron shows wear, but she’s there – dipper to well – the right time, right place.

*And how often does that happen? Haven’t you always had it second-hand?*

Drink of another sort is what he offers.
From a water table deeper than man drills. Not the usual hydraulics. Simpler.
You must climb down, your life cupped in your hands. Belief’s the absence of rope –
call it commonsense – but don’t call for it halfway down. It’ll be on a level you’re not.

Not even an apron to keep the dirt off. That’s the whole idea.
To understand water – *this water* – you have to take on the properties of what it’s been
through:
Volcanic pumice – abrasive and purgatorial – gives it the tincture of fire.
Strata where three elements become one another, and then air. Believable air.

This is the story of the well. Don’t go there. Do what I do. Go back to the tent
and catechize the man asleep on the couch about love. How long and how much?
TWO POEMS
by Barry Butson

Eighteen Slices of Bread

My family is a mean one
Dining with a sister and her husband
last night, I noticed he was missing a tooth

Later in the meal, he asked her for money
She nagged, but forked out a few bucks
On the way home, he stopped at Canadian Tire

for glue to re-fasten the tooth to his denture
Ordinarily she allows him no pocket cash, so he was luckier than usual this time

They own a car, though she can’t drive it
and won’t let him except to chauffeur her
so he walks around town doing errands

carrying plastic bags full of groceries
and such – at age 80 – while the car rusts
in their driveway and she listens to CFRB

People offer him rides he turns down
for fear of what she’d say, like last night
at the restaurant when he took two slices

of bread from the basket and too many
scoops of sugar for his coffee
He is thin as a peasant, and dying, but she still only grants

him 18 slices of bread a week and 18
spoonsful of sugar
Oh no, they have money
He earned it, some time ago

Swimming Against

All flows over the Falls
except my libido
which treads water
like a bird with legs of an ostrich
and a duck’s webbing
I think of my father at my age

and cannot imagine him still horny,
though how would I know if he was?

Women approach me now as a mentor
or grandpa; I defile them in my mind

My sperm swims the Niagara gorge,
laughs at the Whirlpool rapids, heads straight
for the Maid of the Mist
I’m a little tired of my cock
and all this water, but

“No, no,” says the Captain
“Be grateful for each stroke”
The caretaker’s name is Norm or Norman or in Cuba they call him Normando. He’s tanned black and always wears a tank-top and shorts, with his hair slicked back. On the lobby wall there is a photograph of him with a beret and an early thirties moustache. He is banned from the states because he used to be a member of the Mine Mill Union. Every time we rent the hall, he charges us less, trusts us with more keys.

He used to take twenty suitcases of clothes to Cuba and there was a place at the airport where you could donate clothes and they would make sure that the people got them. He heard that the clothes mostly went to tourist towns and that the people in the back country didn’t get anything, but the important thing is that his clothes are in Cuba.

Norm grins pointing to the little room at the top of the stairs
“Got some bras up there”
Norm takes a few stairs in shorts
and chicken legs
“Half the women in cuba wearing my bras”

He bandito.
No return passage.
Part of united workers, once.

He got red shirt.
He wear slow walk.
Up stairs long, again and again.

I says, Don’t you a walk them stairs so much.
He say, Oh yeah.

He keep walk up stairs.
He bandito.
Goin’ all way to Cuba.

I like talking to Norm
who looks at me blankly
and when I’m done he continues to stare blankly at me
finally says
“Oh yeah”.

The summer when blueberries were twelve bucks a basket, he picked one hundred and thirty baskets and made fourteen hundred bucks. His wife used to help him pick, now she can’t. She didn’t believe him about the bears and then she saw one and after that she stayed close to him. He scrubs the hall floors while she cleans the washrooms, he figures she’ll get them cleaner.

This one woman was always asking him where the best blueberries were and she would never show him where the best cranberries were so one day he took her to the blueberries and the next day she was there with a van-load of her friends and they picked all his blueberries but she wouldn’t show him where the cranberries were and now when they ask him where the blueberries are he says LOST MOUNTAIN.
“Travel some long.
Do got done.
Caretaker.

All I really want . . .

Travel some long.
Got hall just right.
Where want I got.

All I really want . . .

Do got done.
Caretaker.
Travel some long.

All I really want . . .”

He had polyps (like mushrooms) in his nose, he couldn’t breathe when he ate and the food went into his lungs. He gets the polyps cut out about every twenty years. He has asthma from the mines and he used to smoke but he quit in the fifties.

Norm says I don’t know how to smoke because he used to smoke but stopped when he got the asthma (from the mines you know) but when he smoked he let the sulphur burn off the match before lighting the cigarette and I wasn’t doing that so that’s how Norm knows I don’t smoke

I offer my hand as he’s about to leave, his right hand in his pocket with the keys so he shakes with his left. Says he lost the nail on his middle finger when he worked in the mines and lost the end of the same finger in his snow-blower. They could have sewed it back on, it was still in the finger of his glove, but he didn’t stop to look for it, just drove himself straight to the hospital.

Norm doesn’t like my ideas
his ideas always come later
and sound a lot like mine
but to Norm they make more sense

Norm didn’t like my couch in the basement
(I suggested he should give it away) but
he didn’t like it THERE and wanted it GONE
so we carried it out put it next to the trash bin
then
Norm said it was a nice couch and decided he should give it away

One day his supervisor Red was giving him hell for mucking with his hands, so Normando threw his shovel down a chute. Red was always giving the miners hell. So one day they threw Red down a chute.

Don’t like to make Norm mad
he always gets that look
stomping around and muttering about some
guy named Mad Dog
who bent his panel back
when he had clearly labelled it “Do not bend back”

*  
He has been the Ukrainian hall caretaker for three years and before that he was the recording secretary and before that he was the financial secretary for the Mine Mill Union and he kept the minutes in a bound book with every page numbered so you’d know if anybody tore a page out, they’re a point of pride for him, they’d stand up in court. He doesn’t respect the way they keep minutes now, on loose pages, a different secretary every time. When he was recording secretary he would be in charge of getting signatures from the president, and the president had an office where he never went, Normando knew this because on the office table he left some cheques and a note that said please sign these cheques, and a week later the cheques were unsigned, and he left a larger note that said sign these cheques, and when they were still unsigned a few weeks later, he left a huge sign that said SIGN SOME FUCKING CHEQUES. And the next day they were signed.  
*  
He hold card we give.  
He hold it long.

Say it most to him of emotion.  
We so happy see happy Normando.  
Though he hardly could wait, rip posters down and such,  
get whole bloody lot of us out door.  
He expect wedding party. Soon.

Reservation.  
He hold it long.  
*  
He points to his photograph on the wall, shows me that the thumbtack goes through his heart, says he thinks he knows who did it. Says the Ukrainians are against him. He took a photo of the photo, and he’s going to pass it around at the next meeting.  
*  
“One time in ’46 got banned from the States  
was in a union and there was that whole McCarthy thing  
got my picture at the border  
they’d probably still recognize me  
one time in the 60’s snuck back across after I wrote a letter saying I was coming but they didn’t catch me  
it was the shortcut  
you know  
to go through the States  
but I was banned and they knew my face ‘cause they had that picture of me at the border haven’t been back since”  
*  
He was born in Saskatchewan, and when he was a couple of years younger than me, he came to Ontario because he’d heard the hockey was good. In those days, it was easy to get on the train but hard to get off because the police would be waiting at the stations to throw you back on. He and his friend rode near the coal car because it was warmer, and they were black with smoke by the time they got to Ontario, where the hockey wasn’t so good, but where, if he lied about his age, there was work in the mines.

*Editor’s note: The “Castro Picasso Quartet” consists of Matthew Heiti, Warren Heiti and Scott McDougall.*
TWO REDACTED POEMS
by Holly Anderson

Winter Redacted
From a hemlock tree
from ‘Dust of Snow’
(1923)
by Robert Frost

Freezing bed
cloud room
our breath
makes weather.

Bare, blue

shiver start
touched tint
blossom blush.
Paint limbs
honeyed salt
candy mouth
stuck fast.

Tossed blankets
icy rains
scribed bird
grey wash.

Summer Redacted
In summer the song sings itself
from ‘The Botticellian Trees’
(1934)
by William Carlos Williams

Drifts of
vinca stars

wrestle down
upend her.
High meadow
lime green
cloudy roses
run along

their flanks
their bellies.
Language sleeps

low slung.
Crows trees
rising wind
drag it.

Cirrus shadows
flit dark
numb mouth
flashing speechless
sun plated.

Flaccid face
uncut field
cloud whites
uncut summer.
Lazy damp
flying blue.
What Can You Had A Level
you level seems the bee
had a level. it that as a an egg
said head in the high north
covered with a dilly of snow

dreams

its body

flickering

mouthless

a

burning wall

the fragile wig between

this life and the next
Standing in the hallway of a Victorian house, I place my hand on the wooden banister of a narrow winding staircase. The banister is suspended by spindles carved with Chinese dragons intricately entwined. As I slowly ascend the stairs the air becomes thick with bees. Each bee wears a pair of miniature World War One fighter pilot goggles. The bees are talking to each other over radios. The squawking of their high-pitched voices and the buzzing of their wings is deafening. They begin to assemble mid-flight into various holding patterns. The patterns are letters of the alphabet. The bees are trying to spell out a message for me but they are slow, confused. By the time they’ve formed a letter I’ve forgotten the letter that went before it. I reach the top of the stairs and look at the ceiling. Just below it, tiny storm clouds are forming. The bees are all gone save one that preens itself on a fan-shaped stained-glass window. A loud rumble from the little clouds shakes the house. Then it begins to rain. Raindrops so small they feel like mist on my hands and face.
“Degenerate Myopia: After Oedipus, Samson and Tiresias” by Mike Freeman
MAGGIE AN EXCERPT FROM A NOVEL: I See You (ICU) by Rosemary Nixon

Foothills Neonatal ICU breathes story. Stories weave the isolettes, the suction machines, heart monitors, the oxygen tubes, the heaving ventilators. They cling to the hems of nursing uniforms and ride the lapels of doctor’s lab coats. They smell, these stories, these angry prayers.

Maggie holds Sophia on her lap, an intravenous needle stuck in the baby’s head. Yellow bruises crisscross the shaved scalp where intravenous needles went interstitial. Even needles fail her baby. When Maggie was a child, farm boys caught frogs, cut off their legs, and let them go. The frenetic gyrate of legs, the bulging eyes. Stop it! I hate you! Maggie crying. The boys laughing. Just being boys.

Sophia fights like that when the nurses suction her. Her fists punch out, head wheels from side to side. Maggie conserves strength for those suction episodes - twelve, fifteen times a day. A tube inserted up Sophia’s nose, tiny mouth open in a gag, push farther, farther, Sophia’s frog legs jerking, a nurse hauling tubing like a hose snaked down a drain hole. White green gunk sucking up the hose, spastic limbs, her baby’s face a caricature of anguish. Maggie sobbing. The nurses step around her, doing their job.

Doctor Summers enters. One of the boys. The head nurse is also one of the boys. This is an old boys’ club and Maggie has crashed it. Nobody likes her here. Nobody likes her baby. She asks permission to bathe Sophia. To lift her into a warm water basin. The surprise of skin on skin. Baby, you exist. We’re really touching. She knows to arrange the gastrostomy tube inserted in Sophia’s stomach, to keep hold of it five inches down the tube, so gravity doesn’t pressure and pull it free, to arrange the oxygen tube, the heart monitor attachment tubes, her intravenous lines. Maggie’s fingers support the baby at the small of her neck. Sophia finds herself in water, her expression is surprise. Maggie laps water against her belly, the soles of the baby’s feet. Cheek against the baby’s head until her features lose their tenseness, her head moves to touch cheek to her mother’s and she kicks. For one strange moment the institution smell lifts, and Maggie is a live whole mom holding a live whole baby.

No bath! Nurse says no time this morning. Beepers are going off. Babies are trying to die. The nurse has filled a basin with water, then abandons it when the baby next to Sophia goes into cardiac arrest. The nurse moves fast, her elbow catches Sophia’s foot which hits the basin, knocks it to the floor, and now the cleaning staff has been called in - more bodies, more equipment.

Maggie hums. It’s an act of rebellion. Hums to Sophia who ignores her bath water sweeping the neonatal floor.

Maggie

Three sculptured ivory heads sit on the woman’s desk. Two clamp their eyes shut. The third one stares at Maggie; Maggie stares back, hand clenched round a booklet tossed on the oval coffee table: *Perinatal Bereavement. The Unique Nature and Factors Surrounding the Death or Acute Illness of a Child.* Footsteps squeak, the swish of nurses’ uniforms, low rumble of food trolleys rolling wonky down the hall. Roast beef, well-done. The social worker flips the pages of Maggie’s file while Maggie leans back against the brocade chair and considers the woman’s outsized purse and hot pink fingernails. She hadn’t thought to make a fashion statement when she dressed this morning, considers her own grass-stained running shoes, considers the walls of this sterile office, hot forget-me-not blue. The flipping stops, the social worker caught on a page, like Maggie’s dog on point. “Ah, yes.” The woman’s buttons on her suit jacket sleeve gleam gunmetal silver.

“Let’s start with this morning’s situation,” the social worker says.

The chair in which Maggie has been deposited is designed for someone with metre long thighs. Unless she slides forward, which leaves her leaning helplessly at a forty-five degree angle, her running shoes stick straight out from the knee.

“This morning, in neonatal care,” the woman says.

The social worker taps her fingers against the desk, a cheerful clicking, and waits for Maggie to take up the ball.

“Are you sleeping well?” the woman says, “because there are pills.”

Maggie wipes salty moisture from her hands. “I had a dream,” she says. “My budgie, Dicky, I had him as a child, every night I said, Pretty bird, Dicky, pretty bird, pretty bird, before I covered his cage.”

The social worker leans forward. “So what was the dream?”

“That was it. Right there. I never owned a budgie. I am at his cage wearing rubber high-heeled shoes. I have a blanket in my hands, and I’m saying, Pretty bird, Dicky, pretty bird. Then I cover his cage. And I can’t see him anymore.”

The woman clears her throat. “Shall we talk about this morning?”

“No.”

“Mrs. Solantz. The doctors, the nurses on fifth…..” The woman takes by the head the statue that has been staring Maggie down and sternly rearranges it. One high-heeled blue shoe dangles off her foot.

“It’s Gillis.”

“They’re worried about you. You need to talk to someone.”


“Your baby has been on the intensive care unit almost four weeks now?”

“Twenty-seven days.”

“When have the doctors last spoken to you of her prognosis?”
Maggie Gillis sits stony in her chair. Never again this morning’s surprising sweep of sobs that took her unawares: the other mothers’ panicked, averted faces like she had thrown up or soiled her underwear.

“Don’t blame yourself.” The woman leans out, pats Maggie’s arm, an awkward, unfamiliar gesture. Maggie hadn’t known she should. “Here grief is…” the baby opens a blue-tinged mouth, “…emotional extremes all mixed…anxiety, anger, fear…”

Breathe, huuuuuu. Breathe. Huuuuuu. “Oh, dear. Perhaps this isn’t the best…Let’s bring you back when you feel more…”

The social worker is scrambling through her daybook. Maggie’s body a river: mucus and blood and breast milk.

“A week from Friday....get yourself together...this Kleenex, no – of course. Honey, we know it’s hard.”

Lady. You have no idea.

Martha

Mid-afternoon light washes Martha Gillis’s window until everything ghosts white. She expects the scent of calla lily, trillium, jasmine, snow. She stands motionless in a gauze curtain of thought, then turns to finish the dishes at her small sink, feeling their way into the cupboard. Last night she dreamed she was tattooed in large words and people read her. The dream was awash in colour. Colour infiltrates her bones. Wilf has been gone ten years, this house in town feels strange and new though she’s been in it six. Each day her world fades deeper into grey/white twilight. Frost stars the ground now. She spends less time with her large print books, more afternoons listening to old tapes. This morning she came across one of her daughters singing. She presses Play and leans into the window, watching Wilf, bent forward on the chesterfield across from the piano, grinning at his girls. She feels his presence every day. His voice lurks in the shadows by the coat hooks, his step on the cellar stairs, she smells his sen-sen though she keeps none in the house. She closes her eyes, and out of a distant past emerge happy girlish voices.

    When the sun in the morning peeps over the hill,
    And kisses the roses on my windowsill...

and as sound fills the room, Martha imagines colour. The brown of a lonesome cowboy song, the soft mauve of a hymn, the wagon-red of Way Up High In Our Cherry Tree. She used to sing that song to her girls when they couldn’t sleep.

Way up high in our cherry tree
If you look, you will see
Mama robin and babies three...

Song calmed Maggie, shouting out her childhood nightmares. Martha reaches to the side table and fingers her impatiens plant. She had an eye specialist appointment in the city yesterday. The Sawatskys drove her up. The
doctor said, “Congratulations, Mrs. Gillis. You have excellent sight. You’re registering 20-25 in both eyes. Quite a feat for someone your age.”

“Thank you,” Martha said, smiling back. “Och, why can’t I see then?” “I’m sorry,” she blurted to the doctor’s 20-20 gaze. She didn’t want to appear ungrateful. He seemed so pleased.

“Ah, Mrs. Gillis. Your retina is full of tiny holes. Macular degeneration. Be patient. If you stare sideways long enough, things should grow clear.”

Maggie

Friday night. Brodie and Maggie lie in one another’s arms. They have had dinner, done the dishes, not talked about the baby. Her presence a terrible beauteous light that hurts the eyes, that never dissipates, that burns. Skipper leaps onto the bed and knocks against them, gleefully breathing out his halitosis. Maggie flips off the bed and puts insulted Skipper out. He rains them with indignant whines. While Brodie marked his test papers, back to Maggie at the small dining room table, Maggie tried to read, then tossed her book aside, started baking, then abandoned the chocolate cheesecake brownies, began to clean, an awful restlessness gripping her, until once when she passed Brodie, vacuum and dust cloth in tow, he grabbed her hand, said, “Maggie,” which has led them here. Maggie is in her soft and clingy nightgown, the colour of autumn leaves. Brodie is naked, aroused in sorrow. “Maggie, take it off.” He reaches for her, his tongue sliding her smoothness. Brodie runs his fingers from her hipbone down against her cradled warmth. She holds his buttocks in her hands, slips to their centre. Brodie shakes a stifled cry. His fingers find her neck, the indent of her backbone, pursue their traveling, roam her small curve of belly, and take flight against her, butterfly wing light.

“Maggie...” the most Brodie can say, her body arching, arching, he slides down down down against her, disappears his tongue, invites her cries against his skin, the light is all around.

Brodie

Joyce is not ten minutes in the house before she tells Brodie the child did not sprout from his genes.

“Not Irish genes.”

She’s scrubbing out Maggie’s sink which Maggie scrubbed out this morning. “Our genes are strong.”

Maggie looks at her face in the hallway mirror.

“I thought Aunt Betts had a baby born without a chest,” says Brodie.

“I don’t know how you deal with this disorganization,” Joyce says. “Will somebody put out the damn dog? He keeps tramping on my feet. His breath is terrible! Where do you keep the teapots? That wasn’t Aunt Betts. That was on your father’s side.”


“You’re not putting green pepper in the chicken? Green pepper gives Larry gas.”
Brodie says, “Real gas or ideal gas?” and when no one gets his Physics joke, “I’ll get the car.”

At the hospital, Joyce is put out by the smallness of the scrub room. There is a jar of flowers, daffodils and daisies sitting on the coffee table in green water, as if someone got mixed up and thought it might be spring. Larry needs help getting the string tied on his gown. He makes jokes about being in a nightie, about the pretty nurses.

“We have to wash up, Dad,” Brodie reminds Larry whose hand rests on the door handle.

“What are we? Contaminated?” Larry jokes.

Brodie herds them in and along the crowded aisles.

The child’s awake today.

“Say hello to your grandma and grandpa,” Brodie says gently to the baby. Joyce and Larry stare. The baby stares back.

“They’re so wrinkled!” Joyce, looking everywhere at bodies covered in tape, tubes sticking out of throats. “Yours looks kind of normal.”

“They’re the size of goddamn roasting chickens,” Larry breathes.

“Hi, baby,” Joyce shouts through the arm holes, jolting the baby, startling nearby nurses, eyes the tubes and needles. “How the hell do you get her out?”

Brodie opens the isolette top, arranges the tubes that bind her, holds the baby out to Larry, but Larry’s feet don’t want to move.

“Larry!” Joyce says, and Larry’s feet unglue.

Brodie snaps pictures of Larry, arms filled with the tiny lump of blankets. The oxygen tube slips from the baby’s nose onto the floor. Her skin is chaffed and raw around her gastrostomy site.

After some time, Joyce rescues Larry. Brodie snaps more pictures, hands the camera to Maggie who shoots a photo of Brodie and Larry flanking Joyce holding the baby. Joyce says, “Say pickle,” into the baby’s face. A family moment. Ha.

“Okay, here,” Joyce thrusts at Brodie the swath of blankets. “Larry needs to keep on schedule. Let’s go home and eat.”

“Good-bye! Good-bye!” Joyce sings, flapping her arms inside the isolette. The baby breathes a rattly sigh.

On their way out, a floor washer causes them to make a detour past the normal nursery. Joyce peers through the window. “Look at that Pakistani baby crying.”

“Babies don’t cry, Mom,” Brodie says wearily, “because of the colour of their skin.”

**Maggie**

Maggie’s learning not to look ahead. There’s nothing out there. Look down, up, in. Her displaced body belongs nowhere, not at the hospital with the baby, not at home without the baby. Her body has betrayed her, thinned. Maggie wants an outline, an outline that says, I have a baby, and for that to be an ordinary
sentence. Maggie looks out at the snow-frosted world. Her body bears no inscriptions of punishment, no sagging stomach, no rounded milk breasts, no stretch marks. Her father, shortly before he died, the cancer diminishing his body until he took up no space at all, said simply, “I’d like to live.” He insisted on clearing the rolling table on which he kept his books and papers for the hair-netted worker each time she brought his meal, as if affording her a kind of pity for witnessing his demise. He wished for life in place of existing.

To lose. Webster’s New Ninth Collegiate. To loosen and dissolve. Almost six weeks have passed and the detail is all wrong. This baby’s lungs won’t breathe without pumped-in oxygen, her heart won’t course blood into the proper arteries, her muscles won’t summon the strength to lift her head; her skin is blue. While Maggie’s body perfects itself, her baby’s scars and bruises write themselves on skin.

And Maggie’s body isn’t acting like a mother’s body. Mothers don’t cry, they take care of the crying. Mothers hold babies in their arms. She shouldn’t have had that second piece of chocolate cheesecake in her third month, she shouldn’t have jogged so much, she should have jogged more, she should have read more books on birthing. The hooks behind the kitchen door fill her with empty rage. She’s tied to people she wouldn’t look at twice. An early winter. Snow crying to the ground.

It’s not a question of lowering her expectations. On the radio, driving to the hospital, Maggie hears a man say, “Humans have to have a culture in order to survive. You don’t have to be cruel to be a torturer,” he says, “you just have to be obedient.” Seven p.m. A long bleak night. The baby’s intravenous went interstitial again. She’s aspirated again. They’ve had to turn up her oxygen. Babies go blind from too much oxygen. Mottled green bruises lace the baby’s scalp and hands. Six needles plucked from her scalp in a twenty-minute period.

“Let’s try this again,” the nurse says heartily.

The man on the radio says, “We have to believe the things that matter to us are going to survive.” Maggie remembers studying the word believe for a spelling test, mixing the e and the i.

There’s a lie in believe, Maggie’s mother said.
No Fences Here
by Katerina Fretwell

After my jog’s rolling-hills, towards-home, slowed-walks over the highest crests up, down, through the trestle bridge and tracks, my friendly neighbour Joan halts my huffing, her bad knee inching safe progress from trailer porch to road-edge, asphalted now. We chat of grandkids, whizzing years and eggs, the chickens and roosters our mothers raised—hers along with geese here in Foley, mine beside our goat, an hour’s road-maze from New York City.

A Jehovah Witness, one house down from Joan’s, passes by. We wave, shout Hi, and I recall her pastor hijacking the memorial service held for my husband’s aunt, summing up her life in three sentences, then preaching at us. Breath back to normal, I tell Joan I’ll soon be 62, she responds, almost 65—her white hair!

We expound on war, on peace never complete. She confides having met three Christlike beings, children who love us despite our disbelief, old souls who are reincarnated to guide us to love. And that’s the wonder—in pastoral Ontario Joan and I can discuss the New Age not fifty feet from that old bible-spouter, without dismissing her and her pastor to a flat earth all by their lonesome.
Garter Lake Gazette
by John Donlan

Now we’ve found how fast electrons
hop from atom to atom – something, quintillionths….
In our ’86 Olds
we amble the rocky lane, frog juggernaut,
soaring any road like bird or angel.
This car life can’t survive
Alberta light sweet crude at $100 a barrel:
“demand destruction.” Cauliflower-brained

cumulus congestus boils and swells
up to the stratosphere and turns to ice
eight miles above its trail of rain and thunder
missing our parching forest. Some southern
dryland opportunists will thrive here
in future weather, some Neo-Neolithic
dragonflyherd tending glittering wings
will read this and understand perfectly.
Excerpt from a novel in progress
by Stephen Flemming

Chapter 2

Jim remembered his father as they lowered his brother Richard into the ground. He’d
looked ineffectual, standing in the graveyard, staring anywhere that ensured he didn’t have to
make eye contact. His mother, needing support and not finding it searched the crowd like she
was looking for answers. Jim went to her, comforting her with an arm, feeling heroic, brave. A
martyr.

The small grave yard was packed, shrouded in a mist that almost hid the steel-grey of
the sea. It made the green of the grass seem brighter, the only color in the landscape this early
in spring. It clung to the dark suits of the mourners, somehow comforting, somehow telling them
that things were as they’d always been, that their small village wasn’t forever changed with the
death of the three young men on the fishing boat. Jim stopped breathing, shutting off the smell
of the sea that the blustery wind carried, remembering how they’d told him not to go out. Jim
had told him. His father had told him. Everyone had told him. “It’s too rough. There’s too much
ice.”

But Richard hadn’t listened. It was as if the warnings made the decision for him, turning
a bad idea into something he confused with bravery. Jim knew this by the way Richard strutted
as he loaded the traps onto the boat, and by the way he looked at his current interest, Nancy
MacDonald, a girl who immediately brought to mind the image of Scottish dancers in highland
dress artfully clogging. But Nancy hadn’t seemed impressed. Instead, her features were twisted
to a worried frown.

But then again, thought Jim, he hadn’t really been worried. Richard was always ready to
try anything dangerous, anything with a thrill, and he always came out on top. Jim remembered
when the boys had dared Richard to dive off the Stanhope bridge, even though rusted
wreckage of years past made the chance of diving head first into the point of a rotted mast, or
being caught underwater in the wire of a lost lobster trap, more than possible. Jim remembered
almost crying as Richard poised on the rail of the bridge, and then being ashamed of his wet
eyes when Richard broke to the surface. It seemed to Jim that their small P.E.I. village didn’t
have enough to satisfy the yearn for adventure that drove his brother.

But now, as it was with fishermen and fishing-boat deaths, no one knew exactly what
had happened. They only knew the wind had come up, the ice came in closer to shore, and the
boat hadn’t returned. The bodies washed onto the beach days later, coming in with the tide like
rotted seaweed.

Jim sighed. It seemed so clear, even now, seventeen years later. He’d been so caught
up in the memory that the grey walls, desk and computer of the office hadn’t existed. He heard
a familiar voice floating above the dividers, authoritative, confident. He peeked around his grey
wall to see slim legs covered in dark hose, coordinated with a navy blue skirt that stopped just
above the knees. A matching blazer was opened to reveal a white shirt that in turn was
unbuttoned enough to reveal a modest V of smooth skin that drew attention from many of the
men, and some of the women who worked in the federal government office. The man she was
speaking to looked up at her with a smile that Jim recognized, a smile that men often gave
Muriel. She rewarded the man with one of hers, whirled on a stiletto heel, then tapped
importantly down the polished tile of the hallway separating the rows of gray dividers. She
glanced over her shoulder as she walked, giving the man another look that although friendly,
was slightly condescending, the right combination to give the impression of being friendly, but at
the same time leaving no question as to who was boss. She noticed Jim peeking around the
divider, and her smile changed, showing the uncertainty of a wife catching a husband’s
surreptitious look.

They’d been married ten years. She was the director general of four directorates, the
least important being the one in which he worked. A director-general they called her, a DG.
Jim’s position was the lowliest in the directorate, the help desk, the first port of call for those
having computer problems in the department. It was mundane work, consisting of following a
set of predetermined steps to solve a problem. In the event these procedures didn’t work, he
contacted the software engineers who dealt with the more challenging issues. The engineers also worked for Muriel.

Stretching his neck from side to side to release the tension, Jim wondered why the memory of the funeral kept intruding. It was so long ago now. Richard had died in the spring before the bridge had been completed.

He fixed on the copies on his desk. They showed letters that were yellowed, dark around the edges, almost as if burnt, with hairline cracks running through the margins, like lines on a map. Coleen had sent them. He'd met her on an ancestry site when he began researching his family tree. They started chatting when they discovered a common ancestor. He remembered the typed chat-line phrases getting shorter, being entered faster, conveying excitement. Coleen mentioned her great-great uncle, James MacLauchlin, born in 1826, who had left for Canada in 1847. And although James could not be certain of his lineage because his grandfather was illegitimate, he thought he must be related to a James MacLauchlin buried in the cemetery behind St. Anne's, in Stanhope Prince Edward Island, also born in 1826. Coleen and her family never knew what became of her great-great uncle, but recently she had been given a bundle of letters written by James found by construction workers doing renovations in the servants quarters behind Aberdeen Hill House, the house where James had been raised. His shoulders relaxed as he thought of Coleen.

Abrupt, rude, the phone rang. He grabbed it before it even stopped ringing, then took a second to shake memories of Coleen and James off. “Hello, help desk, Jim speaking.”

“Listen. This is Reginald Smythe. I can’t access the personnel file and I need the information now. What are you people doing up there?”

Jim’s shoulders tightened. What a pain in the ass. A director who had no computer savvy whatsoever and who inevitably blamed others to vent his frustration. Worse, he kept escalating the problem. It often ended at his director’s office who then took it to the big boss, who of course was Muriel. Jim knew if he couldn’t solve the problem he’d have to deal with her later. He clicked his mouse to open the online problem log. His other line began to ring. He asked Reginald to hold then picked up. “Help desk, Jim speaking.”

“How the fuck are ya doin ya old arshole?”

Jim started at the sound of the heavy P.E.I. accent, an accent so full of the sea that it made the words inoffensive. His gray mood lifted as he recognized the voice. “Murph?”

“Yer fuckin right. What’re you doin up there, fuckin the dog like all the rest of them government boys?”

“Can you hold a sec.” Jim pressed a phone button

“Hi Reginald, could you hold another second?” Jim punched the hold button before Smythe could answer. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Muriel hurrying down the hall. He knew the brisk walk, a firefighter on her way to put out a bureaucratic blaze. She glanced in his cubicle. He punched Murph’s button. “Murph?”

“Yer fuckin right. Who else would it be? You got my pogey cheque printed yet?”

Jim thought a second before he answered. “Well I did, but I already spent it.”

Murph chortled. “Thought as much. I’ll probably get a notice saying somethin about how they want a piece of my old arse.”

“Arse?”

“Yeah, like I owe a rears.”

It was Jim’s turn to laugh. “So Murph, what’s going on in P.E.I?”

“Same old shit. In winter mode. Boat’s out of the water, shanty on the wharf all closed up.”

“Good year?”

“Ah. Not so great. Had some fun though.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Had a bunch of Japanese around early in the spring. I was mendin traps on the wharf, drinkin a little beer, when someone showed up with a glass of shine. I don’t usually drink shine, but I thought what the hell, I’ll have a little jigger. Next thing we know everyone on the wharf is loaded. Then this tour bus stops in.”

“Kind of early for tour busses wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, they had their dates all mixed up. Anyway, this bunch of Japanese unloaded and starts askin to go deep-sea fishin, wonderin who had their reservations.” Murph chuckled.

Jim couldn’t help but chuckle too as he pictured the drunken fishermen besieged by a busload of Japanese tourists: a river of scrubbed faces, casual clothes and expensive cameras
contrasting with the weathered faces, heavy rubber boots, and gnarled hands of the working fishermen and their wives. “They had reservations?”

“No, no. The bus driver was as lost as Aunt Margaret after she got the Alzheimers.”

Murph started laughing. “But it was funny. I took them out, gave em a little shine and in the end we was all loaded, me singin up a storm, the Japanese joinin in, then they started singin in Japanese and I was joinin in.” Murph was laughing louder as he related the story. “Guess that’s what you’d call a real cultural exchange.”

Jim laughed too, but it was a stifled laugh, silenced by compressed lips so as not to disturb the hush of the office. He saw the light on Smythe’s line go out and his phone immediately rang again. “Hold another second Murph?”

He punched the button for his other line. “Help desk, Jim speaking.”

“Can I please get some service from you people? I have a job to do here.”

“Sorry about that Reginald. I had another call. Let me put you on hold just a second to get rid of him and I’m all yours.”

Muriel, breezing by his cubicle, accompanied now by a man who wore a it-wasn’t my-fault look on his face, overheard him. Jim glanced at her and she rolled her eyes in sympathy at the mention of Reginald. He punched Murph’s button. “Hey Murph, sorry about that. Gettin busy here. Did you just call to shoot the shit or is there somethin up?”

Murph’s voice lowered in seriousness as he spoke. “Sort of Jimmy.” Murph hesitated. Your old man’s not so well. He’s havin problems with his heart. I know that your Dad wouldn’t let your Mum call because, well, you know what he’s like.” Murph hesitated again. “It’d be a good idea if you came down for a visit, soon.”

“What? What do you mean I should visit soon? Is it that bad Murph?”

“I ain’t no doctor. I’m just sayin it’d be a good idea to come down and see your old man.”

Jim didn’t respond. He just stared out his window. The air in the cubicle changed, became heavy, wavy, blurring the images he stared at everyday. Smythe’s light went out and the phone rang again almost immediately. He stared at it, his haze changing as he gritted his teeth. He punched the button. “Look Smythe. You’re going to have to wait your turn.” He slammed the phone down.

Muriel, heading back to down the hall again in the same brisk walk, her associate still with her, jerked to a stop. She glared at Jim, then raised her hands in a question. “What are you doing? Was that Smythe?”

Jim didn’t bother looking at her. “To hell with him. I’m on the phone with Murph.”

Muriel looked up and down the hallway, then leaned in, whispering, “Keep your voice down. I want you in my office. Now.” He heard her walk away, heels snapping.

The fog returned, blurring images again. He sat for a second, then with a voice that seemed to come from somewhere out of the dense air he said goodbye to Murph. He sat for another second, then robotlike, he got up and shuffled down the tile hallway to Muriel’s office. Her rich-looking door, made of heavy cherry oak, seemed further away than usual, and the journey down the narrow passageway flanked by grey dividers seemed interminable. When he got to there, he felt impatient, but at the same time felt like he’d accomplished something, but had no idea what, no satisfied sense that accomplishment usually brings, only a nervous energy that had no outlet. He opened the door, made his way around the polished boardroom table and sat down in front of her desk.

Muriel was sitting behind it, jaw clenched, fingers in her right hand white at the tips, tightly intertwined around a pen. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Jim was thinking of Murph, distracted. “What?”

“What the hell were you doing. That was Reginald Smythe. The biggest pain in the ass in here and my husband hangs up on him. I’ll be hearing about this for months.”

Jim focused on Muriel, seeing her anger, her face white, bloodless.

She spoke again. “Think of what it looks like when my own husband pulls a stunt like that.”

Jim stared beyond her, out the window that overlooked the parking lot. He saw a rusty-blue pickup circling minivans, plush SUV’s, and sporty convertibles that many of the middle-aged bureaucrats owned. For some reason it reminded him of P.E.I. He spoke as if he were telling her what he’d had for dinner. “My father had a heart attack...I think.”
the end of our world -- a poem cycle
by amanda earl

big bang theory: countries broken
views of earth from space
as viewed from earth from space from earth
close up where planets splinter
genealogy over atom
stratified centre of quake
birth monsoons
tsunami

before burn
wax effigy packs for apocalypse
carries child raggedly unstitched
plays radio
severs surgeon hand
speeds train
throws bird over cliff
plummets diver
swallows an open mouth
begs an answer

saving the world
wanted—
fuel efficient
fish that flies
and leaves no ecological footprint
afterwards you can eat it
without ingesting mercury or depleting
scarce ocean resources
is powered by hot air
converts noxious bleats into energy
you if ever travelled by fish
know about economies of scale

turntables rewind empathetic breath
until tuesday the stars
rescind hills folded over egg
whites of rivers, eye lids
shutter before after
yolk rises in the east
sets elsewhere
eel or jelly crust unbaked
stuck to the bottom of
bellows suck and fan
the blastfire
finale

the prince counts hands in the valley
while his wife searches for shoulders
in the kitchen
and the butcher needs meat to chop
gristle for the chattering teeth
chew 32 times a feast of galaxy
burn wholes in celeste’s brand
new night table cloth
the dog ticks frenzies from his collar
hind leg thumps to the renaissance
beat of under
again a question breaks the window
4 POEMS
by Changming Yuan

Dangling Modifiers

to write your dead past
into a living essay
this chapter should be read
with your eyes and mind
both widely open

by perusing or pursuing
such perfectly bound books
all the essential rules
can easily be learned
about their sophisticated syntaxes

taking notes with all her attention
the idiomatic usages
of her adopting language
will be mastered well
over a small spot of time

heavily loaded with grammar
his whole being is
an isolated adverbial
often meant to modify
the wrong logical subject

I C Q

Y c q?
-- l o u
l o u 1
l, 4 1, o u
2 b / 2c
2 b 1
2 c 1
4 1, u r 1
l c q
Behest Impressed
from a messed nest to a jest fest
with a blessed crest and a dressed breast
the pressed guest had best detest
molest or invest in a west quest
for the chest of zest
in the assessed protest
against the test of pest
lest the rest vest
in the depressed or accessed

Another Impasse
Writing from Vancouver West
To Li or Liu in East Beijing
I always feel at a loss
Whether to or not to use
The first person singular pronoun
As in ‘I do not really think so!’

Time and time again, they have
Unnecessarily reminded me of
The biggest difference in languaculture
Between the east and the west:
“There in English you always
Spell your favourite word ‘I’
In big bold italic upper case; however
Here we have really rarely
Employed the word even in poetry”

In their writing practice (probably too long)
They either drop the pronoun or replace it
With many an impersonal signifier like:
The present writer, the writing subject
The unlearned, the uncouth one
The old person/body, the little human/one
The trivial/insignificant/unmentionable
The president/manager/[        ] proper
The person per se, or more precisely:
[Your] inferior, [your] subordinate
[Your] stupid husband/brother/son
[Your] foolish wife/sister/daughter
[Your] humble [        ], or less humbly:
As [your] father/mentor/lord…

Instead of standing up for an unmasked person
‘I’ should try to remain hidden like a taboo
In Chinese
“Cloud Wall” by Byron Barrett (Vancouver)
“The Vent” by Byron Barrett (Vancouver)
Deux poèmes
par Nico Lord-Schütze (4 ans)

La lune nous suit quand la journée se transforme en nuit
L’hiver, y’en a pas d’arc-en-ciel
Le soleil est fatigué
Le ciel y veut pas se réveiller
Tu parles en silence

Les arbres sont longs comme mes doigts
Je suis plus haut que le soleil
J’entends un bébé qui pleure dans mon oreille
Les oiseaux y’appèlent le printemps

Je suis une statue
Je suis un éventail
Le tapis est paresseux, aussi
Elle dort encore la journée

Y’a du soleil qui veut aller dans mes yeux
C’est une belle journée
Pour regarder le ciel
C’est ici la très belle journée
Elle est toute partie la nuit

Le soleil brille
Les abeilles brillent aussi autour des fleurs
Maman a avalé un yoyo
Est-ce qu’on est des japonais?

Réveille-toi, la nuit est partie
Quand le matin se réveille
C’est une belle journée
Je l’ai vu demain
Mikica and I Duck Stones
by Patrick Woodcock

There is a woman standing by the concrete staircase.
When she breathes it sounds like a whale coughing furniture,
like an old bureau being belched into heaven.

When her lungs approach silence, she divides
the alley’s architecture with her shadow and says,
Unbearable music is bearable when burped.

She glides across the bar singing,
A shadow can dance if latched onto quickly!

Beside the old staircase she stands, a stone’s afflicted beauty.
Quick, to the staircase, before the gypsies throw another!

Sarajevo, BiH
The Stone Canoe
A Dramatic Interpretation of an Ojibway Oral Narrative
by Armand Garnet Ruffo
(In Memory of Wilfred Pelletier)

[Editor’s note: this story is often told to youthful audiences, or those young at heart, but embedded within it are deeper messages, meaningful to elders].

CHARACTERS

Actors
Wise Man: An old Wise Man, dressed in an old flannel shirt, pants with suspenders, mocassins, a western style straw hat with an eagle medallion on the front. He is carrying a knotty wooden cane.
Vision: A young teenager
Lela: Vision’s drowned girlfriend
Chief: Vision’s father with feather headdress
Elo: The old threshold guardian woman, at the entrance to the Land of Spirits.

Puppets
Kino: A fish.
Tree: A tree.
Ba-ka-dewin: A shark
Mi-gi-zí: Eagle, the Creator’s messenger.
Optional: Skeletons, Fish, Octopus

SETTING: A journey

NOTES: The first part of the play is lighted naturally, the second part, in the “Land of Shadows” can be done in black light for effect. This is optional. Objects to be lighted include the sun and moon, trees, flowers, hills, water, birds, fish, waves, lightning, stars, a cave, an eagle, a shark, and a huge teepee. Puppeteers should develop the fluid effect of floating, swimming and flying.

The Wise Man walks slowly onto the stage. He stops abruptly and looks at the audience and then down to his cane before speaking.

Wise Man: (He lifts up the hand carved cane made from a tree root and admires it.) Nice one eh. (beat) Was given to me a long time ago. (He continues to talk downstage.) Yep, it’s taken me many places. This is what I call my travelling stick. Yes sir! (He stops again and looks intently at the audience.) When I wanna visit some interesting place, I just point it in one of the four sacred directions, (pointing the cane) east, west, north, south, and I just go... (Bright laugh, and a little dance.) Woo! I’m not as spry as I used to be... but I still get around. Oh yeah, I do. I go to all kinds of places... (hushed) places where even animals can still talk!
(He brushes the air with his cane and starts pointing.) Hey, who knows where this old stick might take us! Maybe you'll find yourself sitting right where somebody ate their dinner (Sound of burping). . . burped, and had a nap (Sound of snoring – Wise Man looks around to see what the audience is laughing about, shrugs, continues). Maybe you'll end up at the bottom of a lake with the fish. Or on a polar ice cap. (He shivers.) Maybe even in the middle of the jungle. (Jungle sounds come up. The Wise Man shakes his head in amazement.) Yep, this old stick can take us anywhere. (He pauses.) Am I losing you? Then I'll just have to tell you a story! (He laughs.) So follow me and keep your eye on my magical travelling stick, and we'll go on a journey. (Waves it like a wand.)

***

A Chief in traditional Ojibway regalia appears on a raised platform (optional). His face is sorrowful, his arms are crossed; he is in mourning.

Chief: (Sternly) Listen closely Vision my son. I know that your heart is full of sorrow for poor Lela. But she has drowned and has now passed to the Land of Shadows, and it's forbidden for you or any of us who are living to join her. You must wait until you have lived your life to its fullest. Only when you are called is it time to go. Heed my words. (The image of the Chief disappears.)

Vision comes hurrying out with Gia-ashk hovering over him.
Vision: If only Lela were here. (He wipes his eyes.) Go away! (He tries to shoo Gai-ashk, the gull, away.)
Gia-ashk: Just trying to cheer you up.
Vision: (Waving Gia-ashk away.) Get, I said.
Gia-ashk: Okay. (He begins to fly across the stage, stops, then flies at full speed towards Vision.)
Vision: Gia-ashk! (ducking) Watch it.
Gia-ashk: (He comes to abrupt halt.) I changed my mind.
Vision: Leave me alone.
Gia-ashk: Vision, we're not allowed in the Land of Shadows. You heard what your father, the Chief, said.
Vision: But I want to go. I just want to see Lela one last time to say goodbye.
Gai-ashk: (Hovering beside him.) You're going to get in big trouble!
Vision: What do you know?
Gai-ashk: That this is a big No.
Vision: I'm going. (He heads off with Gai-ashk following. He stops abruptly.) Still here?
Gai-ashk: Well somebody has to be the brains!
Vision: Then help me get ready.
Gai-ashk: No problema.

Vision takes up his umbrella and then a bow, making sure it is strung and in good working order. He starts shaving some arrows, getting together some food provisions etc. All the while Gai-ashk is fluttering around. The bird makes another swoop and then returns with a worm that he offers to Vision.
Vision: What’s this?
Gai-ashk: What does it look like?
Vision: A worm! (a prop)
Gai-ashk: You’re not so dumb after all.
Vision: What am I supposed to do with it?
Gai-ashk: Eat it. It’s really quite delicious.
Vision: Eat a worm?
Gai-ashk: You asked me to help you, didn’t you?
Vision: Thanks but no thanks...
Gai-ashk: In that case... (He swallows it with a big gulp.) Hummm... good.

Wise Man: (Speaking under the action, shaking his head) After preparing for the journey, Vision disobeyed his father and left with Gai-ashk for the Land of Shadows. Night came, stars came out, and on they went for many, many days, past forests and hills, with patches of snow on the ground and in the trees. But then Vision noticed a change.

Gai-ashk is holding on to Vision’s backpack, Vision doesn’t realize it.

Vision: Hey, I’m getting warm. (loosens his shirt) Notice something
Gai-ashk? (He notices the bird is not beside him. He calls.)
Gai-ashk! (beat) The pesky bird’s finally gone.
Gai-ashk: I heard that!
Vision: Where are you?
Gai-ashk: Right here. My feet are sore.
Vision: Don’t you mean your wings?
Gai-ashk: No, I mean my feet. From holding on to your packsack.
Vision: Will you get off me. It’s heavy enough! (beat) Look all the snow’s gone, we must be getting close.
Gai-ashk: Not good. I got a bad feeling about this. (He flies off above Vision and lands on the tree)
Vision: Come on, we’re nearly there.
Gai-ashk: That’s what I’m afraid of.

Vision continues walking with Gai-ashk close by.

Vision: (Eating an apple) Hey, what’s this?
Tree: Like it. Tastes good eh. It’s an apple.

The tree starts to move.

Vision: Who said that?
Gai-ashk: (Gai-ashk startled falls out of the tree. Vision picks him up.) He did.
Tree: I did.
Vision: You did?
Tree: Where you guys going?
Vision: To the Land of Shadows.
Tree: (He laughs loudly.) You can’t go there!
Vision: Why not?
Tree: Once you go there you can never come back? No matter how much you miss your family and friends.
Vision: Really?
Gai-ashk: Never go home again?

A moment of surprise as Gai-ashk stares at Vision.

Vision: (Beat. To the Tree) I don’t care. My mind’s made up.
Tree: Some people don’t even make it there! I’ve heard stories.
Vision: What kind?
Tree: Scary things.

Gai-ashk gulps.

Vision: You’re just trying to get me to stay here.
Tree: You can keep me company. You can have all the apples you want.
Vision: (Thinks for a moment) No… I got to go.
Tree: Wait, hold it.
Gai-ashk: Save your breath. I already tried. (He flies after Vision.)
Tree: We can make apple juice!
Vision: Bye Tree.
Tree: Or apple sauce… apple pie… apple sandwiches anyone?
(Vision waves goodbye.)
Vision and Gai-ashk continue and spot a path in the forest. They stop.
Gai-ashk hovers beside Vision.

Vision: A path! This must be the way. Let’s go.
Gai-ashk: Hold it.
Vision: What?
Gai-ashk: I never said I was going all the way with you. (Ga-ashk looks at the audience and shakes his head No.)
Vision: (Enticingly) It’s a long way to fly back. You’ll get awfully tired.
Gai-ashk: (He hesitates then lands on Vision’s shoulder.) You’re right. (He now shakes his head Yes.)

They walk along an elevated space (optional) and come to the huge Tee Pee. An old woman appears in a long white gown with a staff in her hand.

Wise Man: They were now very far away from home. (He shakes his head in concern.) They’d walked and walked until they met Elo, the old guardian woman, a very special helper who prepares travellers for what lies ahead in the Land of Shadows. Out of respect, everybody calls her Grandmother.

Vision: Look, a tee pee!
Elo: I am Elo, guide to the Land of Shadows. My job is to watch over everybody who passes this way and give them advice. I have been expecting you my grandson.

Vision: You have grandmother?
Gai-ashk You have?
Elo: Listen. (birds chirping) News travels. (Vision and Gai-ashk look at each other in astonishment. Beat) You want to see your friend Lela.
again, don't you.

Vision: Yes.
Elo: The maiden you seek passed here earlier on her way to the Land of Shadows. She will not return.

Vision: That's why I want to see her one last time grandmother.
Gai-ashk: It's probably too far eh?
Vision: *(He grabs the bird by the neck.)* Will you be quiet.
Gai-ashk: Okay, don't wrinkle the merchandise. *(He twists his neck back into place.)*

Vision: How do we get there grandmother? Is it far?
Elo: You are at its border. Beyond my Tee Pee is the Land of Shadows. Pass through my lodge and you will be there.

Vision: And you'll let us go?
Elo: It is not my place to stop you. I am here only to give directions. But remember, it is not for the living. You cannot take your body along.

Gai-ashk: What happens if we get stuck there?
Elo: You can never return home again.

Vision and Gai-ashk look up toward the dominating structure. The flap closing the door suddenly opens and the sound of wind gushes out, a bright light radiates from the inside of the tee pee. They freeze and stare at it.

Wise Man: *(To the audience, hushed)* Well do they go in or not? Does Vision continue his journey to the Land of Shadows, or does he turn back?

*(Vision and Gai-ashk enter the Tee Pee. When they exit, they respond to the change as though they are now in the Land of Shadows.)*

Wise Man: You guessed it. *(beat)* But things in the Land of Shadows aren't exactly what they seem. Our friends don't realize the rules are different there.

Vision: Wow! What happened? Look at you!
Gai-ashk: Yikes!

Vision: *(The sky pops full stars. A quarter moon rises.)* Look at the sky... the stars and the moon? Wasn’t it still daytime? *(beat)* Hey, we must be here! This must be the Land of Shadows. *(He holds up his hand in front of him and makes it disappear.)* Look at my hand, now you see it, now you don’t!

Gai-ashk: Don't do that!

Vision: *(He makes his whole arm disappear.)* Bet I can disappear if I want!
Gai-ashk: Quit it! You’re making me scared.

Vision: Weird eh!

Gai-ashk: Yeah. So now what?

Vision: We keep going till we find her. *(They continue their journey and discover that they can pass through objects. Vision walks through a tree. See that! Never walked through a tree before.)*

Gai-ashk: *(Worried)* Hey, wait for me!

Vision: I feel so light... I bet you I could fly if I just think about it hard enough.

Gai-ashk: What’s so special about flying?
Vision: Try it without wings! (He moves as though rising in the air.)
Gai-ashk: Careful! (Vision suddenly comes upon water, yells, and crashes down to shore.) It takes practice.
Vision: Look, a lake! (He touches the glowing water.) And what’s that over there? (The shapes of flowers appear in the distance.) An island! It’s beautiful. I bet that’s where we have to go.
Gai-ashk: Time to go home.

They walk around the shore.

Vision: Maybe I could swim over there? Come on. You can hitch a ride with me. (He steps into the water and walks up to his chest. Gai-ashk lands on his head.)
Gai-ashk: I wouldn’t go out there if I were you. (He looks at the audience and covers his eyes with his wing.)

Suddenly Kino, the fish, appears, very nervous.

Kino: I wouldn’t do that if I were you.
Gai-ashk: I already told him. (Removing wing from eyes)
Kino: (Quickly) Can’t stay long, can’t stay long.
Vision: Who are you?
Kino: Hi, I’m Kino. This is my home. Nice eh! (A school of fish swim by, an octopus waves and goes on its merry way.)
Vision: I’m Vision. This is Gai-ashk. (He now wades up to his neck.) Don’t worry, I’m a good swimmer.
Kino: Got to go, bye!
Vision: What’s the rush?
Kino: (Nervous laugh) Don’t you know?
Gai-ashk: Know what? What?
Kino: (Stuttering) That Ba-ka-dewin’s out there. He’s always hungry. He’ll eat anything. You should see his eyes, they’re like fire, his teeth look like a saw blade, and he’s big enough to eat you in one gulp.
Gai-ashk: Yikes!
Vision: Really? (He scrambles out of the water.) I don’t feel like swimming anyway!
Kino: Can’t stay long. Got to go. Don’t want to end up fish food. Bye. (He leaves.)
Vision: Now what?
Gai-ashk: Home?
Vision: There has to be another way!
Gai-ashk: I don’t think so.

Vision searches in along the shore, bends some grass aside, and sees a glowing stone canoe.

Vision: Hey what’s that? (beat) That’ll get us across. We’ll use it.
Gai-ashk: But it must belong to somebody?
Vision: We’ll just borrow it.
Gai-ashk: It’s a stone canoe. How’s it going to float?
Vision: Somebody’s been using it. Here, help me get it in the water.
Gai-ashk: Do I have to? *(He looks at the audience and cringes.)*

*Vision bends to push the Stone Canoe and is surprised to discover it moves easily.*

Vision: What the heck? It’s not heavy. *(beat)* Oh I get it! In the Land of Shadows everything must be the opposite. Light things sink. Heavy things float. That’s what’s going on. Look, there’s even a paddle! Quick, get in.
Gai-ashk: *Shouldn’t we ask first?*
Vision: Hold on. I’m pushing it out.
Gai-ashk: I don’t like this. I smell trouble.
Vision: *(Stops pushing for a moment)* Unfortunately, not everything’s opposite around here... will you lighten up!
Gai-ashk: I can’t help it... *(sniffs)* if I have a sensitive nose. *(He slips and falls into the canoe. Vision shakes his head and continues to push the stone canoe into the water. He jumps in and starts paddling. The roar of thunder comes up, lightning flashes.)* Yikes!
Vision: *(Vision opens his umbrella.)* See, it’s not so bad. Everything will be fine.
Gai-ashk: That’s what you think! Look at the wave coming our way. It’s big enough to sink... us! *(A huge wave starts rolling towards them.)*

Vision drops the umbrella and starts to paddle furiously. A huge wave hits and lifts them up in the stone canoe.

Vision: It’s filling up with water. We’re going under!
Gai-ashk: I don’t swim.
Vision: Don’t worry I’ll hold you.
Gai-ashk: Oh yeah! Remember what Kino, the fish, said?
Vision: Ba-ka-dewin!
Gai-ashk: That big scary thing. *(Looking at the audience, he gulps.)*
Vision: Think he’s already here?
Gai-ashk: Waiting for us!
Vision: I don’t see him.

*(Pause)*
Gai-ashk: Look! *(He sees the outline of a big shark approaching. The shark lifts his ugly head and we see its fiery eyes)* It’s Ba-ka-dewin! Help!
Shark: Snack time! *(A low rough laugh.)*
Vision: Oh Great Spirit help us.
Gai-ashk: Momma!

Ba-ka-dewin begins to circle the stone boat. It suddenly comes up alongside the canoe and opens it’s huge mouth. Inside are the bones of fish and people. Suddenly the rain stops. The sound of the storm goes down. A giant wave that is about to topple over them does, but it passes right through the canoe without harming them.

Vision: Did you see that! It went right through us! Yes!
Ba-ka-dewin now sinks back into the lake. The sun comes out with the sound of birds. Another canoe carrying Lela appears out of the dark. She is radiant.

Wise Man: Somebody... or something... must be looking out for them. Guess that Vision has the good spirits on his side. His heart must really be pure and good or else he’d be Ba-ka-dewin’s dinner by now. Look there, maybe that’s who’s been protecting him!

Vision: It’s Lela!

Gai-ashk: Wow! Look at her.

Vision paddles towards Lela.

Vision: Lela, it’s me Vision!
Lela: You shouldn’t be here!
Gai-ashk: (Matter-of-factly) Told him.
Vision: How I’ve longed to see you.
Lela: Me too. (Their canoes touch, and they hold each other’s hands.) But you know it’s not permitted. Once we come to the Land of Shadows, we must stay here forever.

Vision: But I only want to visit.
Lela: Oh Vision, look into the water, and you’ll see this is no place for you.

*The fleeting images of skeletons appear, some are struggling to swim.*

Gai-ashk: (Startled by the images) I saw that!
Lela: Some never even make it here.
Vision: But I miss you. All the things we used to do together, dancing and singing and swimming. (brief pause)
Lela: (Sadly) Until I drowned
Vision: (Sadly) Yes.
Lela: I should’ve been more careful.
Vision: Oh Lela, it’s so good to see you again. (They arrive at the shore, beach the canoes, music comes up and they start to Fancy Dance and play together. Gai-ashk flies overhead.)

Wise Man: If only life and death were easy like that, and we could cross back and forth anytime we wanted. Now I’m not here to scare you, but Vision did something he wasn’t supposed to do, and so far everything’s turned out for him. But will it last? Let’s see!

*They look around the island.*

Vision: The air here smells like bubblegum.
Gai-ashk: Yeah, I thought I’d be ready for another worm about now, but I feel full.
Vision: Me too.
Lela: Here in the Land of Shadows we don’t have to eat. The air is our food.
Vision: You don’t go hunting?
Lela: No. Everything remains as it is.
Vision: The flowers and animals, even the leaves on the trees?
Vision: Do you like it here then?
Lela: I have no choice. My fate is to remain here. (Gai-ashk lands on her and rests his head on her shoulder.) But you do! Come, I want to show you my quiet place.

They walk up a path and sit down.

Lela: It's where I come to sit and spend time.
Vision: When you're lonely?
Lela: When I'm worried.
Vision: But you must get lonely?
Lela: It is a different kind of life here in the Land of Shadow.
Lela: Mostly I worry about you.
Gai-ashk: Me too. (Nodding, he turns to the audience)
Lela: You have a destiny to fulfill, a job to do, a life to live to its fullest. You shouldn't be spending your time dreaming about seeing me.
Vision: That's what my father, the Chief, said.
Lela: He speaks the truth.
Vision: And you?
Vision: And I for you.
Lela: Do you know why stone canoes float here? Why huge waves the size of a tee pee pass through you like nothing?
Vision: Because it's different here.
Lela: Because you've been here too long already. You must hurry before it's too late and you change too!
Vision: Why?
Lela: Or else you may get stuck here forever. Quickly!
Vision: But what if I don't want to leave you.
Lela: It is not up to you. (beat) Listen!... Mi-gi-zi, the Eagle. (The sound of Eagle’s wings flapping come up.)

They hurry back down to the shore, where the stone canoe is beached. A huge eagle appears over them. Its wings shoot rays of light. Its voice is loud and echoing.

Eagle: (Sternly) What are you doing here? (Pause. Vision freezes) I’m talking to you.
Gai-ashk: (Whispering) Now we’re in for it. (Cringing)
Vision: I came to visit Lela, Grandfather Eagle.
Eagle: You must go immediately.
Vision: But Grandfather can I not stay? Lela worries about me.
Eagle: You do not understand my grandson. Lela worries about you because you are not fulfilling your destiny . The Great Spirit has sent me to tell you your time has not yet come. Your duties are not yet completed. Go back and fulfill your role in life and grow into a good
brave man. *(The Eagle’s wings shoots light across the sky.)* This is what will make Lela happy.

Vision: I understand grandfather.

Eagle: And do you still want to stay?

Vision: *(He turns briefly to Lela.)* No, grandfather. *(She smiles and hugs him.)*

Eagle: Then you must leave the spirit of Lela, but she shall wait for you and shall always remain young and happy. One day when your work is finished, the Great Spirit shall call for you, and I will come and guide you back to The Land of Shadows to reunite you with your dear Lela.

Vision: Yes, grandfather. *(He prepares to push off the canoe.)*

Eagle: Always remember, when you miss Lela put a little tobacco down on Mother Earth and with good thoughts say a prayer for her and you will feel better. *(Lighting erupts from his wings again.)* You who are pure of heart are permitted to go home, but do not return here until you are summoned. Now go. I will blow you back to Old Woman.

*(Flaps wings)*

Vision shoves the canoe off and waves goodbye to Lela. She exits. As the Eagle flaps its wings, a wind comes up and the canoe starts moving.

Gia-ashk: *(To the audience)* Hey, we don’t even have to paddle!

*They are blown back to the tepee and greeted with open arms by Elo, the old guardian woman.*

Vision: We’re back grandmother!

Elo: My grandson you have shown you are loyal and brave. Your duty now is to help make every sad life happier. Replace the tears and sorrow of the people with laughter and joy. It is both the easiest and most difficult of tasks.

Vision: Thank you grandmother. I will do my best.

Gai-ashk: That calls for another worm!

Vision: And well deserved too!

Elo: Now hurry home. Your father, the Chief, is worried about you.

Vision and Gai-ashk wave goodbye and return to their journey. Elo likewise waves and enters her Tee Pee. As the Wise Man comes forward to speak to the audience, Vision arrives home to greet and hug his father. They exit.

Wise Man: *(Speaking over the action)* So Vision didn’t get stuck in the Land of Shadows after all. Close call though. Instead, he learned some very important teachings: Mi-gi-zi, the Eagle, told him he must live his life to the fullest… and Elo, the Old Woman, told him that his life long duty is to be good and help people. *(Beat. As he begins to exit.)* Well, it’s time for me to go now. I like to get up early and see the sun rise. That’s when I put my tobacco down on the ground and say a little prayer for all the people here, *(He waves his cane.)* there and everywhere. Yep, we all got to pitch in to make this ol’ Mother Earth of ours a better place to live. *(He waves goodbye and exits.)*
Phil Hall’s *White Porcupine*  
Review by: rob mclennan

After his Griffin-nominated *An Oak Hunch* (London ON: Brick Books, 2005), as well as over a dozen other book and chapbooks of poetry over the years, it’s good to see something new from Toronto poet Phil Hall in the form of his *White Porcupine* (Toronto ON: BookThug, 2007). More and more, Toronto’s BookThug, produced by poet Jay MillAr, has become not only a publisher of important Canadian (and some international) writers, but important writing. This new collection, this six part poem (as Hall calls it), works fragments reminiscent of perhaps the language-fragments of Paul Celan, or the ghazals of John Thompson; there are even parts of the poem that read as small essays, or small explorations of the works of other writers, such as this fragment talking to the poet Lorna Crozier, about her husband, the poet Patrick Lane:

Dear Lorna Crozier

perhaps you will remember that we first met in Saskatoon in 1980
I was 27 – wet – green – my thoughts already sludging to grey

I had just hitched – pie-eyed on potato champagne – from BC
you were still (or almost still) a Uher – swung high off the dance floor

then bowing to your corner – I met Patrick then also
I was wearing a Brewer’s Retail shirt with someone else’s name on it

& white painter’s pants – I must have looked like an employee of the hotel
when Pat handed me a bucket & sent me for ice – I just went

ice has never been delivered with more respect
this year I turned 50 & got a 10 year medallion – *dry grey*

for years I’ve been tinkering with an essay about Pat’s *The Weight*
trying to grow down through this bitter swirling thirst for – what?

eventually I will have to write a poem in praise of my ruinous father
no grouch or brainstorm or craft-as-sponge – I’ll need your equanimity

a calm – even half-joy – might still step clear in me – skittish – crepuscular
(each year’s point grows out of my hard head so slowly so late)

the spit in the porridge of this old square dance
continues to ferment the patterns & crops of us all

Writing six sections (“Verulam / Harvey…,” “Thanks All the Same,” “Spokeshave,” “Ruthlessly Local,” “Harmony Against Harm” and “Wrater”), Hall begins the book with a quote that, one would presume, isn’t there to apologize or explain, but to instead shine light: “*incomprehensibility is confession*” (Theodor Adorno). He goes on to write:
First – my first language – nonsense – over-hugged my second language – sense
*pre-morning fog in the field-hollows muffled the survey-quilt & the deerstock*

later my first language – sense – dampered my second language – nonsense
*a quilt over green smoke smothered the farmer-barloquin dubbed Quotidian*

on the first day of deer season away I rode a cock-hearse
*was locked in the stocks of my name in the public square*

until an actual poem came brandishing its turret key – but no language
*so I had to find one*

So much of Hall’s poetry is stripped-bare vulnerable, down to the bone, writing through and past his own fear, foibles, frustrations and past, into a poetry so emotionally raw and raw with language that it tears itself apart; what’s left is often the strength of the line, and a series of images that break through as a line of resistance.

My early earnestness
sickens me – I don’t want to be an I
would give tongue without origin-hunger
awarelessly inclusive – astute as lallia

*unread water tastes best*

out of two centuries of lyric noise
strident in pastoral crosshatch – this swarm
of I’s – dots & dashes (i) – frenzied
& brief above water

*thumbed spout-gush numb as light*

I would fly-tie an I almost an I
& float it down in its season

The beauty of any book by Phil Hall is that all of his concerns, threads, lines and considerations are put into the mix; there are no boundaries or breaks between, but a series of fragments that move only further out into the world. There is only the knife-edge, and the accumulation of line upon line; a line so fine it becomes a point.

*O Lord*
my shepherd my light

when I was delivered by You
my shadow had already crowned

& was there to catch my soft head
like a prayer mat on the dirt floor
but now it circles me
as You circle me – wolves

I would put on like long-johns
if I knew how to not believe

that boy who was – he swears
eating gravel with his hair on fire

when his bleat got sundered
by a snarl at the cloth door

Simply listen to the excerpt placed on the back cover of *White Porcupine*, an amalgam of single lines scattered throughout the 76-page volume:

Where marrow & tomorrow blur
our silences clenched in full bristle

*I want the snow’s quills to sea-anemone me!*
*I want the snow’s quills to St. Sebastian me!*

of the brush & the pen slicing through forgiveness

There are even small bits of ephemera slipped inside the book, including two postcards, one of a drawing by Hall (the third is a drawing as well), and an old photograph from his own collection. Hall is a big collector of ephemeral things, and you can see it in the way he produces his lines, slipping in bits of seemingly-random lines, threads and even word-usage, and even combining words when needed. If Hall were a visual artist, his work would be described as a scrapbook-collage, taking in bits and pieces from just about everything around him, including parts of his current and past life, much as the way the late American artist and Fluxus member Al Hansen did throughout his career, or the way Hansen’s own grandson Beck has done musically since the 1990s.

Through field-glasses I am auditing the loons & dreading my 50th birthday

I wonder if that fat prick – who – when I was 15 – hit me & threatened to cut my nuts off for selling blotter to his stupid niece – is dead yet

a loon’s beak opens to croon – but is over-dubbed by the local train’s hoot

our limestone – awash with fossil-shards – is being mulched to ‘slurry’ for toothpaste & haught away in white tank-cars

spray-painted – unreadable – the clunking past

*light is indifferent – we are in our own way*
“La Feuille” par Miguel Jimenez (Spain)
HISTORY OF THE LITERARY CULTURES
OF EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE:
Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries
Volume III: The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions
Edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope (Virginia Commonwealth U)
& John Neubauer (U of Amsterdam)
ISBN: 978 90 272 3455 1 -- EUR: €190.00 -- USD: $270.00

Reviewed by Fausto Bedoya

This collection of essays marks a significant departure from traditional modes of cultural scholarship. This is the third Volume in a series of studies on the literary cultures of East-Central Europe and features four large “nodes” of scholarship relating to: I. Publishing and Censorship, II. Theater as a Literary Institution (including Modernism: The Director Rules, and Theater Under Socialism), III. Forging Primal Pasts: The Uses of Folklore, and, IV. Literary Histories: Itineraries of National Self-Images. Each of these nodes is broken down into related sub-sections that include regional and cross-cultural perspectives. Edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope (Professor of English and Director of Media, Art and Text Ph.D. Program, Virginia Commonwealth U, Richmond, USA), and John Neubauer (Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, U Amsterdam, Netherlands), this scholarly compendium assembles cutting-edge knowledge by some of the foremost experts in the field. What is particularly remarkable about this Volume is the inter-connectedness and breadth of scholarship assembled around the key or “nodal” points of culture, a departure from more traditional, linear-minded and individualistic modes of scholarship.

Over 120 world-class scholars abound in this collaboration as part of an ongoing project on the history of the literary cultures. The principles of the series to which this volume belongs were outlined by its general editors, Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdés (University of Toronto). There are 21 other volumes in this same series covering topics including Expressionism, Symbolism, Avant-garde literatures of the 20th century, International Postmodernism, Caribbean literatures, as well as collections devoted to periods such as the Renaissance and the Romantics. What makes this recent Volume of particular interest is its success in capturing the essence of literary expression in East-Central Europe, while considering the impact of both longer and more recent histories. The scholarly research in this compendium is meticulous, detailed and accurate, a testament not only to the collaborating authors but to the editing skills of John Neubauer and Marcel Cornis-Pope. For example, focused attention is given to the censorship of some of the finest authors of the Twentieth Century in Bohemia, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Latvia with cross-references to censorship in the former Soviet Union.

Furthermore, the scholars in this volume have applied contemporary theoretical models to their subjects while contextualizing them within global and trans-national perspectives. Given the centuries of wars, border-clashes, cultural-exchanges, trans-migrations, and other manifold forms of influence, this approach is highly appropriate to the remarkable breadth and depth of cultures examined here. Even a cursory view of the works cited reveals references to the “who’s who” of world critical thinking but more importantly, included here are analyses of elements here that are as rare as they are salient. Focal points in the analyses cover critics and authors such as, Samuel Beckett, Homi Bhabha, Bertolt Brecht, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Marvin Carlson, Karel Capek, Anton Chekov, Jacques Derrida, Modris Eksteins, Hans Georg Gadamer, Marija Gimbutas, Johann Goethe, Algirdas Greimas, Robert Graves, Jerzy Grotowski, Michael Holquist, Lewis Hyde, Henrik Ibsen, Roman Jakobson, Hans Robert Jauss, Carl Jung, Karoly Kerenyi, Arthur Koeslter, Milan Kundera, Frederico Garcia Lorca, Gyorgi Lukacs, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Czeslaw Milosz, Jan Mukarovsky, Lazlo Nagy, Wa Thiango Ngugi, Andra Nieburga, Milorad Pavic, Josef Safarik, Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, Josep Skvorecky, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, August Strindberg, Tristan Tzara, and Vaira Vike Freiberga (former President of Latvian, theorist and specialist in mythology), to name only a few in an epic list of those who have reshaped European and world thinking in reference to criticism and literature. The depth of coverage spinning out of the common nodal points of discussion such as “censorship,” “theatre” or “mythology,” is invaluable for those who are interested in Foucauldian style genealogical traces of cultural influences and socio-cultural phenomena.
In the past, historical approaches to literature and culture have followed a variety of paths, each with their own limitations, including positivist and orthodox Marxist models, Hegelian organicist and teleological perspectives, nationalist views, discussions of "grand narratives. This volume avoids the weaknesses inherent in all of these approaches. The challenge with assembling this sort of scholarly compendium is the difficulty of finding scholars who are sufficiently multilingual and multidisciplinary to conduct comparative and historical analyses. When this volume and the two previous to it were originally conceived there were debates as to which socio-cultural groups should be included. The initial intention was to focus on all countries including the Baltic states that in August 1939 were somehow involved with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as well as other agreements between the Soviet Union and Germany. Complications arose as to whether the Baltics were part of Scandinavia and the fact that it was not until 1955 that Austria regained independence. Complications arise in how to address mass occupations such as that of the former Soviet Union or the Austro-Hungarian domination of Central-Europe. Additional complications include issues such as the Cold War (c. 1945-1990) during the period of the "iron curtain," and correlative hegemonies within the "Soviet Bloc." Further complications arise when considering the powerful influences of peripheral powers such as Turkey, and the deeper historical influences of power-bases such as the Ottoman Empire. If we add to this mix the role of religion and reactions to it, including Christian (Protestant and Catholic) Jewish, Muslim, agnostic, and atheist, then the complexities become even more apparent. Wisely, the plan became to abandon nation-based historical cultural tracings as impossible because they failed to consider the influences of co-relative and contiguous cultures. The ultimate direction of this volume is based on heterogenous analyses of cultures in this important geographic area. The resultant multi-faceted perspectives successfully avoid the pitfalls of paraphrase, cultural cliché, and stereotype.

This collection of inter-connected essays is highly successful in re-articulating the history of East-Central European literatures by considering the various "nodal" points through consistent comparative principles. Eschewing monological and didactic perspectives, the scholars in this collection offer un-constrained and cross-cultural viewpoints of literature as inherently epistemological, open, and dialogical in the senses employed by thinkers such as Umberto Eco, or Mikhail Bakhtin. While still considering geo-cultural influences, these scholars, say as much about the conjunctions as the disjunctions that range across this highly inter-ethnic and inter-cultural region. Notions of national cultural paradigms are reconsidered from marginalized perspectives that speak more of interfaces than isolated and singular dominant powers. Hence, essays that examine issues of censorship or perspectives on cultural identity during times of occupation reveal the diachronic and metamorphic nature of literatures as they respond to each other and to socio-cultural conditions. The essays included here do not attempt to be representative of specific cultural consciousnesses. Instead, by employing comparative models, these critics succeed in demonstrating trans-nationalisms, inter-regionalisms, and cosmopolitanisms, that are rhizomatic in structure. There is no unified over-view of an organic whole. Instead, micro-histories are paralleled with macro-histories linked to linguistic, socio-cultural, political-economic, and military-industrial forces which have shaped and re-shaped the oral and written cultures of these regions, often through forceful intervention. Salient and informed contributions are featured by noted scholars such as Endre Bojtár, Karl Jirgens, Violeta Kelertes, Banuta Rubess, Robert Pynsent, Jolanta Natalia Sujecka, Mihaly Szegedy-Maszak, Josef Szili, Juri Talvet, Ewa Wachocka, among many other excellent thinkers, too numerous to mention here, including editors Cornis-Pope and Neubauer themselves. Contained within this approach are analyses of bio-texts, inter-textual influences, transformations of education, media and communications. "National awakenings" are contextualized within larger developments and the impact of cultural transactions. Presuppositions regarding national identities are deconstructed, and notions of "culture" as some imagined or unified phenomenon, definable through fixed precepts, are abandoned. Instead, there are micro-histories covering influential events such as the emergence of literary journals, Zamisdat publications, newspapers, publishing houses, literary societies, early stage productions, as well as the inception of theatres, academies, libraries and other cultural phenomena emerging in the face of larger cultural forces. In addition, this volume examines revivals of language after years of oppression, the role of translation, the psychic and political impact of censorship, myth in oral and written traditions, the political role of presses and publishing houses, the impact of historical fictions, the impact of canonization and the shaping of cultural identities as inspired by literature. This study will prove highly worthy not only to those who are interested in East-Central European culture, but also those who seek scholarly and analytic alternatives to exclusionary and hegemonic approaches to the understanding of literature. This volume features a refreshing, pragmatic and enlightened methodology that interprets and illuminates regional cultural developments while recognizing the transformative effects of the larger regional and global milieu.
“Waving 2 U” by Karl Jirgens (Canada)