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EDITORIAL

25 Years in print! A cause for celebration! In this, our 25th anniversary issue (Part II), we continue our mandate by featuring both new and established postmodern artists, writers and thinkers. We open this issue with interviews featuring Joyce Carol Oates and Alistair MacLeod, two internationally acclaimed authors with links to the University of Windsor and Southwestern Ontario. This issue also features conceptual works by innovative thinkers including Brian Henderson, Matthew Holmes and Michael Winkler. These three reconsider the intimate connections between thought and language. And, we present fresh new fictions including the avant-garde stylistics of Stuart Ross, Bob Wakulich and Richard Scarsbrook. Delivering a soupçon of international tastes we present a cluster of Baltic authors including Larissa Kostoff, an emerging Toronto writer with Latvian background who recently guest-edited an issue of Descant devoted to Latvia; the remarkable Latvian poet Juris Kronbergs who resides in Sweden and who recently completed a literary tour of the USA and Canada including readings at Stanford and the University of Toronto; Jüri Talvet, professor at the influential Tartu University in Estonia, and founder and editor of Interlitteraria, the international journal of Comparative Literature; plus the critically acclaimed Antanas Sileika who runs the highly successful summer writing institute at Humber College in Toronto. We also bring to you outstanding visual and intermedia pieces including photographics by Rick Simon (gracing our cover), textual graphics by Carol Stetser, illuminated photo-poetics by George Elliott Clarke and Ricardo Scipio, as well as the remarkable new opera Shadowtime by Charles Bernstein. Bernstein’s intermedia opera is based on the life of Walter Benjamin and features music by the distinguished composer, Brian Ferneyhough. Further, this issue offers a new wave of creations by prize-winning and celebrated poets Roy Miki, Di Brandt, Doug Barbour, Sheila Murphy, Christopher Dewdney, Jeff Gundy, Margaret Christakos, Rachel Zolf, rob McLennan, and Carla Hartsfield to name only a few. We thank the Canada Council for the Arts for its ongoing support and we especially thank, you, our readers, for your ongoing support and decades of loyalty! Meanwhile, stay tuned for our next special issue featuring contemporary poetics in honour of Frank Davey and his remarkable achievements as a pre-eminent editor, writer and thinker. For now, we invite you to turn the page, and join our celebration of Rampike’s 25th year in print!

– Karl Jirgens (Publisher/Editor-in-Chief).
This interview with Joyce Carol Oates, happened in conjunction with the University of Windsor HRG (Humanities Research Group) Humanities Week during September of 2005. This year, the HRG, headed by Dr. Kate McCrone, has featured a series of Distinguished Speakers at the University of Windsor, including Joyce Carol Oates, Anton Kuerti, and Linda Hutcheon. Joyce Carol Oates kindly granted permission to publish her talk, and granted an interview to Rampike magazine. She is a prolific author with over thirty novels in print, numerous plays and collections of poetry, nearly two dozen short story collections, and nine collections of essays. Some of her recent novels include Blonde (2000), Middle Age Romance (2001), I’ll Take You There (2002), and Tatooed Girl (2003). In this interview, Joyce Carol Oates talks about her approaches to writing and her latest book of collected essays The Faith of a Writer: Life, Craft, Art (Harper Collins, 2003).

Between 1968 and 1978, Oates taught at the University of Windsor, in Canada. During this immensely productive decade, she published new books at the rate of two or three per year, all the while maintaining a full-time academic career. Though still in her thirties, Oates had become one of the most respected and honoured writers in the North America. In 1978, Oates moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where she continues to teach in Princeton University's creative writing program. She and her husband, Ray Smith, also operate a small press and publish a literary magazine, The Ontario Review. Joyce Carol Oates has received high critical acclaim for her novels including Missing Mom, The Tattoo Girl, and her latest, The Falls. Her novel Blonde (2000) was a National Book Award nominee and New York Times best-seller. A recipient of the National Book Award and the Pen/Malamud Award for Excellence in Short Fiction, Joyce Carol Oates is the Roger S. Berlind Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Princeton University. In 2003 she was a recipient of the Common Wealth Award for Distinguished Service in Literature.
KJ: I heard a funny story about someone who applied for a job at the University of Windsor, and hesitated to accept the position because they were afraid you would write about them.

JCO: Well, I might write about them, but only if they’re interesting.

KJ: Thanks for writing The Faith of a Writer – I found it inspiring in many ways and I felt that it reaches out to aspiring as well as established writers. And, thanks for agreeing to do this interview for Rampike.

JCO: Well thank you. And you know we publish a magazine too, called the Ontario Review. The Ontario Review published one of the very first stories by Alistair MacLeod. He was always a wonderful writer. He writes so slowly, but gradually he accumulated an impressive quantity of great stories, and we were publishing them. We’ve published some others from U Windsor including Eugene McNamara, Peter Stevens, John Ditsky and Tom Dilworth.

KJ: In The Faith of A Writer, you say that if you are a writer then you must sacrifice yourself to your art. You also say that such a sacrifice to art has a price on it in terms of the human relationships one has: family, friends, loved ones, and so on.

JCO: I think people need to understand that writers and artists need a lot of time to themselves. I have never been sympathetic to the view that, for example, Eugene O’Neill’s family resented his writing. That’s ridiculous. Eugene O’Neill was a great genius. If you married Einstein, would you want him to sit around the dining room with you and play cards or something? My husband and I spend a lot of time working, separately, and then we get together after. It’s just something that is understood.

KJ: I have a couple of questions about your work habits as a writer. Do you set aside a number of hours to write per day or per week?  

JCO: Oh, I don’t live my life on those terms. I compose or “write” when I run, and I do a lot of running. I do a lot of travelling, too. I write when I travel. I write on airplanes, and in hotels. You can get a lot of writing done when you travel. Do you know the writing of Paul Auster?

KJ: Sure, I love his work – he did the screenplay for the film Smoke (1995) which was quite excellent. There was strong critical acclaim for that production. We were fortunate to do an interview with him for Rampike a few years back.

JCO: Paul’s terrific. He writes in long-hand and he writes anywhere. He says writing is very painful and he hates it, but he can do it in a hotel as well as at home, because he’s toiling away almost anywhere. I’m sort of like Paul, but I don’t hate it.

KJ: It’s amazing how many writers work in long-hand, I know that Alistair MacLeod does, so do Nino Ricci, Paul Auster, among others. Can you say more about your own mode of composition.

JCO: When I’m running, I’m thinking of what I’m going to write, and I find it very pleasurable. Do you run?

KJ: A bit. I used to swim a lot and did bicycling too. Then I got into martial arts.

JCO: I see. I like bicycling too, and I find swimming and bicycling are also meditative. What kind of martial arts do you do?

KJ: I do Tae Kwon Do which is similar to Karate or Kung Fu in some ways, except that it is of Korean origin. The philosophy behind it can be partly understood through the “Um-Yang” or “Yin-Yang” symbol on the Korean flag which features a sine wave denoting process and fluidity, otherwise known as the “path of the dragon” or the “warrior’s path.” This path denotes a condition of flux and marks a path between two worlds, or between polar opposites. Co-incidentally, this idea of opposites is similar to the concept you raise in “‘JCO’ and me (After Borges),” the interview you do with yourself in The Faith of a Writer.

JCO: In San Francisco you see a lot of people doing Tai Chi, which I think is similar to Tae Kwon Do.

KJ: Yes, the fundamental principles are quite similar.

JCO: If I was younger, I think I’d find martial arts appealing, it’s kind of like dance, the fluid motions. It’s very beautiful, almost theatrical.

KJ: Yes, it can be very dance-like and in a way the moves can tell a story. I’ve worked some martial arts into some inter-media performance works.

JCO: Oh, so are you interested in theatre?

KJ: Oh, yeah. I’ve done a lot of performances at festivals and so on.

JCO: I’m quite interested in theatre too.

KJ: I wanted to ask you about that because you talk about theatre in this new book. Maybe you could say something more about your interest in the stage or staged works?

JCO: Well, I certainly encourage my students to work towards performance and to use different...
media. Most of my plays are based just on language, but some go beyond that. One of my first plays is about a couple being interviewed on a television show by a talk show host, you just hear his voice coming in and they’re sitting there. On the stage in the background are films or videos, images of what they are saying. They stumble and are hesitant because they are completely out of their depth, and nervous, and this voice is sort of exploiting them, nagging them and revealing their foolishness. Gradually it comes to light that they are completely in denial, that their son was the one who murdered a girl whose body was found in their house. The play has been done frequently, and the images that directors sometimes choose are very interesting. But, I didn’t have anything to do with that aspect. It’s what the director does to choreograph the multi-media, lights, and images. Eventually, those poor people are reduced to tears. It’s not that much of a parody – I think it’s more of a tragedy.

**KJ:** A lot of your work is tragic but often based on actual figures or events (such as the Detroit race riots of 1967, the Chappaquiddick incident, the Jeffrey Dahmer case, and more recently, the life of Norma Jean Baker and her transformation into Marilyn Monroe.

**JCO:** Yes, I was trying to get a texture to her life that was difficult to do because of my sympathy for her. A novel like *Zombie* (1995) is a different adventure. It’s more like a dramatic monologue in a number of short takes where the person is talking. But with Norma Jean and Marilyn Monroe and *Blonde*, it was a more complete narrative, almost like a nineteenth century novel conjoined with a postmodernist novel, where I really had a lot of detail and did a lot of research into popular culture and movies. In a way, I’d like to try something like that again, but in another way it was so exhausting emotionally that I’m not sure I could do it.

**KJ:** Do you do a lot of research when working on your novels?

**JCO:** No, not usually, just where it fits. A monumental novel, by which I mean a really long novel, a thousand pages or more, usually does require a lot of detail just because there is a lot of whatever that can fit into the language, but a novella can ride on its own language. That’s because with the great nineteenth century novels, people read them to learn something and I want to provide that. But, if you do research, then you learn something and you’re passing it on and distilling it for people. I did a book on boxing and it came out in 1987, and that was a fairly short book. – I would love to do something like that again, but I haven’t found a subject. You have to really care about the subject. You have to really care.

**KJ:** In *The Faith of the Writer* you talk about the urge to write being almost as powerful as the sex drive. Freud believed that the death and sex drives are interconnected within the Id, through the Eros and Thanatos principles. The energies of Eros and Thanatos seem very strong in your writing. Do you think there is a connection between these drives and the subject matter you choose to write on?

**JCO:** I suppose. I’m very interested in drama and I think there is something beautiful and exciting in a dramatic movement, whether it’s a tragedy, or whether you pull back and the person doesn’t die, but has some life-transforming experience. But when we write, we’re embarking on an adventure and the adventures can be very exciting and thrilling, and there’s a pleasure in just seeing what happens. In real life, our stories are usually very long and meandering. A love relationship can go on for twenty-five years and then just crumble slowly, but you don’t do that in art. In art it has to be condensed and it breaks down into a number of dramatic scenes, and it all comes to some conclusion, and life is not like that. I lost both my parents in the fairly recent past, and it’s not like the death of King Lear. So, if you’re writing about a realistic death it’s challenging. -- My friend Edmund White wrote about the death of his lover through AIDS, and he really and seriously wrote about it without all of the romantic gloss. It was not pretty, the slow and ugly decline. But we can’t usually do that in art. You have to transmogrify. Like the last time you spoke to your father, maybe your father was completely incoherent, but you can’t do that, it has to be a little more like King Lear. So, we confront this all the time, through Thanatos and Eros. I guess Eros to me, is the spirit of surprise, and creativity and a kind of Laurentian energy that is like sunlight moving across the water, and it’s so thrilling and exciting. I get thrilled by both landscapes and cityscapes. I was driving through Detroit yesterday, and it is such a ravaged landscape. I like the landscapes that I live in, but they’re very tame, comparatively, sort of upper middle class. Living in Princeton, is probably a bit like Riverside Drive if you’re living around here. I remember, because I lived here for a while. And it’s nice to live there, but it doesn’t inspire me to write.
**JCO:** Yes, that’s the problem, because satire is a trivial genre, a genre into which you put a lot of energy, but you don’t get much out. Unless you’re Jonathan Swift, or Pope, it’s not worth attempting.

**KJ:** I guess we’re left with the children of chaos, Eros and Thanatos, with art coming out of chaos.

**JCO:** Yes, that’s right. Coming out of chaos, and going back into chaos. And real chaos, like the New Orleans disaster, is not any fun. You can’t do anything with it. Art only comes along when you organize the chaos, and do something with it.

**KJ:** So, you’re still running as a way of composing?

**JCO:** Still running, and walking, bicycling, I really love to be in motion. The only time I sit still for very long is when I’m teaching. I teach two writing workshops and courses in literature. I also have two or three senior students working on theses. It’s very nice. Toni Morrison is one of my colleagues. Toni doesn’t teach the workshops but she does other things. Some of the other Princeton faculty in the Program in Creative Writing include Paul Muldoon, Yusef Komunyakaa, C.K. Williams, Edmund White, and Chang-rae Lee to mention only a few. So there are a number of interesting people.

**KJ:** In the last essay, “‘JCO’ and I (After Borges),” in The Faith of a Writer, you give a privileged view of self rather than the writer known as “Joyce Carol Oates.” You finish with a tantalizing bit, left to the audience’s discretion by saying “for once not she, but I am writing these pages, or so I believe” (p. 155). The ambiguity at the end of that statement raises wonderful paradoxes reminiscent of some of Borges’ labyrinths.

**JCO:** Yes, the essay is after Borges. I’m very good friends with Dan Halpern who used to publish a magazine called Antaeus, and I said one day, why don’t we do a series of writers responding to Borges’ self-interview, and I’ll do the first one. And Dan sent out the idea to all these different people, like Margaret Atwood, and John Updike, all sorts of people. And he got wonderful responses. The one done by John Updike was just great. Anyway, I think you often feel like there is your private self, your family self, the self you are when you’re with your parents, you know, there’s a sort of social self, which can have little or nothing at all to do with the writing self. I’m often astonished by the difference in some of my writer friends as people, and what they’re writing. There’s no connection. Sometimes there is. But sometimes there isn’t, especially with the men. The men are the ones who are the most radical. Bob Coover, for example. You could never deduce his personality or his self from anything he’s written. With Paul Auster, you can see a little bit of a connection. There’s a certain tenderness and wistfulness, winsomeness in his prose that is definitely in his personality too. John Updike is very much like his writing. There’s a real continuity there, John Barth is very different. Beckett’s a fantastic personality. He sort of looks like his art, very tall and cadaverous. And there’s something about his eyes, maybe he had cataracts or something. He’s kind of like a skeleton, and then his writing is skeletal.

**KJ:** When he heard he’d been nominated for the Nobel Prize, he said “what a catastrophe!”

**JCO:** I know. He hated to be famous. He felt damned by fame. He hated people to be looking at him, but he had a good sense of humour, something like Charlie Chaplin.

**KJ:** I was thinking about the configuration or topology of self and writer as a kind of Möbius strip. It appears to be two-sided but in fact is it only one-sided.

**JCO:** Yes, that’s right. And to add to it, those of us who are teachers are conjoined in a kind of communal contractual relationship, where basically because we are teachers, we are supportive and upbeat and not cynical, but then when we’re writing – alone, with language – the results may not be so socially benign. This is the paradox of the artist.

**KJ:** You did a lot of research for the section of the book on the so-called “failed” writer. You list so many famous authors who either failed in the eyes of others or who thought of themselves as failures. Did it take you long to gather that information?

**JCO:** I guess it’s just being a teacher and accumulating that kind of information. I think that James Joyce provides the best example because he couldn’t get that initial novel published, so then he wrote Portrait of the Artist. It’s like someone who is so clumsy they can’t even paint a house right, and then he goes off and becomes Jackson Pollock. It’s amazing how the failure becomes the great means of the great genius. Not just a success but a tremendous success.

**KJ:** So, what are you working on now?

**JCO:** Right now I’m between projects, and when I’m between projects I usually work on shorter things. I’m doing reviews for the New...
York Review of Books, and I work on short stories, so, I’m working on some short stories right now, and I’m looking for a subject for the next big novel. I guess I’m in that stage where I’m looking around, thinking, looking at landscapes.

KJ: How much of the ending to a story do you usually have in mind before you can move ahead on a longer fiction, like a novel?

JCO: Well, I think I’m a little more like James Joyce than most writers, and James Joyce had pretty well everything figured out. I’m not as obsessive as Joyce, but I couldn’t be like D.H. Lawrence who basically plunged in and just started writing, not really knowing where he was going. He would have some vague ideas and some people, and not really know how it’s going to end. I could never write that way. And Alistair MacLeod was saying that he writes one sentence after another and that at a certain point he writes the final sentence. Well, I always have an ending, and I have a beginning, and I usually have a title, and it’s some sort of triangular relationship between beginning, title and ending that is difficult to talk about and is mysterious, I guess. Because the title can encompass the whole essence, and the beginning, I know where it starts in time, and the ending ends in a particular time. Then there are the pages in the middle that give me the trouble. I have to run and walk a lot to work on a novel. I spend a lot of time trying to work out this trajectory.

KJ: Many of your works are tragic in form and of course that form has served your art admirably. Yet, I’ve heard some say that the twentieth century is a period of ironic art.

JCO: Well, the second half of the twentieth century certainly was. Everything was saturated in irony. When I think of Donald Barthelme, he was extremely alcoholic, Don was living in an irony saturated world in Manhattan, a certain part of Manhattan with a particular group of people, hard-drinking, smoking, and a lot of them were artists. And everything they did including pop art, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, everything was mockery. Can you live your life with everything being mockery? You can’t actually build a life on that. So, it would be hard to be Don’s friend, or be married to him, or have a child with him. And I think these are gestures that work well in a young man or a young writer, but then you may want to move on emotionally to a novel that encompasses more. It’s like living in a nicer house, but so long as you’re living in certain parts of Manhattan with certain sorts of people whom you see all the time, you have to have that mode, because that’s the way those people talk. Everything is sort of sophisticated. But let’s say you move away to somewhere else, to the Midwest, there’s a different sensibility. Family starts to be important, there’s a tribal sense, religion, children, other things start to get more important. But the gestural art that works when you’re younger, that’s kind of angry and funny, you can’t really do that when you’re 50 and 60. You have to move beyond that. But I’m still very much attracted to that kind of gestural art. And I love the theatre, and I love experimental theatre, to me the theatre is the most experimental of all the media. It lends itself to dance, lighting, language, and music, all sorts of different things.

KJ: I note that you return frequently to the notion of mysticism, a child-like perception of the world, and the necessity of keeping that sense alive as a “key” to the mysterious room where one creates. You explain that there is a need for the writer to gain access to that “special world of which he alone has the key” (p. 60). With reference to the idea of that key, have you given much attention to dreams and dream-like states? You sometimes speak of a half-awakened reverie gazing and daydreaming through the window when composing in the opening of your essay, “The Writer’s Studio” (p. 137).

JCO: When we lived here in Windsor, I loved to be on the river, I could just look out and do my writing, and look out the window, and it was very quiet. And I think you need that kind of quiet, even if you’re not actually working and you’re just looking out the window. You can daydream. An hour goes by and you haven’t done anything, it’s kind of wonderful!

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Editor’s Note: As a follow-up to this interview, in our next issue, Rampike will publish a talk on writing given by Joyce Carol Oates at the University of Windsor.
Thought Experiment
by Brian Henderson

Try this. You are to be represented as..., say the voices. Let’s forget the as for the moment.
Representation is always under the threat of substitution, but is not that, nor is it as far gone as doubling, nor as weak as as if. It’s more like giving an impression, an overlay of difference.
For instance, at the Dresden station I saw a fair number of people who gave the impression of being railway passengers.

A question along these lines of some import, given the malign forces afoot, might then be If I am to be represented, to whom does such representing belong?

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Birds

I am conscious of how incredible this must seem to other human beings, but in spring the song birds: finches, vireos; in summer, swallows; and in winter, crows, were miracled with speech, which had been inscribed in them, and would repeat what they had imbibed interminably, and because they worked on a scale of vibration, if I inserted, by thinking, a word of similar sound, they would stop their ritual libation and pass over into the genuine feeling of delibility in an annihilation of chatter. Don’t forget all representing is nonsense; quicksilver might shine in the gleam of human being, distinctly encouraged me.
And these were everything I could take with me into the night of my cell.

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Representing Questions

What can be more definite for a human being than what he has lived through and felt on his own body? But when someone says that he once used to be a drawing in a book, and only recently escaped to come here to the asylum, what can one say to that?

What if she had never existed and people only thought that she did?

Can each life really be one miracle after another?
TIME and PLACE
Interview with ALISTAIR MACLEOD by Karl Jirgens

Alistair MacLeod is the author of No Great Mischief, (1999) which has been translated into 15 languages, including Japanese. He is a professor Emeritus at the University of Windsor and each summer he returns to Cape Breton to write. MacLeod still writes out each sentence of his books in long hand and then rewrites it until it is right. His other books include two collections of short stories, The Lost Salt Gift of Blood (1976) and As Birds Bring Forth the Sun (1986). His most recent book Island: The Complete Stories presents 16 stories in chronological order to allow readers to follow his progress as an author. No Great Mischief has won many honours, including The Trillium Award for Fiction, two Libris Awards, one for Fiction Book of the Year, and the other for Author of the Year. In 2001, his novel, No Great Mischief won the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the world's richest literary prize for a single work of fiction. He is a member of the Royal Society, a recipient of the Queens Jubilee Medal and holds eleven Honorary Doctorate degrees.

KJ: Do you ever think about definitions of writing in terms of modernity or post-modernity?
AM: No (laughs).
KJ: I thought so, but I thought I’d ask anyway.
AM: I just write.
KJ: There are some readers and critics who think your fictions and especially your novel, feature interesting post-modern techniques.
AM: That’s good. I’m always glad to hear that. It makes me seem more clever than I really am.
KJ: I think you’re being too modest. Perhaps we could talk about islands, one of the motifs you keep coming back to in your writing. The idea of islands and islanders emerges as a kind of mentality with recurring images of lighthouses on islands. Could you comment on that?
AM: Well, I think the lighthouse is interesting, because for a long time on the coast everybody knew that lighthouses were important, but then nobody knew if the province should be responsible for them, or if the federal government should be responsible for them. Then finally the federal government became responsible for them. And the idea of the light is interesting, because it generally warns people away, you know—“don’t come here you’re boat will crash,” but when there were families keeping the light, if you didn’t crash or wreck, then you were always glad to go towards the light, because they would offer food and so on, and even in the lighthouses around the area where I come from, although some of them now no longer have families, they generally have little houses and a supply of food and so on, in case somebody does get wrecked there. There would be cans of beans or something, you know, or basic things just to keep people alive. So, in one interpretation the light says “stay away, stay away, stay away,” but when you get too close, it kind of says “come along, come along, come along,” so it’s a repulsion/attraction kind of idea.

KJ: The double meaning is intriguing. I understand you’ve been touring a lot because of the great success of your novel No Great Mischief – can you tell us something about your travels?

AM: Well I’ve been traveling quite a lot for the last two or three years. I travel a lot with the novel in Canada, and I travel quite a lot with it in the United States. I travel for the hardcover edition, back and forth, and then when it came out in paperback with Vintage, they sent me on another tour back and forth across the United States, and then when the short stories came out on hardcover with an American publisher, I traveled for them, and then when it came out in paperback I traveled again. So I sort of did four tours of the U.S. with it. Then, when it was published in Europe, I generally would go to Europe with it because they would want me to go. So I would go to Spain, or I would go to Finland, or I would go to Germany, or I’d go to Sweden, or whatever. I think that’s just fine. People like to see who wrote the book. Most of the books in the world were written by people who are now dead so sometimes when the people can see a living author, they think the living author is perhaps more exciting than he or she really is, but at least one is alive, so sometimes you go into places, Universities perhaps, or I go to high schools, and they say—“you wrote this book?” and I say “yes,” and they say, “and you’re still alive?” And sometimes I go at the request of external affairs; I do talks on Canadian literature. I’ll go to New Zealand or I’ll go to Cuba, or Australia, and so on, and sometimes the government will send three or four Canadian writers. So, if they ask I generally go, since as I said, I’m only going to be alive for a while. I think if you’re part of the writing community you should go, you know, not everyone feels this way, but Margaret Atwood says its something like being a blood donor, you know. If you want to have the blood for your own transfusion, then maybe you should give some back.

KJ: Good idea.

AM: So, if someone asks me to go and talk about Canadian literature somewhere, I generally go. This doesn’t mean of course that I go to every single high school or every single grade school. I go around Windsor quite a lot because I live here, but there are only 25 hours in the day.

KJ: You write both extended fiction and short fiction. For example, your collection, Island (2000) gathers together your previously published short stories and one new one. Would you say your approach to writing short fiction is different from extended fiction, and if so, how?

AM: I don’t know. When I was writing the short stories, I always wanted to be intense, because I always thought of myself as running a hundred yard dash or something like that, where you just run as fast as you can. Then, when you’re writing the novel it’s sort of like running a marathon, or something. You have to run 26 miles instead of a hundred yard dash, and so there’s always the worry, I suppose, that maybe I’m going to burn up my enthusiasm and my energy on the first few pages. But, I thought that when I was writing the novel, that I would try to maintain the intensity of the short stories, and I think I’m fairly satisfied with it, because I still think it’s kind of intense. It’s longer, and the latter short stories that I wrote were maybe 45 pages long, so it seems they were getting longer, and it seemed that I needed more space. I wanted more space. So my idea was: if I was going on a short journey it might be in a Volkswagen, but now I’d go on a long journey and I’d need a bus. You can have
more people in the bus, and you can go on a longer trip.

KJ: I’ve heard it said that you tend to write about a concept, rather than focusing on a specific direction in plot. No Great Mischief closes with the idea that “All of us are better when we’re loved.” Is this a regular approach in your writing and what are the types of concepts that interest you most?

AM: Well, I generally have an idea, somewhere, when I’m writing the novel, or when I was writing the short stories. I think that with the kind of person that I am, I like to know what I’m doing, and I think most people should know what they’re doing. You don’t want to take your car to somebody who doesn’t know what he’s doing. But somehow there’s this idea that writers just kind of write, and it will become something. But, sooner or later, I say to myself, “what am I doing here.” Kafka had a sign above his desk that said “Is this novel really necessary?” So, I say: “this is going to be my story about choice,” or “this is going to be my story about vision,” or “this is going to be my story about the tension that we emotionally yearn for, and what we rationally realize,” or “this is going to be my story about loyalty,” and on and on. When I’m half way through, I write the last sentence of the work, because I think then – to go back to an earlier metaphor perhaps – it seems to be like a lighthouse, that I can journey towards. So, “all of us are better when we’re loved” is then end of No Great Mischief, and that image that I have there of the fresh water well coming up through the ice and the salt and so on, I had that image almost from the beginning. I said: “now this is the image I’m going to have at the end of this novel.” So, at the end of my short story “The Boat,” I say: “There was not much left of my father physically, as he lay there, with the brass chains on his wrists and the seaweed in his hair.” So, I wrote that before I was finished it. This is the last thing I’m going to say to the reader. Or, you know, the conclusion of “Vision”: “And forever difficult to see and understand the tangled, twisted strands of love.” So, that was my last sentence there. So I work in that way. When I’m half way through, I have my final paragraph or my final sentence, or my final page, because I find that helps me, you know. And as I said earlier, I think that you should know what you’re doing. So that’s why I say now, “ok, this is going to be my story about vision,” or “this is going to be my story about choice.” Now who am I going to have in my story? Well, I’m going to have, you know, one old man, and three children, or four women, or two dogs, or whatever, and then the drama will work out against the landscape. So, I think sometimes, you get this idea that writers just sit down and just write and write and write and write, and then when it’s finished they’ll be something there. Maybe for some people that is, but I think, for me, since I like to know what I’m doing … well, if you were a carpenter, and you were out there with your nails and your hammer, you should know what you’re doing. Are you making a deck or are you making a doorstep, you know? You wouldn’t say “what are you doing there Charles?” and Charles would say, “I’m just driving nails into boards. It’ll be something after a while.” And then you would say, “no, it won’t be anything! It’ll just be a mess!” So you would say: “Ok, what kind of doorstep?”

(higher voice) “Could it be three steps?”

“Ok. How wide is it going to be?”

(higher voice) “It’s going to be this wide.”

And then, you get halfway through it, and you realize – this isn’t going to be any good. You could add another step, or take one off, but you still half to follow a plan … or so I think.

KJ: Some critics have observed that your earlier stories such as those in The Lost Salt Gift of Blood address questions of uncertainty while later collections such as As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories mark a movement into a more affirmative view. Yet, all engage with notions of death. While there appears to be a shift in attitude in the writing, there remains a consistent attention to what you’ve called the “killing professions” such as mining, fishing, farming, where lives can suddenly end. Could you comment on these shifts and consistencies?

AM: I don’t know if I’m really aware of the shift between one volume and another. The way those stories are written, they’re not written in a single sitting, or over a single year. There might be one story a year … one story a year … one story a year … for maybe seven years, and then you put them all together. So, I think maybe if my interest shifts, I’m going to write a story about this, or I’m going to write a story about myth, or I’m going to write a story about people who are affected by history and who know a lot about history, or I’m going to write a story about people who are affected by history but don’t
know anything about history. Their history is all wrong. These are going to be my subjects, you know. So, I think the subjects change a little bit. And the landscape doesn’t change very much. The professions, I think, grow out of the landscape. I've always been very interested in geography, and how geography affects the lives of the people who are given that geography, who inhabit that geography. I believe, to a certain extent, people write about what worries them. People who live on sea coasts worry about the tides, and they worry about fishing. People on the prairies don’t worry about tides, they worry about droughts and they worry about grasshoppers, and too much rain, or not enough rain. Everybody in Canada worries about winter, I think, unless you live in Vancouver, because it’s a cold country. People in the winter are getting snow tires, and getting anti-freeze, and putting plastic over their windows, and so on. Nobody checks their furnace in Kingston, Jamaica. They have worries too, but their worries are different. Winter will kill people in Canada. Winter won’t kill anyone in San Juan, Porto Rico. Something else will happen to them because their geography is different. Now, getting back to your original question, I think that people who work in extractive industries, lets say people who work in logging, or people who work in mining, or people who work in fishing, farmers and so on… these are people who work with their bodies, and when you work with your body, you are in physical danger in a way that you are not if you work in an office, you know. People who work with their bodies have stress, as well as people who work in offices. But, they are afraid that they might lose their lives, or that they might lose their fingers, or that they might lose their feet, or their eyes, or whatever happens. So, if you go to certain areas of the world where people are in extractive industries, you’ll see a lot of people who are missing something, more so than you’d see if you went somewhere, let's say, downtown urban areas.

KJ: I’d like to ask about your style. Your novel and your short stories feature recurring patterns of flux emphasized by imagery and narrative flow. I note that your writing is rich with images of rain, tears, hair, salt water, alcohol, wind, conversation, language itself (including Gaelic), songs, blood and bodily fluids. And your narrative patterns return to the flux of life and time, as well as a conceptual flux or "imagination's mist." – All of this this seems to tie in with the recurring image of the Celtic knot in your writing. Could you comment on the Celtic knot with reference to flux imagery, narrative and sense of flux?

AM: Well, the image of the Celtic knot, I suppose the major image is of the never-ending circle. You know, what goes around comes around, or whatever. Some of those earlier images that you mentioned, the natural images, like water droplets or mist, or something like that... the rain comes down, then the sun comes out, moisture evaporates, it goes up, you know. These are sort of Shelleyian images actually, when you’re looking at water and mist and rainbows, you know, like light going through water droplets. I think what’s interesting about the mist, and the rain and the snow, and the wind is that they’re sort of timeless, and they’re also kind of inconsistent, in the way that weather is. You can’t control it. You can’t say “today I will have a rainbow.” You have to listen to the weather forecast first, and if the wind is a certain way, than this may happen, or may not happen. So, a lot of that imagery, I think, is elemental imagery, and people who spend a lot of time out in the weather are very much affected by the weather, and they react to the weather. You see, in the kind of urban world in which many of us live now, you can just be in an office such as this, and it can be 70 degrees all the time, or whatever your comfort level is. It can be 70 degrees on the 15th of January, and it can be 70 degrees on the 15th of July, because you can control your personal weather. Whether that’s good or bad, that’s the way it is. But, if you are in the outdoors, you’ll always have to worry whether you’re going to get your boat home before the storm comes, or whether the blizzard is going to obliterate your highway, you know, or things of that nature.

KJ: And in relation to that, the novel and a number of your short stories embrace notions of a slowly eroding presence, the rocky coastline of Cape Breton, for example. Rock, like memory, eventually loses the battle of permanence. In No Great Mischief, there is an interplay of process and permanence, kinesis and stasis – is this a way of alluding to the act of writing in the face of time, as well?

AM: I think all writers like to think that when they’re writing – like to think that their work would last forever. So, I think serious writers like to think that they are communicating with
the world, and not just with their contemporary world. I believe that if literature is done well enough, it will kind of transcend time, as it will transcend language, because I find, well I’m impressed that pieces I wrote have been translated into Japanese, and they’ve been translated by the Israelis, and by the Albanians, and they’ve been translated into Turkish, and into these languages, with the idea that these stories, which are set in Canada, for the most part, are going to be read by people who have never been to Canada, or who have never been to this particular region of Canada. And I think that that’s a good reason to write, although, you know, when I began writing, I didn’t say “this will last forever. The Albanians will definitely like this,” you know, or “this line is for the Turks.” You don’t operate like that at all. But, I think that some writing lasts and some writing doesn’t. Literature is wonderful in explaining to us the way people live, so we know a lot about Greek civilization because the Greeks were literate, and we know a lot about the Hebrews because of the Bible, but when you go on and see those stones of Easter Island, or even Stonehenge, something happened there, but you’re not really quite sure what. These faces face inland. Who went to all this work? You wish you could have a field guide. I mean, you get a field guide at Stonehenge, but no one’s sure if it’s really right, you know, it has something to do with the Solstice, and the longest day and the shortest day, and the light and so on. I guess what I’m saying is that literature is an art form that has a way of kind of lasting longer than I think sculpture would, or even the figures on Easter Island. So, it’s nice if it will last, but all literature doesn’t last, but some of it does. And some of the images that I think you’re referring to there … sometimes people think that things will be permanent. Sometimes you go to old communities, and there are no communities, but there are gravestones there, and you see these in Europe, and you say “I wonder who lived here?” and, “who’s grandmother is this, buried under here?” And the communities are gone, but the gravestones are there with the dates, and the people that buried their grandmother there, or their mother or their sister, probably didn’t think this would ever happen, but you know, it’s like seeing an old photograph, and you say, “who are these people? Somebody took these pictures, and they really knew who these people were,” but they’ve moved on, and all that’s left is gravestones, and you can’t hardly make out the dates. So, I guess what I’m saying there, is that this seemed to be permanent, and the gravestones are kind of permanent, but the community around them is not permanent at all. Wars came, floods came, something happened. In the novel, No Great Mischief, where the man is buried by the cliff, but the water keeps coming in and the cliff keeps eroding, so its like he’s moving out to sea, but he’s not. But when that was established there, when he said, “I want to be buried here,” there was probably a half a mile of land between where he was buried and the ocean. This is a kind of permanence, but you can’t be too sure. KJ: I found that in many ways, the novel had a cinematic quality to it. For example, your attention to lighting, with angular, often stark illuminations including dusty tenement halls lit by forty watt light-bulbs, shafts of September sun slanting through streaky windows, rainbow sprays of water splashing waves on rocky outcrops, or lighthouse beams passing over craggy scarps. Could you comment on both the visual effects in the book and whether you think the novel or some of the short stories could be adapted to film? AM: I’m interested in the senses, you know, and the most basic of the senses is sight, so people see things, and they absorb what they see, and the react, and so on. And as I said before, I think a lot of those images would have to do with rainbows, or light, or mist, or what you see early in the morning, or dusk. I think a lot of those images come from people who are in the outdoors a lot. You know, like the gothic novels of the 19th century, where people are always walking around with the candles, always seeing someone skulking behind a door, and you always see figures coming, or you see the trees moving. The idea is that you try to see as clearly as you can, but very often you don’t see very clearly, or what you see is wrong. KJ: So, do you think your work would translate well into a film? AM: Oh yes. Film is interesting, in that you can do things that you can’t do on the page, but there are other things that you can do on the page that you can’t do in film. And stage is another thing. They had a run of the novel as a dramatic production in Toronto this fall at Tarragon Theatre, and I thought it was great, but they had to leave things out. I think one of the things that I was impressed by was that it
was very musical, because they can sing all the songs. If you don’t know the song, if you don’t know the tune, it just sits there on the page. But, you can do it on stage. Sometimes you’re in good hands with filmmakers, and sometimes you’re not. My feeling with that is, if I give someone the permission to do the film, and they stay within the spirit -- that’s all you can ask. It’s a different art form. I thought what they did in Toronto was just great. In the play, they left out the sister who was one of the main characters in the novel because they thought she was too strong. They thought she was pulling energy from the other characters, so “go away!” They thought she was too good. But, I know writers who become very angry when they see their story change. Especially with Hollywood, where people want happy endings. There’s a well known writer I was on a panel with once, and they asked him “what did you think of the film adaptation of the novel?” and he said, “it was like sending a child to school in the morning, and then having your child come home at dinner with his ears on backwards.” I find though, if they say “we’ll give you money to make this movie” or this stage play, well that’s fine. Then they’ll say, “do you want to work on the script,” and I generally say no, although I’ll give advice. But, I think the way I am, as a writer, I like to more or less control everything. If you think, great novels aren’t written by committees, but films may be made by committees, you know. If you sell the rights to your movie, it’s kind of like selling your house. You can’t say, “how dare you paint it green,” because it’s not really your house anymore. I like to think that with the novel, the story will always be mine. You just hope that they’ll do the best they can.

KJ: For me the images of lighthouse, ring and fountain all evoke the on-going cycles not only of time but memory. The goddess Mnemosyne, was a Titan of memory, and the mother of the nine Muses. The muses frequented the spring Castalia which gave poetic inspiration, but was also linked to the river of the underworld. The last words in the novel speak of ferrying the dead. In ancient Celtic cosmology, the otherworld was an inscape, or an overlay, contiguous with the existing world, and could be reached through specific crossing-places. At several points in the novel, there are visits to the fresh-water spring on the Island. And, early on in the book, Alexander and his brother Calum discuss great-great-great-grand-father Calum's grave which stands atop a Cape Breton cliff-side overlooking the ocean:

"I wonder if his grave is still there?"
"Yes, but it is very near to the cliff's edge now. The point of land is wearing away. Some years faster than others, depending on the storms.
"Yes, I imagine so," he says. "It was always so stormy there. It is almost as if his grave is moving out to sea, isn't it?" (11-12)

Were you aiming at this nexus or link between underworld, memory and inscape and if so, could you comment on it?

AM: Oh, sure! (laughs) Thank you very much. The spring is the Nexus of it. All of that was never far from my mind. I think what’s interesting there, is in terms of the Greeks, their reacting to the natural world, and when they saw the stream and then they believed the stream came up from the underworld, you know. With Coleridge, Kubla Khan … the stream comes up out of the ground and it meanders across five miles of fertile ground, and then goes back down into the underworld. So it comes from some place, and it goes to some place … but where does it go? So I think, in a lot of the primitive myths, or according to a lot of present day religious myths, we come from someplace, and we’re here for a while and then we go some place else. I think what the Greeks were doing there, they were looking at their natural world and they were saying – “what does this mean? Where does the thunder come from?” Then they would say – “That’s from some big man up there.” And – “Where does the lightning come from?” “Well, that’s someone throwing down thunderbolts.” So, their natural world was so alive, because they were so imaginative. They saw winter being what it was because Persephone, or whoever she was, had gone underground to do whatever she was doing down there, and it was all dark and frozen, and then the spring comes, and so on. So, I think there’s always a sort of magic about water, and where it comes from. Of course not so much anymore, when it comes from the tap! But I think water springing up from rock will always be fascinating to all kinds of people, and this is why even today there are people that go with jugs … they think the water will cure them from cancer, or it will purge them of guilt. And who knows, it might -- if you believe strongly enough.
Anything that comes from some mysterious place is interesting.

**KJ:** Your novel in particular includes frequent elements of self-referentiality to the act of writing itself. For example: "It is hard when looking at the pasts of other people to understand the fine points of their lives. It is difficult to know the exact shadings of dates which were never written down and to know the intricacies of events which we have not lived through ourselves but only viewed from the distances of time and space." (64). This appears to be is a direct reference to memory and the art of writing – could you comment on this?

**AM:** I think, on one level it's the difficulty of ever being able to fully understand any other person. You look at other people, and you say, "I think you're thinking such and such," you know. But it's hard to be certain unless they're really beating their cat with a stick, and you say, "you don't like your cat I guess." But it's rarely that clear. I'm also interested in trying to understand other cultures, like George Bush saying, "I think I really understand what Iraqis are like," but it's not really working out that way. He kind of thinks Iraqis are like him, or anybody else. But when you go and say, well, "I will go to Africa and I will be there for two weeks, and I will really understand the Zulu mind," but you won't understand the Zulu mind. They are very different. They may be similar in that they walk around on the same number of feet. Further to that, I'm interested in history, because history is written by the people who win the battles. History is also written by people who have language. Literature and history is written by people who have language and leisure. If you only have a 400 word language, you're not going to write a novel or a history. If you don't have leisure, and I don't mean an island and a hammock, but a place to sit and a place to contemplate, you're not going to write anything either. It's also a challenge if you have peculiar languages, and by peculiar languages, I might mean peculiar in the sense of literacy, you know, like if it's an oral culture. Who knows in the case of the North American Aboriginal people, who knows what was going on in Sitting Bull's mind. He didn't write a novel. He didn't write history, but he obviously had feelings, and he obviously had thoughts. Very often – I don't know if this deals with revisionist history, but I'm interested in who gets to tell the story – but very often, people who tell stories, when they talk about the people, or the language of the people, they very often say, "they were speaking in their peculiar gibberish," you know, which is what the aboriginals of Australia were talking about, or what the Irish were speaking to the English, what the North American Indians, or so-called Indians were speaking in the face of the white man. But, they weren't speaking gibberish at all -- they were speaking with their own language, because that's who they were. But I think, in a struggle, like in the American Civil War, where people were fighting, one against the other, although people were not on the same sides, people were all speaking the same language. So, a person could say, "get your hand off my throat," and the enemy would know what he was saying. But, if you held your hand around the throat of a North American Aboriginal person, or an African or something, or an Irishman, and you said something and the hearer was an English-hearing person, he would just say, "well, he's speaking gibberish!" I think that historically that's interesting. Captain Cook goes to the Polynesian people and they're all speaking "gibberish." Wherever one goes, if they don't speak like me, I'm going to write the record, because I am going to be the conqueror and I am language. It becomes very one-sided.

**KJ:** In your writing, memory appears to be related to the concept of stories within stories, or voices within voices. I guess Bakhtin has talked about heteroglossia and polyglossia enough for us to recognize the technique, but your voices within voices seem to reach back through the mists of time to the beginnings of culture itself – is there an UR-voice that you are trying to reach back to?

**AM:** Well, to a certain extent. What I was dealing with in the book – including some of the people, well in fact, all those people in the novel come from the same place, but within any group, there are some people who are interested in some things, and some people who are not interested at all, although they may be brother and sister or something like that. So, you may have two sisters, and one is crazy about copying down all of her mother’s cooking recipes, where the other one doesn’t cook at all, she just goes to Burger King. It doesn’t mean she’s evil or anything. She’d say, “You want mother’s recipe?” and she’d say, “No!” Where the other one would say,
people just looking at them from outside. And there are all these individuals, but not for
But of course they're not! Within the circle like this.” or “All the Catholics are like this.”
these clichés and say, “All the Muslims are always stingy.” And you can go around with
“All the black people are like this…” or “All the Irishmen...” or, “All the Scotsmen are
racially, or ethnically. It’s very easy to say, I think we do this very often, you know,
that circle to think of them as all the same, and it's easy for some people outside
have the same name, and they kind of all look
MacDonald’s, you know, because they all
cliché’s was all those Alexander
MacDonald’s, you know, because they all
knew, so he dies jumping up, trying to click
his heels. These are very different deaths. I
won’t say what is preferable, but its just that
they are different people, and one man is very
interested in history, and the other man, he’s
not very interested in it at all, although he
likes parts of history, or his side of twins, but
he doesn’t read the parts where his side loses,
which makes him a very poor historian, if he
just wants to pick out the good points.
Whereas, the other man says, “but they lost
these battles too, look here!” Don’t go there …
as they say, you know, “I don’t want to hear
that.” But, I think it’s just interesting. See, I
think there’s a cliché … well one of the
cliché’s was all those Alexander

“I’d die for mother’s potato soup,” or
something like that. So, I think in terms of the
two grandfathers in the novel, the one man –
the serious one – is born out of wed-lock,
which is not a good situation to be in, in that
time, in that kind of social structure. It was not
a good thing to be the mother of a child if you
had no husband. And it was not a good thing
for a child either. This has obviously changed
in modern society. But I think what that
man’s concern is – because he’s never known
his father – and he had no picture of the father,
and he tried to re-discover the father, and he’s
trying to pursue one of these father quests, and
he’s also asking the question, “Where did I
come from?” because he can’t see the man
where he came from. This goes further into,
“Where do we all come from?” So, then he
starts reading all of this Scottish history and he
still doesn’t really have it settled because he
dies with all this silent history, because it’s too
to complicated. Now, the other man is just a
social man – he just spends all of his time
playing cards, and dancing and drinking beer
and running around with his friends, you
know, so he dies jumping up, trying to click
his heels. These are very different deaths. I
won’t say what is preferable, but its just that
they are different people, and one man is very
interested in history, and the other man, he’s
not very interested in it at all, although he
likes parts of history, or his side of twins, but
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that.” But, I think it’s just interesting. See, I
think there’s a cliché … well one of the
cliché’s was all those Alexander
MacDonald’s, you know, because they all

you don’t always know what they do, but I know
the individual is always greater than the
cliché, which is hung around his neck.

KJ: Would you agree with the notion that
“facts” or histories, strictly speaking, are
mutable and subject to revision?

AM: Perhaps. I think some people are
interested in history, and know a lot about it,
and they care a lot about it and they feel
themselves as part of historical events of the
past. So, if you look at what is happening
between the Palestinians and the Israelis –
these are people who are very, very much
influenced by the past, they are very much
influenced by their landscape and they will die
for it. Other people just believe in the mall or
something like that. If you said, “What do you
believe in?” and they’d say, “Well, I believe in
my DVD’s.” Ok … well, “Would you die for
your DVD’s?” But there are some people who
feel very fiercely about certain things, and
there are other people, who may come from
the same history – you could be a person of
Palestinian origin, or Jewish origin, and you
could say, “Yeah, I know that, but I don’t
want to think about that, anymore, I going to
move forward.” Or “Yes, I know that, but its not
for me, I want to go forward.’ And again,
these are people who walk upon the earth.
These people know certain things, and as I
said earlier about people in my novel, some of
them are thoughtful about them, and some of
them aren’t particularly thoughtful. But some
of them remember things, almost in spite of
themselves, so you may not brood on it, but
you may know certain things in the same way
that somebody may say, “Can you sing the
song Happy Birthday?” And you’d say
“Yeah.” And I’d say, “Do you remember who
first taught it to you?” And you’d say, “No, I
don’t. It seems I’ve always known it.” Well,
you didn’t come out of the womb singing
Happy Birthday … although it was your
birthday. But, you picked it up sort of because
of your culture. So, then you could sing,
“Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you
….,” but I’d say – “Now, where did it come
from?” And you’d say, “It comes from the
mists of time. It comes from the campfire. I
don’t know where it comes from, but I do
know this song; it’s part of my make up.” Then
I’d say, “Do you practice singing Happy
Birthday every day when you get up?” And
you’d say, “No, no, not at all.” “But could you do it now?” “Yup.” So, I’m interested in that idea, you know, sometimes people tell you stories. Like your grandparents or your great-grandparents or your parents or your brother, and they’d say, “Well isn’t this interesting that once this happened.” And you’d say, “Yeah.” See, in that novel, I’m interested in the sister, because I think of the sister as being more literary and more thoughtful than the orthodontist. I don’t see him as particularly thoughtful. He’s fine. Well, they’re all fine, but she says in a lot of those scenes, “Do you remember this and this about the dog?” And he says, “Oh yeah …” So, they’re brother and sister, and obviously they’re closer than that – they’re twins. They’ve both gone through the same experience and they’ve come from the same place. But, she remembers some of those scenes clearer than he does. So, when she reconstructs them for his benefit, he says, “Oh yeah, that’s right, I haven’t thought of that in a long time.” And she says, “You remember that song?” An says, “Yeah.” And she says, “Well, can we sing it now?” And he says, “Yeah, alright, I can sing that.” Then he says, “Alright, we haven’t sung that for 25 years.” But it’s deep within him, although he doesn’t think of it everyday. So, I wanted to make her a literary sort, and that’s why she studies drama and so on, whereas, he just makes a lot of money. There’s nothing wrong with him, but he’s not working for Mother Theresa or anything. He’s more of a modern man. He just makes money, and then he makes more money, and he’s successful. Now, I thought both of them – the orthodontist and the actress – I thought both of those professions were professions that especially the grandparents would never think of, because those professions weren’t even there. Orthodontists are only about 40 years old, you know, there’s always some kind of primitive dentist, who would pull a tooth with a chain. But, this idea that you can make money by giving people nice smiles is a new idea. You get rich by looking after rich people. So, I thought that was nice. Then I thought of the actress, you know, and this girl has this talent, but her grandmother says, “Isn’t that strange … being a different person every week. Wouldn’t it be easier just to be yourself?” She just thinks it’s a strange way that these children are educated, you know, with one working on people’s smiles, and the other is Lady Macbeth.

KJ: That sort of ties in with one of the thoughts I had on the book, which has to do with sort of mutable versions of what has happened, you know, dialogical views, or metamorphic histories, or different points of views on the same events. There’s a lack of final agreement, there’s no sort of fact that can be pin down.

AM: It’s hard. It’s very hard. You can pin down dates of battles, but you can’t pin down what people were thinking in the battle. Whether they really thought that Montcalm was any fun or whether they thought Wolfe was any fun. Even in Armies, some people fight for causes very fiercely, and other people, you know, they’re just mercenaries, “Well, I’ll fight on this side, and then I’ll fight on that side. You give me 100 dollars more and I’ll be there tomorrow.” Usually, my skill as a soldier is like my skill as a lawyer, you know, how much money I want to deal with. Then others say, “I’ll fight for the cause of Ireland or Estonia until I die. I’m not doing this for money, I’m doing this because of who I am, and because I hate all Russians. I hate them! I hate all Germans! And I hate all fat people!” You have fierceness to your cause. So I thought it was interesting …

KJ: Well it worked. I think there are certain alternate statements one can make, perhaps we could call them “myths” that transcend the so-called facts – do you think that certain fictions can rise to a higher level of truth as something we might call a “mythic truth?”

AM: To a certain extent. But, sometimes you get so caught up in myth. The grandfather says, “Well, all The MacDonald’s were brave.” And “All the MacDonald’s were noble,’ and the other grandfather says, “No they weren’t.” So, you can make your own myth. Like, “All white men were created to rule over the world. That’s why we’re white.” So, the various myths that are applied to the various cultures or various ethnic groups are based on some fact that’s sometimes based on nothing. You know, I read in some book that women in Africa, and some Amazonian fighters believed they couldn’t be shot by bullets. Bad idea! But it was their myth, they’d say, “Well this won’t get me!” you know. Whereas everyone else is scared of the bullet. So, I don’t know if these people are better than everyone else or worse than everyone else. But, this is my belief.

KJ: That works too. I guess one of the myths that I got from the book as a whole, is that
nothing is absolutely certain or fixed, and that
we shouldn’t walk around with the illusion
that we “know,” when actually we don’t
know. This is a myth of uncertainty – not in a
negative way – but you shouldn’t feel so
cocky about thinking you know. There’s
always something there you’re unaware of.

AM: I believe that. You can never be certain.
This is why somebody said, “You sure use
‘perhaps’ a lot in your writing.” And I do use
“perhaps” a lot, because I’m not that certain
myself, and the characters are not certain, you
know. The narrative voice would say, “Well,
perhaps you did this because he was noble.”
Or “Perhaps he wasn’t, perhaps he was just
trying to save the old portrait so he could sell
it for a lot of money.” Or perhaps he was loyal
to the spirit of his grandmother … that’s why
he wanted his grandmother’s recipes – so he
could put them on E-Bay.

KJ: Any exciting new projects in the works?
AM: Well, I’m thinking. I perhaps will write
short stories in the future. See, if I only write
a novel every 60 years, I’ll be 120 when write
the next one. So, as I said before, I’m
thinking. I think it’s good to think. If you
have things settled in your mind before you sit
down to write, then in answer to Kafka’s
question (“Is this novel necessary?”) you are
able to say, “Yes, it is necessary.” This is
what I’m trying to do.

KJ: How long did it take you to write the
novel?
AM: Twelve years. But I was dragging it
around a lot, you know, I wasn’t writing it
eight hours a day. I was quite busy here at
the University, and my wife and I have six
children, and so very often I’d write it in the
summer, or for part of the summer. Then I’d
come back and start the fall work, which
there’s a lot of, as you know. It seems to
expand. Then sometimes I wouldn’t get back
to it until the next summer, or maybe
Christmas or something like that. Then I’d re-
read it again, and say, “Oh yeah, ok,” and I’d
write notes to myself, like, “Don’t forget to
make the parents older than the children.”
When you’re dealing with dates and all that,
you have to be careful, you know, because
then people write you and say, “Did you know
that Wolfe had black hair instead of red hair?”

And I’d say, “No …” And I’d go back and do
my research. So, it went on too long in a
number of ways. Although, we like to think
that we write out of time and space, but you do
have to live in a world where things change.
When I started writing that novel, Quebec
separatism was an issue, and then it kind of
went away, and then it may come back. I read
once about a man who was even slower than I
was. I think he’s an apocryphal man (I hope).
He worked on his novel for years and years
and years, and his final scene was going to be
about the Berlin Wall. Well, no more Berlin
Wall. And all those novels, those Cold War
novels, in which the Russians were the evil
empire and so on -- and a lot of them excellent
– you couldn’t write them anymore. You
couldn’t write that novel in 2005. And you
couldn’t write Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and you
couldn’t write an anti-slavery novel, because
times have changed. And so, that was one of
the things about that novel as I kept dragging
it around. I was glad it was finished, because I
thought I was going to die before, or that I
would be finished before it would be finished.
So, I’m glad to have it completed.

KJ: You were born in North Battleford
Saskatchewan, but in your youth moved to
Cape Breton. Most of your writing is about
Cape Breton, but have you ever written about
the prairies or had an inkling to do so?
AM: I don’t think so. Yesterday, a man
phoned me up and said, “You’re probably the
most famous person who was ever born in
North Battleford.” He was from the North
Battleford newspaper, and he said, “Would
you like to do something for this?” And I said,
“No. I was only five when I left there.” So,
when I left North Battleford, then my father
went out west to Alberta, where he was a coal
miner, and I have memories of that, because I
started school there, and everyone remembers
their first day of school. But when I was in
Saskatchewan, we were on a farm, and, you
know, I was five, so I don’t have any
memories of prairie winters. I couldn’t be a
prairie writer, like the way Guy Vanderhaege
is, or the way W. O. Mitchell was, or the other
good prairie writers, because that’s really their
place.
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SHADOWTIME: An Opera with 
Libretto by Charles Bernstein 
& music by Brian Ferneyhough

Shadowtime is a "thought opera" based on the work and life of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). Benjamin is one of the greatest philosophers and cultural critics of the Twentieth Century. Born in Berlin, he died on the Spanish border while trying to escape the fate that awaited most of his fellow Central European Jews. In its seven scenes, Shadowtime explores some of the major themes of Benjamin's work, including the intertwined natures of history, time, transience, timelessness, language, and melancholy; the possibilities for a transformational leftist politics; the interconnectivity of language, things, and cosmos; and the role of dialectical materiality, aura, interpretation, and translation in art. Beginning on the last evening of Benjamin's life, Shadowtime projects an alternative course for what happened on that fateful night. Opening onto a world of shades, of ghosts, of the dead. Shadowtime inhabits a period in human history in which the light flickered and then failed. Shadowtime is published by Green Integer (Calif). ISBN: 1-933382-007 -- 132 pages trade Paperback: $11.95 (U.S. Funds). Order direct from Green Integer (add $2 for shipping): 6022 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036
For reviews and performance information, including performances at the Lincoln Center Festival in New York and the English National Opera in London visit the Shadowtime website at: http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/berstein/shadowtime
"Bernstein's libretto, plain and simple, is the finest contemporary libretto that I know of."
-- Tess Crebbin in Music and Vision

From the Munich Production of Shadowtime: Scene V. "Pools of Darkness (11 Interrogations)": Benjamin interrogated by Border Guard. Photo by Regine Koerner, © 2004
SCENES

I. New Angels//Transient Failures (Prologue)
Level 1: Lecturer
Level 2: Radio (1940)
Level 3: War Time (Spanish Border, 1940): Innkeeper, Henny Gurland, Benjamin, Doctor
Level 4: Reflective Time (Memory + Thought) (Berlin, 1917): Benjamin in dialog with Dora Kellner (Benjamin)
Level 5: Five Rimes for Stefan Benjamin
Level 6: Redemptive Time (Triple Lecture): Benjamin in separate dialogs with Gershom Scholem and Hölderlin (who appears as a pseudo-Benjamin and as Scardanelli)

II. Les Froissements d'Ailes de Gabriel (First Barrier) (instrumental)

III. The Doctrine of Similarity (13 Canons)
1. Amphibolies I (Walk Slowly)
2. Dust to Dusk
3. Cannot Cross
4. Indissolubility (Motetus absconditus)
5. Amphibolies II (Noon)
6. In the Dark (But Even Fire Is Light)
7. Sometimes
8. Anagrammatica
9. Dew and Die
10. Schein
11. Dusts to Dusks
12. Amphibolies III (Pricks)
13. Salute

IV. Opus Contra Naturam (Descent of Benjamin into the Underworld)
1. [untitled]
2. Katabasis
3. Kataplexy

V. Pools of Darkness (11 Interrogations)
1. Three Giant Mouths
2. Headless Ghoul
3. Karl Marx and Groucho Marx, with Kerberus
4. Pope Pius XII
5. Joan of Arc
6. Baal Shem Tov Disguised as Vampire
7. Adolf Hitler
8. Albert Einstein
9. Border Guard
10. Four Furies
11. Golem

VI. Seven Tableaux Vivants Representing the Angel of History as Melancholia (Second Barrier)
1. Laurel's Eyes (after Heine's "Die Lorelei")
2. Tensions
3. Hashish in Marseilles
4. After Heine's "Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht"
5. One and a Half Truths
6. Cants
7. Madame Moiselle and Mr. Moiselle

VII. Stelae for Failed Time (Solo for Melancholia as the Angel of History)
From the Munich Production of *Shadowtime* from Scene One, "New Angels/Transient Failures (Prologue)"
Benjamin and company at the Hotel, Fonda de Francia, Portbou, Spain. The time is just before midnight,
September 25, 1940. Photo by Regine Koerner, © 2004
Shadowtime – commentary by Charles Bernstein

Shadowtime is a thought opera based on the work and life of the German philosopher, essayist, and cultural critic, Walter Benjamin. The libretto was written by Charles Bernstein for composer Brian Ferneyhough and had its premiere in May 2004 at the Munich Biennale, with subsequent productions at the Festival d'Automne in Paris, and the Lincoln Center Festival in New York.

In its seven scenes, Shadowtime explores some of the major themes of Benjamin's work, including the intertwined natures of history, time, transience, timelessness, language, and melancholy; the possibilities for a transformational leftist politics; the interconnectivity of language, things, and cosmos; and the role of dialectical materiality, aura, interpretation, and translation in art. Beginning on the last evening of Benjamin's life, Shadowtime projects an alternative course for what happened on that fateful night.

Opening onto a world of shades, of ghosts, of the dead, Shadowtime inhabits a period in human history in which the light flickered and then failed.

Summary of the Scenes:

Scene I -- In September 1940, one step ahead of the Nazi invaders, Walter Benjamin fled France, taking an arduous journey, on foot, over the Pyrenees mountains. He died the day after his arrival in Spain. Benjamin's final day is the central motif of the prologue, "New Angels / Transient Failures." "New Angels" refers to the Paul Klee painting, “Angelus Novus” which Benjamin writes about in “On the Concept of History. The scene opens with some metaphysical speculations by a quixotic Lecturer, a mercurial figure who reappears in Scenes IV and VI. Scene I has several overlapping layers and is presided over by the chorus, whose members represent the Angels of History.

The primary layer, "War Time," takes center stage. The setting is just over the French border, in the Pyrenees, at the hotel, Fonda de Francia, Portbou, Spain. The time is just before midnight, September 25, 1940. Benjamin has arrived at the hotel with his traveling companion Henny Gurland. The trip had been more difficult by Benjamin's bad heart: every ten minutes of walking was followed by one minute of stopping. Benjamin's plan was to continue on to Lisbon, and from there to America. But the Innkeeper informs Benjamin and Gurland that their transit visas have been voided and that they must return to France (and to the dark destiny that would await them). At center stage, the cruel Innkeeper gives the exhausted travelers the bad news, to Gurland's protests and Benjamin's growing despair. The Lecturer, now in the guise of a doctor, enters the scene. Having been called to the hotel because of the alarming state of Benjamin's health, the doctor says Benjamin must rest.

Meanwhile, on the right side of the stage, at the same time as the central scene from Benjamin's last hours, a dialog takes place, in flashback, between the young Benjamin and his wife, Dora Kellner. This layer, called "Reflective Time (Memory + Thought)," is set in Berlin around 1917, the year of their marriage. The dialog focuses on their shared aspirations, in their youth, for the radical German student movement of the years immediately prior to World War I, and touches on the nature of emotion, eros, and prostitution.

Another layer consists of five short children's "rimes" (dedicated to Benjamin's son Stefan, who was born in 1918), performed by a quartet from the chorus.
The final layer is a triple lecture called "Redemptive Time." It follows the dialog with Dora and occurs simultaneously with the central 1940 scene. This layer has two parts: a philosophical, political, and theological dialog with Benjamin's closest friend Gershom Scholem, the great historian of Jewish mysticism; and a dialog with Friedrich Hölderlin, the German poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, who was important to Benjamin. The text of these two dialogs are unfurled on stage from large scrolls.

**Scene II** -- "Les Froissements d'Ailes de Gabriel" (The Rustling of the Wings of Gabriel) is instrumental, scored for solo guitar and thirteen players. The guitar suggests the just audible, transitory, flickering, chimerical rustling of the wings of Gabriel, the angel of Messianic time. This is *Shadowtime* 's first barrier, marking the beginning of the journey of Benjamin's avatar (shadow or dream figure) from the represented historical times of Scene I to the nonhistorical time of the unfolding opera.

**Scene III** -- "The Doctrine of Similarity" -- consists of thirteen short canons, sung by various groupings of the chorus of the Angels of History. Each of the movements reflects on the nature of history, time, and translation/transformation. The title comes from an essay by Benjamin with a similar name -- "Doctrine of the Similar" -- in which he considers the ways that the physical sounds of language echo or mimic the primordial structures of the cosmos. In the scene, various numeric patterns create reverberations within and between the text and music. The theme of temporality is explored musically by the use of canon forms throughout the scene. Canons 1, 5 and 12 are called "Amphibolies," suggesting mineral ambiguities, where "pricks are points on a map" and "where shadows are thickest at noon." Canons 2 and 11 have the same text, which ripples from one end of the chorus to the other: "The leaves turn dark before the trees are shot with light." Canon 3 is a lyric both lamentory and defiant. In canon 4, "Indissolubility," the concern with the temporal is represented by the choice of a multiple, palimpsestic parody of a late medieval motet from the Montpelier Codex. The libretto extends these investigations through the use of linguistic translations and displacements. While the text roams in time, space, and content, it returns to the knotted dead-end situations of life in extremity, as in canon 6, "In the Dark," and canon 7: "Sometimes / you burn a book because / It is cold / and you need the fire / to keep warm / and / sometimes / you read a / book for the same reason." Canon 8, "Anagrammatica," consists entirely of anagrams of Benjamin's name. Canon 9, "dew and die" is a homophonic (sound) translation of a poem by Ernst Jandl, while canon 10 refers to a key Benjamin concept: *schein*. The last canon, 13, is based on the final stanza of Mallarmé's "Salute."

**Scene IV** -- "Opus Contra Naturam (Descent of Benjamin into the Underworld)," a shadow play for speaking pianist, is the pivotal scene of *Shadowtime*, inaugurating the second half of the opera. "Opus Contra Naturam" is an alchemical term for work against, or beyond, the constraints of nature. The Lecturer from Scene I appears in guise of a Joker or Liberace-like singer in a Las Vegas piano bar (that suggests also a Weimar cabaret). He leads Benjamin's avatar, set adrift after the fateful events of September 1940, on the Orphic descent into a shadow world ("katabasis") of shock-induced paralysis ("kataplexy").

**Scene V** -- In the darkly surreal "Pools of Darkness (11 Interrogations)," Benjamin's avatar is interrogated by a series of haunting, masked figures. Each interrogation is set to a distinct musical form. Three Giant Mouths (Canon/Heterophony) question the Benjamin figure about the nature of the future; a Headless Ghoul (Isorhythmic Motet) asks about dreaming; the two-headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx joined to the body of Kerberus (Hoquetus-Melodrama) taunts Benjamin's avatar about the nature of memory; Benjamin's contemporary Pope Pius XII (Dramatic Madrigal a Due) wonders if his fate is part of God's plan; Joan of Arc (Palimpsestic
Chorale) worries about the fate of history; the Baal Shem Tov, disguised as a vampire (Rebus), poses a series of impossible comparisons, such as "Is assimilation better than estrangement?"; Adolf Hitler (Rondo) considers the nature of existence; Albert Einstein (Passacaglia cum Figuris in Eco) asks "What time is it now?"; a Border Guard (Pastoral Interlude) makes the standard interrogation; Four Furies (Fuagto) ask "What is to be done?" and receive the reply: "The light spills into pools of darkness. I can no longer find it." Finally, the Golem (Quodlibet / Abgesangszena) asks a set of menacing questions in an invented language; the final response is from a line of Heine: "Keine Kaddish wird man sagen" ("no one to say Kaddish for me").

Scene VI -- In the second and final barrier of Shadowtime, the Lecturer reappears, in a new guise, to perform "Seven Tableaux Vivants Representing the Angel of History as Melancholia." Both Scene VI and VII imagine Benjamin's Angel of History as the angel depicted in Albreht Dürer's 1514 engraving, “Melencolia,” which shows a dejected, winged figure, surrounded by instruments of scientific inquiry. Tableaux 1 and 4 are reworkings of two poems by the nineteenth-century, German-Jewish, post-Romantic poet Heinrich Heine, a distant relative of Benjamin's. Both poems are standards of the lieder repertoire, previously set by many composers -- "Der Tod, das ist die Kühle Nacht" and "Die Lorelei." (Heine's work was censored and banned by the Nazis.) Tableau 2, "Tensions," is a series of sound translations of ten-word propositions, as, for example, "each ear's sly fiction a toy taboo which founds us." Tableau 3 is based on permutations of phrases from Benjamin's essay "Hashish in Marseilles": "Seeing only nuances." Tableau 5, "One and a Half Truths," takes its title from one of Benjamin's favorite contemporaries, aphorist Karl Kraus; it is a set of imaginary epigrams, concluding "Truth / Is a gun loaded with a parachute." Tableau 6 presents a full set of syntactic rotations of the sentence, "if you can't see it it can still hurt you." The final tableau ends with a play on negative dialectics, asking "whether what is is so because / Is so because it's not."

Scene VII -- "Stelae for Failed Time," the epilogue, is an elegiac solo by the Angel of History (imagined as the angel in Dürer’s “Melencolia”). The angelic chorus sings to and for Benjamin. For the Angel of History, the song has a single voice; in the historical time of the performance, this solo is splintered into the many voices --the angels -- of the chorus. "Stelae for Failed Time" has two overlapping layers. The first is a reflection on time and uncertainty in the context of historical recrimination and erasure: "I back away / helpless, my / eyes fixed. / This is my task: / to imagine no wholes / from all that has been smashed." In a lyric that echoes a lover's lament for her lost lover, the first layer ends with an evocation of one of Benjamin's central concerns, the radical break with historical time into "now time" (jetztzeit). The second layer is a reflection on representation: "The best picture / of a picture / is not a picture / but the negative" and ends on the theme of failed -- and falling -- time: "as now you fall / from my arms / into my capacious / insomniac forgetting." --Charles Bernstein -- June 2005

* * *

The world premiere of Shadowtime was on Tuesday, May 25, 2004, at Prinzregententheater, Munich, with subsequent performances May 27 and May 28 Additional Performances: October 26 and 27, 2004, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers; July 9, 2005 at the English National Opera; July 21 and 22, 2005 at the Lincoln Center Festival, at the Rose Theater, New York; September 20, Oct. 1 & 2, 2005 -- RuhrTrienniel at the Jahrhunderthalle, Bochum (Germany).
The Alliance of Telephone Wires
by Roy Miki

—the semis rolls down the highway
regardless of the copse of birches

the swaying axis reformulates the
hum of the train’s horn across fields

of standing water borrowed from
a poem that is dispersed in a flood

of some phonemes linked by the
candid throw of dice across the bridge

on the side a multiple row of tiny pine
standing upright in the space invented

why is it possible to make known the
otherwise impossible calculation of indents

the bruised fruit of the loam in drainage
networks the extent of freeways on the ropes

even in a conspicuous daylight the size
of the seizure would be unmistakable

the cow in the pasture gesticulates in a wink
that he needs to perform a rescue mission

arrivez arrivez arrivez in the earlobes the
faint patter of letter feet across the plein

pulling into Alexandria he remembers the
atlantic hotel and the forays of forged tristes

look there’s a blue house sinking in the earth
all its inside cry out for the dream of resistance

he thinks of the v formation of the geese
in the graying sky outside the left window

his fingers on the keyboard as the train sways
the black wave of lines in the peripheral —

propels an uneasy truce
ILLUMINATED VERSES
by George Elliott Clarke

I -- DAUGHTER OF MUSIC

A style lights upon her –
   Daughter of Music,
Beauty who is living song,
   Negro, Criollo, Mulatto, Aboriginal –
because she embodies (here me out)
   sinuous woodwind, imperious brass,
her voice coaxing Oaxaca, cocoa smokiness,
   (lips tremblingly agape, lips trembling agape),
her eyes orchestring gold-ochre copper.

Her form is fluid fire –
   sunlight breaking open, flaking, upon water,
our Afro-Americas Ocean,
   saltwater taffy and zaftig molasses.

A style lights upon her –
   she who slipped from barracoon,
swam barracuda,
   clambered over barricades.

By outscaling whips sibilant as surf,
   by shouting down yelping dog-men,
who wished her sighing in fields, moaning in bed,

The Daughter of Music refused her captors songs.
   She refused them music –
and their clumsy waltzes as they died,
   clawing at light-blinded eyes, was proof.

Amid forest harbouring her evergreen lineage,
   its hard-breathing leaves, wood-grained light,
amid soul music leafing from that jungle foliage,
   she augurs Joy, matrix of song.
II -- DAUGHTER OF MUSIC

She was majesty amid their sty,
a Queen impervious to stain.

The *vee* at her posh thighs signified Eve –
womanish woman scorning trophies and traps,
because she was light, refined light,
gold so pure it was hardened light,
and her supreme haughtiness was rhythmic:

it was tremors of silver upon her ebony,
it was quakes of gold when she moved:

heart jigging in her onyx palace,

blood reeling *via* ruby flutes.

After she flew from those enslavers
wanting her caged, shackled, and raped,
after she leapt into North Star night, soared,
aria-like, slipping her captors’ locksmith logic,
their clanking theology of chains,
she reconnoitered her true-true love, *Ogun*  
(ebon phallus that jets ivory)

God of *Beauty-creating Chaos*,
then begat, after their hooting, love-call laughter,
their nine, natural daughters –

*Calypso, Soul, Jazz & Blues* (twins), *Poetry, Reggae,*
*Anastacia, Dona Beatrice,* and *Oxum,*

whose duties were to enforce and reinforce Love.

But she was sure her pickney would endure
and force their way to *Joy,*
so long as their mouths always spit fire.

Look: the sun is beaten flame upon her face.

It serves her.
II -- OXUM

My *karma* weds Mahalia Jackson
    and Millie Jackson.
My scripture be rapture –
    the overture of my aperture –
that which turns Edward S. Green even greener
so his envy jerks him to script
*The National Capital Code of Etiquette*
    *Dedicated to the Colored Race*,
to preach, in 1920,
‘Coloured gals’ must be as mute as wallpaper,
ever don yelling, gala shades like yellow.

    But Green was just a camouflaged white –
    as bumbling as an ape in an apiary.
He establishes the madness of M.E.N.
(whose sex means “More Explanation Needed”):
All their cracked craniums is crazy –
as if with bovine spongiform encephalopathy,
so they peacock – or stallion – about
as if hyped up on sildenafil citrate.
To hell with their heaven!
    I like yellow; I love gold.
I adore mirrors and their delicious imagery.

_ I like the way I look. _
_ I speak the way I speak. _
_ I ain’t easily shook. _
_ I don’t easily break. _
    I push against rock
       like water pulsing History –
            what will dissolve even stone.

“Woman pushing against rock” photo-image by Ricardo Scipio
VI – SOUL

_Abril Libra_,
turquoise-ambergris eyed,
with eyes of the sea –
grave but sassy, sapphire-grey eyes
(simulating Mona States – or Suzanne Malveaux).

(Everyone’s eyes go knock-kneed
to espy her –
voluptuous corpus of the _vrai_ canon.

Her cinnamon whispers secret
the hurtful joy of wine…
Her every breath veers to Bible verses.

And she don’t care for _race_ –
what only in-bred family runs.)

_Soul sayeth, “I leap like a hart, ecstatic,
up from zoos of mouldering brick,
trashed streets, smouldering slums:
Queen Creole._

“I ain’t fallen, but _ascendant_,
like unfaltering _Virtue._

“Am I not hallelujah, air-borne,
unthinking fulfillment, mirroring
perfume that distracts a breeze?

“Consider me glazed topaz –
a totem pole of copper fire:

_you do not forget
the shape of a woman.”_

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**Editor’s Note:** The above poems and images appear in the recently published book _Illuminated Verses_ by George Elliott Clarke, with photographs by Ricard Scipio published by CSPI (Canadian Scholars Press International ISBN: 1-55130-280-2). Price: $24.95 (Cdn). This 78 page book features 37 full-colour photographs. For more information please contact CSPI at: [www.cspi.org](http://www.cspi.org)
CONTINUATIONS VII
By Doug Barbour & Sheila E. Murphy

in depth indebted
to a sharp outline of
Fuselied bodies caught
against the shadowed walls of
high dungeon backlit
by fear brackets breaking

or external voicelets hunching
in audition to acquire
caught sentences aligned
and misaligned at once
the way a shadow sallies
in receding light

and who listens anyway
in the huge auditorium
darkness empty or full
do they putative hear
a complex music or the
shattered sense of syntax surprised

and even further into dis-
connection, do they veer
back to intended selves,
or is the fall more sharply carved,
so a dividing line, once crossed,
becomes the defining moment

back & forth through
the unseen portals of intent
self selflessly sheds self
definition this time this
place cited in inscription's
cut and thrust read clearly

daily as repaired on the off
chance of being defined at last,
portals enlarge their destination,
each time / place thrusts
open into what remains
the permanent unseen

where each one has to go
through and into the vast
in silent openings

dew ghosts against

leaves flow & ripple

above dawn glow up

standing there listen

what moves outside

is inherently here

standing as above, so

[ ] and flow to have been

listened to still

leaves as ghosts as silent

openings, what moves outside

moves back & through new

portals to the enlarging

inner worlds of []

irising beyond the reach

laid out in scattered light

flowing toward the falling moon

reach's own continuum relays

vast inner motion, falling

toward / is light / enlarging

f/low the moon, beyond

and inward iris chilling

faith when scattering

in such a cold wind wind

ing offshore whitecaps strewn

across trash[ings] / how

ordinary they might make

destruction's fires

when god turns moon colour

vast, enormous, chilling

to recall the struct- [how]

fading do these destinations ladle

preconception longingly

as fire recedes, and we are left

considering what heart rehashes

but holds on to holds

close heart knowledge

in flames fled no direction

home or every way

a silent one the hidden

music a dance among ashes

fled // filed

these ways a foreign silence

hides from music, dance,
is knowledge ashen //
held as tone with-
in direction misted

missed note

that notes fall from

the whitened ayre a song

whispered to knowing less

as learning more & more

to listen to notes not played

being those notes apart from

the betrayal of seams / less

known than fixed, perhaps,

thus played as single

instances, connection gleans

the knowing &

the known gone again

sewn together as collage of

improvisation lets go

o keep faith & keep on

betraying true sound

the beat hidden in the silence held

the beat against the dampness

and the scald / the beat hidden

in sound / faith's own

improvisation / letting go

the sewn silence held

and kept and known

beating against the current

sewn sails full with

those wings' winds winding

that far into floating garbage

strewn a new turn of time

s a new turn of phrase (phase)

place/d wherever seeing

s paced, phrasing lapsed into

soothed aftermath of winds

that change wings into past

tense curvatures recalled just

turning when the signal's lost

across those eons suns

sail too galaxies
dying dying centuries of
light lost come to write
across what pages of night
unread the sentence due

an audience / the looking on
indelibly for one pure
evident moment / relaxing toward
the final breath become
these centuries / viable
as galaxies / constructs

those arches overhead
stoned knowledge glow
as ink sheds light to shadow
forth exhalation's mist
finally evident the moment
re/turns a mirrored lack

of firsting / held, then
shed to light toned shadow
forth as evident
this moment arching
overhead turns
being mirrored

as circling it profers bright
as penciled shadowing
suggests outlines out
of light toned down
under brush precisely catch
(cached) re flecks of fall

swept into outlines once
thought hewn, toned edges
mute the early light
that separates flecks
from wholeness fallen into
cache that teaches replication

mechanical? or only thought
s to be there found
as cutting edging as there
now in the midst of
chips strewn the glare
illuminates the hidden

Most thing s illumine thought
if the mechanical switches
are flicked on the hidden
thought s reply to midst
that amplify the local
anaesthesia normed to match the harm
caught on the wing thought
s on the wind blowing back
through history's long
bidden moiled high
archive of bone bane
lit by stormflash fittingly

precepts gleam due
left with history to bother
being the detritus false
and back known archive
in the fitting place
of keeping books and smudges

finger prints dirty news
flash five times blissed
outside history's box
of billets-doux duct
taped to technology's
dance across papers scat

sung purple-passaged
as the rest that follows,
jots of history's
boxtop opening to dance
flashed across the screen
that enters and remains

blank for the time
being there & shadowing
through the fall the wings
swept backwards from
the middle world midden
piled high to dance across

quaffed rinse lifting
middle things aglance with
shadow after fall from
time and various swept
flight accretes to islands
various and stunning
SIGNALGLYPHS by Michael Winkler

Michael Winkler has been researching, developing and practicing word-art for several decades. He has pioneered formal textual innovations by creating word-images using the Roman alphabet arranged in a circle with each point representing the location of a specific letter. When the points are connected in the sequence of a spelling of a word, an abstract geometric form is generated. In “Signalglyphs” Winkler extends his research and examines historical traces of glyphs, circles and linguistic forms. For further information about Michael Winkler and his works please check his website: http://winklerwordart.com/Index.html

As per the Committees request, these reports will contain as little scientific/technical language as possible. During the past Quarter, we've learned a great deal about their approach to mathematics. Some of the information has profound implications to the history and development of our own mathematical concepts. One major difference between our approach and their's, is that they don't use \(\pi\) for calculations involving circles (they have no word for the 'diameter'). When they talk about the linear measure across a circle, they use the plural of the word for 'radius'. Their name for the tool used for drawing circles is 'radial-arc-marker'. This gives a clue to their method of calculating the radius. They use two numbers which have a ratio of unified correspondence (two integers differing by a factor of unity). The numbers are called the trace and the trac. To find the radius, they divide 1/6 of a circle's circumference by 22.1875399 (the trace) and then multiply that result by 21.1875399 (the trac)--click on the formula to view a comparison to the use of \(\pi\). For calculations which do not require extreme accuracy, they use rounded off versions: 22.1875 or 22 3/16ths (trace), 21.1875 or 21 3/16ths (trac)--their fractions are the same as ours. When they speak of the whole numbers of the trace and trac; they use the terms: bow (22) and band (21). Calculations using only the whole numbers are as accurate as a 3.14 value of \(\pi\). At the end of their description of the process for calculating the radius, there was a notation: "1/6th of perimeter, 60 degrees; Radial angle, defining orientation for two-dimensional space, 90 degrees; arc degree ratio 60 to 90 refects (the symbol shown below left)."

A member of our team, who is an expert in reading Egyptian hieroglyphics, noted that their symbol was very similar to the hieroglyph for the fraction, 2/3rds (above right). One of the greatest achievements of ancient Egyptian mathematics was their ability to find 2/3rds of any number, whether integral or fractional--no one knows why this was so important that they would make it a foundation of their entire system of mathematics. Consequently, when we asked about the meaning of the symbol, we also asked about the possibility of any connection to the Egyptian hieroglyph. They replied that their symbol represents the elemental relation of the numbers, '2' and '3'--a relation which is connected to the patterning of many mathematical processes. They classify '2' and '3' and their sum of '5' as elemental numbers--numbers which are prime but not part of the regular class of primes (they provided a description of the system of prime distribution which will be presented later in this report). The reason '2', '3', and '5' are considered to be in a class by themselves is that they are not contained in the cycle which orients the distribution of...
primes and they can be used in combination to express all larger numbers. Despite affirming that their symbol can be used to express the fraction 2/3rds, they declined to discuss any connection to the hieroglyph because it would violate their communication guidelines. But they did mention: use of their symbol would be consistent with the viewpoint that '7' and '11' were the initial integers in the class of primes, rather than '2', '3', and '5', which their symbol defines as a separate group of *elemental numbers*. The following enigmatic statement was also included with their remarks:

Since 280/440 reduces to 7/11, it reflects the ratio of the initially occurring primes. If 440 is one side of a square, 440 multiplied by 4 yields the square's perimeter of 1760. If this 1760 square perimeter is reshaped into a circle of the same perimeter, what is the radius of that circle using the *bow* and *band*? Since 1/6th of a circle with a perimeter of 1760 would be 293 1/3rd; and dividing this by 22 (bow) would result in 13 1/3rd; multiplying this result by 21 (band) will give a radius of 280."

We believe they were trying to tell us (by using only mathematical information) that their symbol and the hieroglyph are connected: In Egyptian cubits, 280 is the height of the Great Pyramid; 440 is the measure along one side of its base; and 1760 is the perimeter of the Pyramid's base. Their calculations show the relationship between the height and base as a reflection of the primes, '7' and '11'. Also, If the perimeter of the square at the base of the Pyramid is thought-of as the perimeter of a circle; the height of the Pyramid is the radius of that circle, when calculated using the *bow* and the *band*. There are many theories about the mathematical basis of the Pyramid of Cheops but these calculations have an exact correlation to its most basic dimensions--but even if our assessment is true, the circumstances of the connection are unknown.

When we began to discuss our philosophies concerning mathematics, a profound difference was revealed in our methods of conceptualizing mathematical phenomena. Mathematics may be the universal language but expression of mathematical concepts in the form of algebraic symbolization is not universal. To those with whom we are communicating, abstract symbolization of the logic behind particular mathematical concepts is not considered advantageous. To paraphrase their attitude toward such an approach: Nature's methodologies will always transcend the logic of the seekers of its patterning; if a mathematical system is based on a preconceived formulation of logic rather than a rigorous mapping of Natural phenomena, the system of mathematics will be confined to preconceived conceptions of relational possibilities. Their system of mathematics is based on building rigorously definable *relational structures* which are information-preserving transformations of Natural phenomena. The fundamental relations which form the basis of their system are called, *recurrents*--relations appearing repeatedly in diverse phenomena. They shun the notion of 'mathematical proof' because they say that counting is an incremental process and, therefore, its proofs must be constructed incrementally. And they say Nature is not limited to incremental processes; Nature's mandate is
'efficiency', not proof—it will sometimes produce a single result from a multiplicity of simultaneously occurring functions. They cited the System of the Distribution of Prime Numbers as an example of a synthesized outcome of rigorously interactive processes.

According to them, primeness is used by Nature to create a system of markers which uniquely define the landscape of linear sequences. All of Nature's forces have to be kept in sync or the fabric of the universe would fall apart, but 'Time' is an ever-evolving continuum; locations on the landscape of the continuum have to be uniquely identifiable so that Nature's forces can maintain the alignment of their synchronization (that's why prime numbers relate to things like wave properties). To visualize the System of Prime Distribution, imagine a circle of 30 points, which are equally spaced around the arc. Starting with any point and moving in either direction (clockwise is shown in the diagram on left), Imagine counting the 30 points but begin the count with '0' instead of '1'; consequently, the 30 points are counted using the numbers '0' through '29'. But you don't stop counting—you continue with '30' through '59', and then '60' through '89', and so on—you're just infinitely counting around the same circle of points and writing the numbers next to them. Afterwards, all these numbers were written next to the points as they were counted; the prime numbers—with the exception of the elemental numbers, '2', '3', and '5'—would all be written next to the same, eight points. The first numbers to be written next to the eight points: '1', '7', '11', '13', '17', '19', '23', and '29' (as shown in the diagram); are all prime except for '1' or 'unity'. As stated in the discussion of elemental numbers, '7' and '11' are the first two primes to appear in the cycle (not '2' and '3'). But this cycle is only part of the system.

After primes emerge within the cycle, they are involved in another process which is integrated within the overall system of distribution. After a prime number emerges, products based on that prime's sequential multiplication by powers of itself and each higher prime will systematically emerge in future progressions of the cycle. Here's how it works: the first prime to appear is '7', and '7' multiplied by itself is '49'; so the composite, 49, will appear in one of the eight locations in the next rotation of the cycle. Then '7' is multiplied by the second prime to appear, '11'; so '77' is the next composite which will be included. Then '7' is multiplied by the third prime, '13'; will result in the inclusion of the composite, 91. And this continues: '7' is infinitely multiplied by powers of itself and each higher prime. All these composites will eventually emerge within the same cycle as the primes. The appearance of every prime number spawns an endless string of composites which will be incorporated into future manifestations of the cycle. Since these composite products are originating in a cycle which is unevenly spaced, and the pattern of their factorization is not aligned with the pattern of the cycle; the system's underlying regularity becomes less and less apparent as the composite products continue to build-up. The entire system
is completely rigorous and the appearance of every prime number and every composite can be predicted (click here for the demonstration of rigorousness and predictability). However, the two processes—the cyclic progression and the factorization of the composites which will be included in that progression—are inseparable; this is the reason that the system as a whole cannot be expressed algebraically. Number theorists are aware of both processes involved in the System of Prime Distribution but they see them separately, as a reduced residue class and a sieving routine, rather than as the integrated components of a single system.

Now lets move to another subject. We've all been wondering why they based their communication with us on glyphs which are a geometric/spatial transformation of our language. Obviously, it makes sense that it would be easier for us to communicate in our own language. However, visualization is the foundation of their approach to communication and the letter-sequences which form our written words are not visual images—they are a form of abstract symbolization which has no visual meaning. Written words are not images because the visual characteristics of their form are irrelevant; if that were not true, the same word would have an entirely different meaning depending on whether it was hand printed, written in script, typed in uppercase or lowercase, written in Braille, or spelled verbally. The form of the letters is irrelevant to the transmission of a word's meaning because the visual characteristics of a letter do not define its identity—a letter's identity is defined by its role in the patterning of lexical sequences. Although written language is not visually expressive, its patterning is capable of triggering meaningful imagery; consequently, in some sense, it would have to be in sync with our mechanism of comprehending imagery.

The makers of the glyphs assumed we were aware that our written words were an abstract symbolization of the lexical relations of our language. And they assumed we would recognize the visual modeling of the information encoded in our alphabetic sequences. They produced an information-preserving transformation of our written language based on what they consider to be the fundamentals of visual modeling, the point, line, and circle. To them, a circle is a regular polygon with an infinite number of vertices. If all these vertices were to be interconnected with lines, the result would be an infinite number of lines moving in an infinite number of directions in the two-dimensional space within the circle. Since every one of these lines is comprised of an infinite number of points, all possibilities of two-dimensional form can be mapped within the relational patterning defined by a circle. Since the model of our written language was constructed using visual fundamentals, and all content of the alphabetic system was included in the model; they assumed we would recognize the forms.

This is only a summary of the information we have obtained. For additional details, committee Members should contact the Project Director: http://winklerwordart.com/Index.html
PARIS PARTOUT
HOW THE AESTHETIC OF *La Vie en Rose*
HAS PERMEATED OUR CULTURE
by Antanas Sileika

Paris held foreigners in its thrall for well over a hundred years, representing freedom from the
dour, straightlaced homelands of the expatriates. Anais Ninn went to have sex and write about it,
Ernest Hemingway and company to drink themselves silly, and Oscar Wilde to die unhounded
for his homosexuality. A. J. Liebling began his career of overeating in Paris, Josephine Baker
created the earliest succès de scandale, and countless forgotten aspiring artists and writers lived
the romance of the bohemian life along the banks of the Seine.

These expatriates succeeded all too well. Their bacchanals proved so wildly popular in memoirs
and movies that the aesthetic of Paris now dominates the industrialized West. There are no more
straightlaced homelands. Why go to Paris any longer when Paris is here?

Take sex. Tourists used to flock to the Folies Bergère, the century-old music hall where they
could feel so sophisticated, looking at the pasty-free breasts on stage. But the real action was
outside, in the scummier *boîtes* and up and down the Rue St. Denis, where the prostitutes bared
their breasts to advertise their wares.

Why suffer jet-lag anymore for public or private sex? The saleslady for the pornography channel
asks over the phone, “Sir, to make sure you are properly connected to our channel, could you
please describe what you see on the screen?” What’s one to say at a moment like this, the erudite
fellatio? The grittier blowjob? The spectacle of sex that used to be available only in Paris now
comes into the staidest of homes. The real thing is freely available too in almost every major city
– the back pages of the entertainment weeklies advertise full body massage or an escort to come
to your place, which is one better than the old Parisian whorehouse – now there is home delivery.

The photographer of underground Paris of the thirties, Brassaï, took some of his most famous
photos in the lesbian Monocle Club and the gay dance halls where sailors waltzed with blushing
working men. But even Paris never had gay marriages. These are now available in selected states
and provinces near you.

Long after absinthe was banned in Paris, half the pleasure of going there lay in the exotic range
of alcoholic drinks you could sample. The American lost generation went to Paris in the twenties
to drink too much of almost anything during prohibition back home. Subsequent generations
went to learn discernment in wine. But wine appreciation has now reached the point where a
garage mechanic can sing the virtues of Australian Shirazes, and suburban dinner guests look to
the label to see if the sauvignon blanc comes from old vines. Everyone is a wine sophisticate
now, so much so that it has become boring and a younger generation has chosen to drink
cocktails again.
The quality of French food used to be much higher than ours, but at the local Loblaw, as big as the venerated Les Halles of Parisian fame, one has not only the choice between celery root and escarole, but between their organic and non-organic counterparts. A. J. Liebling famously ate in Paris for a year in 1926 instead of going to classes at the Sorbonne. What would the wide-girthed journalist say now? No need to go to Paris any longer. You can eat well just about anywhere, and besides, French food is passé. But if you have a hankering for cassoulet or confit de canard, it might be on offer at the Canadian corner bistro.

Paris used to be deliciously corrupt, addicted to celebrity and scandal. Josephine Baker was a succès de scandale in Paris in a way she could never be in the United States. When she danced bare-breasted with her banana skirt on the stage of the Folies in 1926, the bobbing bananas looked like what one biographer called “good-natured penises.” And Colette played the same game, causing a sensation when kissed her female lover on stage in Paris.

One hundred years later, Madonna and Britney Spears played out the same succès de scandale, as did Janet Jackson by baring her breast on TV. Istvan Kantor, a Canadian artist, played a version of the same game by splattering his blood on the gallery walls, and he succeeded. Want your fifteen minutes of fame? Cause a scandal and make sure your makeup is not smeared, for otherwise it looks bad in the glare of the spotlight.

The deepest Parisian influence on modern culture is the bohemian chic which we have all adopted without even being aware of where it came from. Henri Murger wrote his Scènes de la Vie Bohème in the first half of the nineteenth century, Puccini popularized them in opera, and we have been playing out his roles ever since then – we would all like to poète maudit: tempestuous, heedless of tomorrow, scruffy, artistic. Cool is just an updating of bohemian, whose antithesis used to be bourgeois and has now become suburban. Of a earlier generation, Mick Jagger was our bohemian and Margaret Trudeau ran away from staid respectability to be like him, but the ranks continue to swell today – Marilyn Manson and Atilla Lukacs all owe part of their persona to Paris bohemian chic.

People still go to Paris. Some go for the architecture, though they could see an Eiffel Tower in Las Vegas. Paris is still away, anyplace that is not home, anyplace where an expatriate is unknown and so free to succeed or be a fool. And some away are still better than others, so do not look for an expatriate outflow to Buffalo, Leeds, or even Lyons in France itself.

Returned visitors used to be able to sigh that they would “always have Paris.” But now one can sit, say, at an outdoor café on College Street in Toronto, sipping excellent wine, snacking on frites and watching the young bohemians and the gay couples holding hands. Paris is not just a memory. We may have left Paris, but now Paris has come to us.

President Kennedy once showed his solidarity with beleaguered Berlin by declaring, “Ich bin ein Berliner.”

Forty years later, Nous sommes tous Parisiens.

Antanas Sileika’s latest book is the critically acclaimed Woman in Bronze (Random House).
Four Poems by Juris Kronbergs  
*Translated from Latvian by Mara Rozitis*

**Strata of Time**  
*(Riga, The Andalusian Dog)*

Day sneaks off with a smell of tobacco  
Rain. Old film music drifts  
From a loudspeaker  
It’s Nostalgia’s birthday today  
Days of the past turn up  
Like uninvited guests  

Time leafs through your old  
as yet unwritten diaries  
You turn time  
Like the pages of a newspaper  
Where the print refuses to stick  

*  
Inside you howls  
An active emptiness  
That hints at religion  
Our railing at the edge of extinction  
You feed on that:  
The manna of nothingness  

*  
Empty streets empty windows  
Fill up with your ghosts of old  
A flash of thought a flash of proximity  
A flash of what may be  
Maybe was. May as well have been  
Rain all day. Fatigue  
Up to your neck  

*  
A wonder the houses haven’t been worn down  
By all these writings  

A wonder the words haven’t been worn away  
By all these prints of fingers  

A wonder the bridges haven’t been ground to dust  

Night. Houses of Parliament and Government sleep  
Democracy has surrendered to the dictatorship of dreams
Night That Transmutes Into Day and Time

Night is a quiet piano sound
With a tendency to deep-sounding threats
In the left handed bass tones
That easily overpower
The vacillating triplets of the right hand
Because night is left-handed

With definite not too frequent eighths
It runs into morning
Which time has not yet had time
To make a note of

Behind night’s last chords
In C major or A minor
We surmise morning’s first rain-heavy glissando
On the day’s viola and the drum rolling
Background clatter as a post-modern commentary
To childhood’s long and sunny summer’s
Soft winding fugue on a Spanish guitar

Time writes down all the inward sounding
Which is transformed into a story
Of your own escape and it’s hunting down

Running away and standing still
Like music like notes on a sheet

A snail on the pathway of autumn

a snail on the pathway of autumn
joy’s slow shadow despondency
November advances
light beats a retreat
the sun has flown to winter
on the island of the dogs
the sky is a grey carnation
in the buttonhole of the universe
thoughts squeak like hinges
on lop-sided doors
where did they go those angels
that were here just now
a snail on the pathway of autumn
it’s tentacles striving constantly
to touch them once again
I Reach Out In My Darkness

Life is stone and a gun barrel wreath
weaves round the violin string

Maybe the victory of Pyrrhus will be evoked
Maybe the Rook and King will find
some common ground. The shadow of desire

stretches no further than the intensity of despair
Flesh becomes an abstraction
envelopes dissolve unopened
and the triumph of non-being is already strewn with dust

Darkness is rebuffed by a figure
and its already realized intent. Could it be
a mirror, but its surface is not smooth
and polished

Could it be the Plough
in the dark sky – a budding embrace
of my gilded mistakes

Something emerged in a burst of smiles
something moved over timbers full of promise
in a newly built house
and stuck fast in the cracks

Blind consummation with baying ambition
Laughing disillusion. Too many followers:

all the centuries of civilization
and whips of abstract assumption
and hopes that lie napping

Eyes smart from sleepless years

It is not only about hardship and ease
or the razor edged shadows of tomorrow
to be dodged

Survival lodges in autumn leaves
the withered past crumbles to dust
And love leaves fingerprints
on my inner shelf

I will be a field left fallow
where truth will stride. Subtextual
ironies will be hung on the walls
God will bless my longings
and the counsellor Humility will
with a tearful smile take part
in the festival of the final accounting

Juris Kronberges latest book is Rudens Mani Raksti (Autumn, My Writings)
Valters un Rapa, Riga (Latvia) 2005.
ESTONIAN ELEGY
by Jüri Talvet

Shortly after midnight on 28 September 1994, in an area of the Baltic Sea sailors call "the ship cemetery," the passenger ferry “Estonia,” en route from the Estonian capital Tallinn to the Swedish capital Stockholm, sank, taking to the seafloor more than 900 lives. No other peacetime shipwreck on the Baltic has claimed so many victims. Technical failure and human error are among the possible causes of the wreck, as is a criminal act. The only certain conclusion of the investigating commission is that the huge ship was brought down by water.

No, it cannot be true.

Cramps of disbelief constricted throats that morning.
Legs turned to lead, as if earth were dragging us to its roots,
the way water tore them, naked children,
suddenly from their dreams to her iron-cold breasts.

No, it cannot be true.

Liberty should have meant warmth at last, and joy.
As always, among the first, Estonia pushed forward proudly.

The tether tied to us from twilit past times
could be forgotten finally, and the dark Middle Ages
with their foolish taboos could withdraw.

Had there not been enough bowing already
to German lords, scions of Vikings, Russian wags?
Enough hauling of stumps and stones at the marsh's edge?
And now that the people had power in its hands,
why could not the feast of the body's solace last forever?

(In this land the breath of prophets put pressure
on both ears. Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Bakhtin…
Who from the left hand, who from the right, depends
on which side of the map you adopt. Poor little Jew Yuri Lotman,
on the sad, fragile middle way, had no hope of becoming a prophet,
his eyes no longer open to the sky, here at the cemetery in Tartu,
Europe's dump, last year on a biting autumn day, homeless,
speechless, taken now for Russian, now for Latvian,
his only eulogy the violin's nightingale song
by the nourishing river that indifferently, coolly flows past.)

No, it cannot be true.

What stupid sophistry about God, sin, the duty of fasting!
Where was Christ when the Knights of the Cross killed
the children of Mary's Land and raped women and girls,
when, barely having roofed the first rooms of our own,
we found ourselves back on the snowy Siberian plains gnawing on permafrost,
at the waste land's rocky dump, there from where they say we came.
No, it cannot be true.

For thousands of years already we have been Europeans:
early tillers, at a time when others, the stronger,
consumed their neighbors, like an insatiable swarm of grasshoppers
discovered and plundered new continents,
driven by hunger, by the darksweet womb of a foreign woman.

Then a precipice, bitterness, anyway the cool grin of death.

Is small size proof of nobility? Have not we also desired
a midday under our mournful skies?
The king of Estonians rising from the field of Ümera,
his sword, bright with the blood of the foreign exploiters
pointed exultantly to the sun!

The ship's lights went out suddenly;
in the water's womb, amid seaweed, shoals of silent fish,
a school of children slept, dreaming
of a clear, bright summer morning.

No, it cannot be true.

We have waded in the mud of history,
calling for help from the bastards of our lords.
But who would recognize the puny name of Sittow
in the endless halls of Europe's castles,
in the numberless flock of Low Country painters?
Who would notice Schmidt's sweat and soul
in the lens, piercing into space, that illuminates regardless,
or Martens, among the faithful Russian civil servants,
in the rear of the regiment, without a necktie?

Then, Peterson, the Estonian Keats taken too young to the grave,
and the father of our song, Kreutzwald, who conducted the hero
of Mary's Land to Tartarus, as Vergil did Dante, to find love there.
(By that time the German Faust already sat comfortably
on the knees of the Virgin in heaven — late, always late!)

Or the singer of sunrise, Koidula, whose streaming
ravenblack hair proved the descent of Estonians
from the Peruvian arch-Inca, just like
the brush of Viiralt, made of Berber women's hair.

Who would learn to pronounce their names, or the even less
sonorous, clumsily compound Tammsaare?
Who would care about his earth-colored proofs
in a language the same as the tongue of Basques,
the nahuatl of Indians, the nonsense sounds of Celts.

No, it cannot be true.
Now Estonia sank again to a common grave,
so suddenly there was no time to divine
who in the mist of times had been master and who slave,
who until the death hour had fornicated in the bed of pleasure
and who had loved the homeland.

Oh, rage of the dance of death! Just as the clothes
are torn to flesh and flesh to bones
of the ants who always made provision, so of those
who let today's wind blow through their thin bodies!

Oh, alphabetic death, whose laughter does not mark
the darkness or brightness of our intellectual signs!

All words bore the zero-sign when
an Estonian stretched his hand to a drowning Russian,
when a dry Swede from his scraggy breast
withdrew warmth to tender it to a freezing Estonian.

Not in this century had the ironwet foot
so trampled, until blood flowed,
the mighty frame of the Scandinavian lion.
No, it cannot be true.

How could that other wave still comfort
that had reached from an even darker night,
ever behind our backs, threatening,
that Estonians in the joyful shouts of song festivals
wearily, dreamily, vainly invoke and erase?

I am not interested in your cemeteries, nor in your proofs
that in your graveyards is hidden another, bigger state.
I am interested only in life, the capacity
of our kaleidoscopic time to give a unique pattern to colors.

Just an ethereal turn, just a fourth of a degree
of skillful movement learned from the Greek artists,
opens the safe, blessed niche!

No, it cannot be true.

For thousands of years already we have been Europeans.
Thousands of years before Marx and Friedman
we knew that Penelope's heart
would not stay cold to the Tyrian purple
and that Odysseus, cavorting with naiads,
really hopes the journey home will never end,
and that the poor orphan Telemachus is Oedipus,
persistently pestering his parents
who build their bed ever wider,
as the East-Slavonic sensible germ
pestered the French prime minister, who
in the early 1990s shocked his colleagues
by firing a bullet into his head.
Again you come out with your myths,
but we simply have no time for them. Why
should the two of us, Señor González and Herr Kohl,
worry about the crumbling ozone over our heads
or have nightmares of drowning Estonia or sinking Europe
if our heads and stomachs ache each weekend
for worry over how our beloved countrymen
in their beloved cars can get to beaches to inhale more oxygen,
how it is possible that today Real could be beaten
by Bavaria so badly, or vice versa,
and how the fluctuation of sausage prices has been influenced
by the air wall, the spirit of Marx that, as before,
hovers sneering between Unter den Linden
and Tierpark — despite our mighty hammers,
despite our warm embraces!

No, it cannot be true.

For thousands of years already we have been Europeans.
At our rebirth, as midwife,
Plato nervously bustled. From him we learned
that the idea of love is more important than love itself;
he illuminated the rose that blossomed in Eco's mind
and guided Lotmans' forceps,
which from the gelatinous well
drew to daylight struggling signs of life.

Had Plato ever loved?
We do not know, despite
his protestations that love
could not nestle in the beloved,
but only in the lover himself.

Well, there are the lovers themselves:
amid the rubbish drifting in the Singel Canal
in Amsterdam
they leave their sad saleable ingredient —
whether from green, black,
or white skulls, from wrinkled
or smooth brains.
(Look at muddy Rembrandt, ecstatic
spermatic Van Gogh
painting despair that floats
amid the chunks of flesh.)

How would you like to go home, to yourself,
to the green morning mist of Estonia, to the heart's depth and breadth,
there where Europe shakes from herself
the omniscient sludge of evenings
and is a child again!
But you know nothing of yourself —
until the moment when from behind a wall
rising to the heavens (built of unnumbered cities,
mountains, rivers, deep
triangular wells, women's breasts,
oblivions, graveyards with skeletons
and crosses, silver hair, crowns of veins,
and memories) breaks a longing,
a voice that does not begin only in myself.

(Many prophets have died without living that longing,
or lived without dying from it.
Look, Plato, that is why love in yourself alone is insufficient,
and even less the idea of love.
But the Green Knight tests the living
at least three times: are you faithful!
Be steadfast: one from whose scalp
the golden curl of vanity has not
by the third time fallen
will not raise his head!)

All this could be called a sign, a mist,
a dream, something that cannot be true,
that vanishes at once,
— as that night wise computer craniums
blinked out into the opaque mist of algae —
had you and I not been there
at that moment when God did not yet know
whom to name Europe, whom to name Estonia,
whom rose;
what to name us, who (having been born into the universe
unfadingly from whatever earth, water,
whatever odor, seed, fire,
whatever distances)
are true. Just so, we ask
of ourselves, we who receive ourselves,
tenderness (more than a name), love (more
than blood), light (more than bones).


THE SCORE
by Larissa Kostoff

It was happening again. No matter what she did to shake it off, dance got into everything. At the restaurant where she worked for years following her injury, the staff was chosen on the basis of looks and cool and the kind of attitude that created a vertical fear in their newly, often precariously successful clientele. This fear made them regulars. And the money they spent then, how familiar they became with the staff (now and then walking one of the girls home or following a group of them to the after-hours place on Ossington) was their ticket back. Into youth culture. Hip culture. Beauty. To create a motive so terminal and hard to put one’s finger on was genius. Certainly if you had to go blue collar it was the sign of a thinking man’s boss.

Curtis Walcott arrived in Canada with nothing but his draft card and a small bag of books. He went on to publish a thin volume of poetry sometime in the early seventies, a formidable collection of words about geology and migrational storms. Critics loved it. So did the nation, and Curtis was invited to stay. When he later abandoned a sophomore effort in favor of political work, good political work that resulted in the formation of the arts councils and legislated funding for artists, he was awarded an honorary doctorate. He pasted this degree to the wall of the small office he maintained at the far end of the restaurant, the restaurant he built with government funds.

Although in her interview he’d called her provincial for wanting one day to get out, Anna supposed it was natural and right that he liked rocks and wind. Much as he liked and was protective of his time. In the months following their opening, as the restaurant rose in profile and even established a degree of street credibility, he’d taken to dropping it, his time, like a compliment on whomever it was he favored. You could argue, and people did, that it taught them respect for their time, and for the alternate careers he claimed to foster as well.

These days he liked to discuss new literary theory, oftentimes with her. “It’s retaliatory,” he’d say, swishing the peanut-sized dollop of foam she’d prepared into his espresso. “It’s crass. It’s a bunch of linguists good for nothing but the swank disarmament of those old-fashioned enough—poor bastards—to want to read primary sources.”

It surprised her to know that she agreed, although of course she lacked the vocabulary to make her case. Curtis was good. In all sorts of ways he was actually grand. He fully expected to drink at their trough and be included in their jokes and whatever trails they were blazing on behalf of their generation and posterity. And while he didn’t exactly expect to get into their beds, he certainly hoped you’d invite him. The thought that this was wrong, even dirty, rarely surfaced. In the one or two instances where legal action was taken Curtis had covered his back, and was thus able to quite happily, fearlessly, fire the insurgent. You’d be pissed at him for a time and then invariably you’d let it go. Because he could talk you out of a room as he made eyes at your ass, at the appropriate moment unraveling the kite of his personal legacy like a plume to your weak attempt at style.

Mounted on the wall beside the bar sink was a power board of more than sixty dimmer switches. Beside each sliding button was a diagrammatic explanation of wattage and location and proper gradations of brightness according to the hour it was, and also the time of year. This power board became the subject of endless debate. The definitive marker, according to Curtis, of their sheik. “Treat it like a living sculpture,” he’d say. “Of which you are a living part.” This was the artistry. To his credit there was an actual musical allowance as well, and staff members were regularly asked to contribute a bit of themselves to a soundtrack they’d create together, although Curtis himself preferred Cuban. This was the score.

Which carried the room, as they liked to call it, and the room was beautiful. All tans and aged wood with a single wall of exposed brick that ran the length of the building. The brick had been strung meticulously
in vine so that green tentacled feet tiptoed about while you ate, and someone or other was always trying to extract a suctioned bit of foot from the wall. Curtis would watch for this and calmly float across the room to engage them in a talk about exotic plants and high-end dining, his white teeth flashing bright against a white ring of hair and a chiselled pair of kneecaps. This was the showmanship.

And this was also an honest living. A full day’s work could be exhilarating, or it could throw you up against the sucking blowfish of a thousand strangers who wanted you to be their whipping boy or their sultry consort or the smile they deserved at the end of the day. One could never tell and perhaps that was the fun, the tense hope that started every evening. Money? Connection? A tryst? The rock and roll of adrenaline and hungry bodies piling in and at you with their hopes and their dates and their feeble resolve and their varying degrees of lust and aggression and greed.

Life’s little variables. Life. The fact that at any moment a night could fly out from under your feet like a magic carpet. This was the rhythm and when this happened, she’d think of her life. Her old life. Dance. She liked her own tricks when this happened, the particular way the music made her move, thirteen fling-hipped strides to cross the room. She liked these young men—customers—talking about their lives and what nearly cost them their lives, and their work. And the eager newbie Curtis had elected her to train. His moony face was intense, flooding and falling and following her to the kitchen and to her tables and to the bar.

Where he practically assaulted her now, drizzling salt on some oil at her feet and then chastising her for running in heels. “Above average.” she said, and shot the tequila she’d been offered. “Gold star.” The scrape of her own teeth against the lemon she’d been given was sharp and it left her feeling red and a little swollen. She knew her tables were jealous, furious that she’d dare drink this shot. Her tables, who’d seen no one on fire, were unhinged. But she’d already cut off her thumbs so they could suck, and flashed them her tits so they could feel. She’d peppered and watered and asked after them. Endlessly.

And now the kitchen screamed and the young man at her elbow offered her his number and the woman in the red dress, who was clearly here on a date, marked her territory with such venom that she made a mental note to speak only to her eyes for the rest of the meal, and never to his. This was the stamina. And this could go on for hours.

Unless the night called your bluff. This was the wild card. A forgotten glass of water. A too rare tuna steak. She could stand there, extinguished, and cry. Or she could lie. Smile and like, Curtis always said. Smile and lie. Anyway, as she’d ask the innocent—who was certainly now planning escape—what to do? Joke and they’d think you uppity. Admit to another life and they’d leer at you or they’d want to make you their cause. Shine the button of your navel at the wall as you reach to remove an empty plate that had been sitting for too long and the wives would destroy you.

Of course this was when the patron she’d been tending for hours, the one with the recumbent eyes and the two-fingered whistle that snapped at her tendons like an elastic band, would look at her blankly and say who are you? And she wouldn’t know because she’d be prostrate on the gravel in the alley behind the kitchen, a handful of tiny pebbles like shrapnel in her skin and the poor little kid, the newbie, crying like a baby at the door. Too much skin tonight, she’d think, they don’t deserve it.

If you’d managed to find an ally, the way Anna had in Kevin, he’d watch your back. She made a bad habit out of that gravel patch and Kevin got so he could see it coming in the way she poured a cup of coffee or set down a dinner plate. He’d follow her out there, poking his head playfully through the kitchen door. “You know that none of this is real,” he’d say. He was a screenwriter with a fedora and a secret love of vamp. He used his fedora like a prop, and the old school glamour in that and the pranks that he played and the way his eyes crinkled when he smiled could lift her heart. “Curtis in the house,” he’d add “Wants to tell you something about the velocity/ temperature ratio of milk steamed in a steel as opposed to a plastic bowl.”

She’d breathe in the smell of city and rot and wonder if she could remember the thick humectant drop of autumn on a forest. In that autumn, she’d heave her courage up and over her head. Run with it held away from her body like a city on fire. Nobody danced like that anymore.
From WELDING AND OTHER JOINING PROCEDURES
by Di Brandt

“In the poem, each, or almost each word should be used in its original meaning. Some of them, cutting loose, may become plurivalent. And there are amnesiac ones. The constellation of the solitary is arrayed.… Why pulverized poem? Because at the end of its journey towards the Homeland, after the prenatal darkness and earth’s harshness, the finitude of the poem is light, what being bears into life.” -- René Char

* “That was the summer we learned about explosive welding”

Explosive welding differs from conventional welding in that the materials to be joined do not melt on contact and their surfaces do not deform. There are no unwelded surfaces or signs of local melting with explosive welding. The outer layer of the two surfaces are stripped down by intense volatile attraction, leaving virgin surfaces which can then adhere. In contrast to conventional fusion welding, explosive welding can weld materials with widely divergent properties, e.g., lead can be welded to steel, science to poetry.

The bond of explosively welded materials can be tested in two ways: destructive and non-destructive. Destructive tests include the peel test, the bend test, the twist test, the direct tension test, and the shock test. The peel test consists of cutting a small piece out of an explosively welded item, gripping it in a vice, or firm fist, and pummeling it with sharp cutting instruments, chisel, pliers, harsh words, etc. The bend and twist tests employ whatever tools are available, gossip, vague fears, angry tears.

The direct tension test requires a piece of the explosively welded item to be screwed into the jaws of a tension machine. A university campus or business office with disgruntled employees will do. This test is particularly severe but provides incontestable evidence of bond resistance against perpendicular tension.

The shock test is required if the explosively welded materials anticipate severe affective differences during adherence, and consists of immersion in situations of extreme contrasts in temperature, viewpoint or experience.

Non-destructive tests include the hammer test, the sweat test, and perhaps most profoundly, the ultrasonic sound test. The hammer test involves light tapping or stroking on the surface of the welded materials. A skilled operator can estimate the strength of the bond from the quality of the resonance set in motion by the taps.

The sweat test is best used to check the edges of the explosively welded materials. A silver penetrating liquid is poured onto the skin of the explosively welded item to impregnate its finest cracks, best reviewed under cool silk sheets.
Ultrasonic beams may be sent into the explosively welded items from a variety of benign sources, lasers, shooting stars, sympathetic friends. The difference between the intensity of the intermediate and background echo of a good welded bond and the intermediate and background echo of a weak bond is striking. Hear them rippling, sparkling, in every direction.

* 

“Or perhaps more like thermonuclear fusion”

In fission reactions, a heavy nucleus, a family, say, splits into two lighter nuclei, through differences or marital separation, plus two or three neutrons with high kinetic energy, house, cottage, children. In fusion reactions, two light nuclei join to form a heavy nucleus, a household, say, and a light nucleus with high kinetic energy, shared projects, offspring. Fission is easily understood and widely used. Fusion is more difficult to manage, for all its promise of ongoing useful heat.

The fundamental problem in fusing two nuclei, that is, subjects with very different histories and life experiences, is that they are each positively charged and so repel each other. However, if the subjects meet head on with high enough energy, say in a busy traffic intersection, or interdisciplinary seminar, or bar, they can get close enough to each other for the forces which hold all nuclei together, despite their net positive charges, to overcome their repulsion; in this way they can begin to “touch.” (Remember the word “touch” must be used loosely because nuclei don’t have clearly defined boundaries.)

We might think of achieving fusion by firing beams of charged particles, glances across rooms, email messages, project proposals, at each other. However, the probability of the particles being scattered out of the beam and lost is several thousand times greater than the probability of two nuclei fusing. The best way to prevent scattering is to confine nuclei in small chambers, coffee shops, conferences, and heat them to a high temperature through extensive energetic conversation interspersed with delectable dining. This way the subjects are much more likely to collide and fuse.

While nuclear fusion was not regarded as economically viable in the past, given the high capital cost of building reactors capable of achieving nuclear confinement with enough density, it seems likely to become competitive in the near future. There is no theoretical possibility of nuclear excursion in a nuclear fusion reactor, as there is in a fast fission breeder. There is simply not enough fuel in it at one time to permit an “H-bomb type” explosion. The environmental dangers associated with fission fuel are also much less in the case of fusion reactions because of the significantly lower rate of radioactivity involved, such as resentments gathered over a long period of time.

We dream of the possibility of building thermonuclear fusion power reactors completely free of radioactivity. In such a reactor all fusion reactions would be precisely tuned to the moment and no negative energy leaks, no escape of destructive neutrons, would occur. If such a reactor became available, it would be the ultimate power source – practically free of energetic pollution of any kind.

* 

“Or maybe mitochondrial tethering”
It turns out different biological trafficking systems use identical steps to accomplish desired mergers. These steps include what intracellular molecular fusion experts call tethering and docking.

Tethering refers to the initial attraction between a vesicle and a membrane, in you and me, and she and she. Tethering is not well understood. The vesicle is mysteriously and powerfully drawn into the membrane’s orbit, radius, aura, and held there, even though they are separated by considerable distance. Experts are unable to explain tethering’s nubile, numinous, nirvanic hold over organisms. Poets and lunatics, fetuses and toddlers, lovers and mothers, have lain in its arms, made their beds there, feathered, flown in its ether, forever.

Docking, or petting, is easier to document and observe. Snares (sensitive “n” factor attachment receptors) or in some cases, trap(p)s (transport protein particles) on the tethered vesicle surface combine with snares, or trap(p)s, as the case may be, on the attracting membrane. Hunter gatherer styles differ. Interactive snare and trap(p) complexes created by docking draw the membranes slowly closer, closer, closer to each other, until the bilayers fuse, overwhelmed by their close proximity and shared attachments.

While some investigators are puzzling over which particular proteins, poeticisms, qualities of eye contact, best promote membrane fusion, others are simply enjoying the resulting mitochondrial togetherness in a state of domestically inflected bliss. All that for this.

*  

“At night they mused on the day mystery of how flowers eat light”

Coherent oscillations of a single excitation between an isolated atom, you dreaming of ecstasy under a full moon shining over the dark lake, and a cavity, me, walking down a treelined street across the county, aching for you, have been observed, under conditions of electronically charged correspondences through superconducting transmission line resonators.

O, but then the happy investigators found the strong coupling of photon to superconducting qubit in the way they had previously only imagined, however tumultuously, across rustling shadowed fields, could be demonstrated in fact. And they did. And it was. Delightful feats of atomic cavity quantum electrodynamics, on sunblasted beaches with eggshaped coloured stones, beside damp wood smoky fires at sundown, under wool blankets through ecstatic starfilled nights.

The rest of that steamy summer they explored the coherent and conditional dynamics of the coupled system. For example, probing the coupled qubit oscillator spectroscopically, they were fascinated to observe the phenomenon of rising coloured sideband resonant frequencies in relation to different pulses. An extremely high frequency excited the qubit tremendously, evoking rosy hues in the sidebands. A variable frequency, on the other hand, de-excited it, resulting in shades of blue. Sometimes the coupled system fell into a mysterious in between state, simultaneously red, yet blue, for hours, days.

Occasionally, owing to unavoidable distractions in either photon or cavity, the system cooled to near ground state. The calculated transmission spectrum for thermal photons then became incompatible with the experimental data, a cause for worry which the investigators, caught up as they were by the magic spectacle of matter absorbing light, brushed aside for the time being. Bees, emissaries of the sun, urgent, tender, circling her petal tips, corollic radiance.
The Heart’s Dumb Memoir
by Una McDonnell

Sepia, crimson: colours of the body:
under oxygen, light,
under closed eyes the film of life
passes,
fades in the dim
eye of memory: Do not feed me

bloodless talk. Feel
the Adam's apple fist
in your throat: Love runs

its roulette circle, and, we stand,
waiting, each, for our numbers…

The silver ball dances, hovers—
on the line:
I want your number, you
want hers and she wants mine;
blood filters back

through the needle,
then belts
into body; the neon hiss

of a moth
seeking light. —Send me

out, if you must, but skin

me first, send me raw—

If not your glistening
Body

—the steam, after
ASTONISHING DETAILS OF THE UNIVERSE
by Jeff Gundy

Created things follow a pattern.
They do not know rest.
- The Odes of Solomon, #16

1.
Every red-winged blackbird, every reed washed up against
the black shore, each thin new sparrow and pair

of white butterflies proclaims and emboiders in the same air.
If we asked they might say too many are neither awake nor asleep.

2.
No one, sane or crazy, can sleep in the valleys of the clouds.
In the dawn I rise and finger the foggy afterimages

of spacious rooms upstairs in the house, full of light
and antiques, burnished beds and dressers I could never afford.

3.
Try this for a story: George cries in his cradle.
George’s mother loves him and cannot help him.

George marries and becomes a preacher. George falls
while rising from the toilet and never regains his strength.

George’s children inherit the earth and rediscover
the blessed condition of the early church:

furtive, perplexed by rumors and apparitions
they wrestle for splinters and bones.

4.
Beauty is not the problem nor the answer.
My mother loves me and cannot help me now.

The gold coin of light is the sun,
the gold coin of darkness is the night.

There are more true words than there are bugs
in the Little Riley Creek.

He made the sun to clarify the day
but evening blurs the face of the earth.
The evidence is buried so deep
that we’re all safe forever or lost for good.

Their alteration
speaks the beauty of God.

5.
Just off the familiar road is a clearing
where no one has walked in forty years

of light and shadow, dusks and dawns,
sleepy drivers following the curve

to the auto plant, passing the sumac and day lilies,
squinting into another sun.

(N.B.: passages in italics are from The Odes of Solomon, #16)

Intention
by Christopher Dewdney

Was it your intention
to move your hand just then,
to nod, to scratch, to look
this way or that?
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,
voluntarily. 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
when you had moved your hand,
as if you actually had.
TWO POEMS
by Margaret Christakos

BARELY
Words that write themselves forget me
but you is of a different mind

I mind differently what I mean is
I are of a strangeness
unplaced in order  Lacerate

without certainly

when categories desist
and yeah, wreak he a gift, yet

don’t been to please for

: afternoon arrives on memory
: quicksand-greedy takes all of all
   in.

(Confused woman tears pie with fingers, licks flakes of crust from plate)

2:20 pm

No longer the filling
or, partial in motion, even-summoned.
Crack up on some shore lame bird
print a sleeve of their chest
Which Washes aWay Why We Wear hope/desire briefly. Evasive. Erase then
vacuate

pour the body is fond of location
: tanks poorly.
(The woman, salivating asocially, wipes grease on mine shirttail)

(A boy studies Atwood ahaahahahahahaha over economical coffee)

(“Couples” chatter)

Go along to three damp border
decoy how distances close on
dis discovering party. Rarely whence
I I I I I I I I I I I I ridicule loose meaning
they
shut out irksome cupboard, hoarding some excellent foamish deal.

(SVP woman do not eat a third)

(Someone applies to work in kitchen Send resumé his is ordered)

(Who loves the crumbs and licks, salivary for secretion)

Reprisal
how thought can extol template
cautious individuals made some nightfall, silly trifling, intention—

(Please woman, that lack perspective)

(Her has pocketed fork again)

(Msr Canadiana rubs him downy chin, considers actions of the ally)

It have worn no earrings and feel moyenne
as a display of emotion

(I leaving, hurl finger “Not you! He don’t steal!”)
GLISTEN
(to the tune of “Hello Darkness My Old Friend”)

Glisten woman’s addle, believe! Centre patter, choked sterling lynchpin,
of luster lips, covered powder. Sleeping slackly, collect earrings,
blacklist his irrigate some order laundry snake!
grist, syncopate

for standing tap, fragility, lighting...

Glisten, toggle lighting
Luster, stare on sterling
Syncopate, pitter patter
Irrigate, spinal tap
Lynchpin, cheap powder
Order, intern earrings
Blacklist, ogle slackly
Addle, subtract grist.

Slackly Stare on Irrigate
Can you not collect your own clothes
from the laundry floor?

Lynchpin Grist Patter
And when she choked I stared at
her blueing lips, helpless.

Powder Toggle Order
My keyboard is covered in finger whorls,
greasy ones, the children’s of course.

Syncopate Earrings Pitter
He preferred chandelier-style, bejewelled
fragility dangling near a woman’s
jugular.

Lighting Intern Addle
There’s no snake in the grass! Believe
me!
Glisten Sterling Ogle

*While the roast is standing, rub each tine with some chamois.*

Subtract Cheap Luster

*He was sleeping in the washing machine, wondering what next to try, when she glimpsed his nape.*

Blacklist Tap Spinal

*When you get to the centre of town, take a left, watch for thespians.*

grist) There’s no snake!
slackly) He was sleeping earrings) Can you not collect powder) My keyboard is covered tap) While the roast is standing patter) When you get to the centre sterling) And when she choked lighting) He preferred...fragility.

Believe me! addle His nape; blacklist Laundry floor; order Of course; lynchpin Some chamois; irrigate For thespians; syncopate Lips, helpless; luster Woman’s jugular: glisten
Round Dance
by Andrew Bomberry

Walk a mile in my “moccasins”,
take a tour, not quite the powwow highway –
but wait, ‘bout my moccasins, I haven’t any.
Only pair I ever wore was dear to me, a dear
ten dollars and I only ever wore ‘em to dance
half-assed, in class – as if being aboriginal could be taught
in classrooms. With textbooks stating
the buffalo’s doom, then introduces the Indians who hunt them,
synonymous with extinction.
I’ve heard Mother Goose has been punished,
slapped on the wrist. Bad, inappropriate children’s tales,
lets add “How to be Indian,” ‘bout Big Chief and wife
Squaw Woman to the list. Squaw – defined on reserve
as the fastest way to get a woman’s point across – right cross.
We’ll make False Face masks, silly as you please
with shiny beads and glass, made specially
in Japan. Run around trick-or-treating
demanding food or land.
Handouts galore, free education and tax free –
tough to remember when we’re outrunning RCMP, OPP, SNP,
and oh gee, are all those cop cars for me?
Honest officer, I was just breaking in
my moccasins – yeah. Call me an apple again
and choke on the core.
Enough of this.
To BC, further west where I’m wanted,
in fact the going rate.
Simply skin me and collect the bounty on my head.
But just for fun, try it the good ole Indian way,
before Europeans – and how did my classmate say?
Before horses and weapons, that’s it. When hunting was fun,
bringing down deer by biting their necks, punching
their eyes, kicking their shins and why won’t they die!
Or to Saskatchewan, quiet, eerie Saskatoon
where police offer special
“Starlight Tours,”
but only once.
Follow me to the USA, but wait, I just remembered
Sitting Bull,
Chief Joseph and
Leonard Peltier.
from Human Resources

by Rachel Zolf

She’d seen the short, square Portuguese woman a few times since moving into the neighbourhood just too far from the centre of town. One day she realized the woman, Isara, had taught her how to clean bureaucrats’ trashcans and toilets many years ago. Nine dollars an hour had seemed okay to an 18-year-old on her way to university. They’d had no words in common, so she learned through gesture and mimesis, somewhere knowing Isara didn’t have to help her. Next time she sees Isara shuffling up the street, she stops and asks, “Remember me?”, swooping her arm in tight scrubbing circles.

Game theory has always been a favourite pastime—Huizinga’s “temporary . . . limited perfection,” the poised codes of a Homo Ludens that “creates order, is order.” For a class presentation, she draws concentric circles on the board, representing the voracious progress of Austen’s card-sharp Emma. Ashamed to admit she may be a structuralist at heart, she needs to identify the elements of the poem before it can start. Walking around for years with a dog-eared list of what to write about the Shoah, she crossed each line out with satisfaction, arbeit macht frei.
Market Day
by Richard Douglas-Chin

Iyaagba ewa. Iyaagba ewa. ¹
E wa, e wa, e wa. Iya agba e wa.
Come, Grandmother, come.
It is market day.
Ojo oja l’oni
Let us go down the way together
E je k’ajo lo
E je k’ajo lo si ilu
Let us go down together to town
the weather rainy
Ojo nro
Rain is falling
calling you and I
E yin ati emi
Labe ofurufu dudu
Under blue-grey sky
In the sultry heat of the afternoon
Ninu ooru osan gangan
In the sweating heat of the high afternoon
So sweet in June is Charlotte Street
Ona salote dun pupo l’osu kefa odun
Charlotte way, so sweet in the sixth month
in the teeming rain
Ti oun ti ojo jojo
In Port of Spain
Ni ibudo Spaini
At noon let us go down L’osan, e je ka lo
Let us go down
E je ka lo

The market dim
and dark shimmers
and glimmers
of stark sunlight dwelling
with smells of
king fish thick
and mixed with the
sick of car exhaust
the sun lost in black, oozing asphalt
stomach somersault
a cornucopia of smells
Utopia of shrimp shells

¹ Come, Grandmother, come. Yoruba. Many descendants of the African diaspora in Canada, North and South America, and the West Indies trace their origins back to the Yoruba people of West Africa. Yoruba translations by Yomi Obidi.
and pig feet, pork meat  
and vegetable life, rife  
carrot, green bean and stalk.  
We walk together  
through smothering heat  
and hazy streets, we are debonair.  
Your hair is ebony  
streaked with gray  
your necklace chain  
and bracelets gold  
are bold in sunlight.  
I confess, I might have seen the  
flesh of your thighs  
against which the thinness of your  
shins and calves are a crying dichotomy  
a veined mass of varicose  
closely interwoven  
a charred, scarred,  
and painful mass  
around which you pass your bandages  
freshly salved with ointment.  
I have bent to see these things  
hidden beneath a hem,  
above which you are beautiful.  
Midnight blue is the colour of you.  
Your dress a mess of  
polka dots, white spots on blue,  
are truly magnificent!  
Munificent is your market basket  
for the task it has of gathering  
yams and plantain  
thick, rough down, or yellow-brown skin  
in brown hands  
sweet mellow banana smell  
cassava and eddoes  
on a bed of steaming rice  
and spices keen, and  
blue dasheen and green callaloo,  
and crab legs too  
you must suck the white meat up  
Grandmother tucks these pleasures  
in her basket,  
measures of love.  
I will carry the basket, Grandmother!  
Mama, emi yio gbe apere naa!  
No, my little one, it is too heavy for you.  
Nda, omo mi, o wuwo ju fun o.
For Grandmother to trip and fall,
to lose her basket full of things
all because I bring my small
self underneath her feet
and in between the folds of
her polka dotted dress
is my worst nightmare.
Everywhere the contents of her basket
scatter, rolling,
what a mess,
provisions bowling, watercress flying
I am crying, "Grandmother!" horrified.
And your shin, unbandaged, grins
wide open, it will be months
before it heals again
and this shameful wound vanishes.
I am banished to the deepest circle
of creeping hell,
abandoning all hope as I enter there,
where I a well-damned creature
am sinning and unworthy.
A blue-black man helps my grandmother
stand upon bandy legs and shaky feet, and she
is laughing, sweet, muffled laughter
which can forever after transform the air
about her into fair heavenly ether, a richness
from which I am exempt, wretchedly weeping
keeper of blame, unkempt transgressor
of the vilest order, shamed.
Yet you, grandmother, comfort me.
Retrieving your basket,
the moment is past, and people have gone their ways
at last, have helped us
with the task of collecting
our provisions.
Let us go home.
And on our way,
let us take from the bakery
a golden turnover,
bursting with apple and
cinnamon cloves, tenderflaked
and baked with a topping of huge
sugar crystal.
This, grandmother,
is sweeter than kisses,
for this is what bliss is,
and I, indeed, am comforted.
STARLING’S LAW OF THE HEART
by Matthew Holmes

1. When S— was eleven, living in V—, he found a bird sidled into the crack between the old brick sidewalk and the lean of someone’s retaining wall. It was a chick, blinking at the low world sideways, lower than it had ever been. It would not fly. S— had been told about mites and could imagine the tear in his finger its beak would make, where the dirt would mix into his blood and, when he was twenty-two or so, like a splinter left in too long, make its way to his heart and stop it. So he made a sort of funnel out of paper, scooped up the bird without touching it and brought it home, where it sat in a shoebox in his window for three days before dying.

2. In V—, later, S— would go out to the pier and stand listening to the sound of the pebble beach rolling itself in the flowtide: a sound of slot machines, rainsticks, popcorn, knuckles cracking, oak leaves. In the cold, his ears would start to pierce his thoughts, then numb, then ache deep inside his head. The mist bringing the broken stumps of pilings around the pier into a sharper presence, like the build up to surprise. When the pulse knows before the throat does.

3. She told him once that she came from a star whose light hadn’t reached us yet. There. Right below Orion’s belt, pointing. Just before dawn with a cargo train rolling by, rolling by, rolling by in the fields outside of T—. The morning she left, both of them quiet with it. The sky was getting that sharp blue colour. Trying to sense how emptiness can give the feeling of weight. Like water.

4. His ring said 92.5 on the inside: sterling. He took it off his finger and sniffed the lighter skin there. Not paying attention. The ring bounced once on his desk and he came out of it—wherever he’d just been. Put the ring back on. Outside the window winter was coming, the rain on the mud on the other side of the road making it silver, like snow was already collecting in the low places. Inside, the hiss of the air was on, circulating something warm through the building. Down the street he could see a few people in other offices: standing at their windows, walking by. Each building housing its own season, opposite to the one outside. Each person somewhere else, or in another time.
BOUNCING
by Stuart Ross

Due to a powerful convolution of tanglement, one ankle blocking the path of another, a knee tilting inward while a foot swung around backward, I fell and I hit my head. I didn’t witness it from nearby but from within my very self; and so I am only speculating upon the precise sequence of limb-related fiascos, but the blows to my head I am certain of. My head hit the ground, and then hit it again, and then again, and so forth, and I realized I was bouncing down the small hill like an upturned pogo stick, which is something I’d believed possible only in cartoon animation. I’m tempted to digress for a moment so that we can compare our favourite childhood Saturday-morning programming, but my doctor — as well as my brothers and my mother — have expressed impatience with my digressions, and I don’t want to exasperate you, as well, because right now you’re the only person who will actually talk to me.

Here’s the thing: with each blow, each contact of the top of my head to the hard-dirt ground — along a sloping path that served as a shortcut to my home, allowing me to avoid the paved sidewalks riddled with children and their lemonade stands — I uttered a sharp “Ah!” or “Unh!” depending on the exact angle of impact. Thus did the people who lived up along the edge of the ravine, their houses in danger of tumbling into the trees, hear me and come running through secondary and tertiary paths to witness my comical descent. Well, they found it comical until they found it alarming. They jogged along behind me, their numbers growing, discussing amongst themselves what they might do to slow me down and bring me to a stop, lest I bash my brains to smithereens in the ravine, making it impossible for them to, in the future, gaze down wistfully into the trees and mist without evoking the terrible picture of my boinging demise.

As for me, I wondered if, after all, it wouldn’t have been preferable to sidestep the occasional lemonade stand and hurt the feelings of small children by declining to patronize them as they make their first desperate stabs at capitalism, a system I championed, but whose drawbacks I was all too aware of. Yes, perhaps I might even have stopped and enjoyed a plastic tumbler of the sweet pink lukewarm drink, parting with a nickel or dime, or whatever these midget entrepreneurs extorted from passersby these days. It is unlikely, that way, that I would have felt this terrible pounding atop my sorry noggin.

I could hear only snatches of the discussion around me, but there was talk of lassoing me, rolling a log into my path, shooting me with a sedative-loaded dart, and tackling me outright; one woman, gasping for breath as she loped along, suggested passing me a pillow that I might hold above my head, or more rightly below it, given my inverted posture, to cushion the impact each time I bounced. They argued, they joked, they
shouted to each other and to me, they formed committees and subcommittees, agreed on meeting dates and venues. I cannot say they weren’t taking my predicament seriously.

By now I had reached the cradle of the ravine and had begun to bounce up the opposite incline. This surprised me, as I had expected to tumble into a heap at the bottom, not continue my staccato trajectory uphill. I had to accept that this would not end, that I would continue pogoing along, the audience dwindling and swelling again depending on the time of day, the weather, their work schedules, and what was on television. I would never show up for work again — they would hire someone else to press the button when necessary — and I might never again see my family.

A man from the press loped along beside me now, close as he could safely come, and he was hunched over, his legs kicking comically as if he were a Russian dancer. I recognized him from the tiny square picture that appeared beside his name in the paper, and took comfort that it was no mere reporter assigned to me, but a popular columnist. “I am the Bouncing Man,” I told him. “I was a happy child and a content father and husband, but now I spring through the ravine and shortly up into the street and down the highway and through an endless string of villages, each blow to my lid a reminder that we are placed upon this earth by god and we are set upright and given a tiny shove that we might begin moving and determining our own direction and in this way defining who we are and what our values might be. Tell your readers that I have a joined a club of exceptional men — men who stumble without cessation about their living rooms, who stomp day and night through the corridors of their offices, who teeter like metronomes in public squares. I am not alone.”

Eventually, and I have no idea how much time had passed, I became oblivious to the activity around me — those who mocked and those who tried to help; those who genuflected and those who tried to profit. The cameras, the cars, the trotting dogs. The woman who said she was my wife; the children who called to me their grades. Each village became an overturned blur, each downpour a welcome laundering. I could focus only on the blows to my skull and the subsequent rattling, the quiver of every molecule of bone that held my increasingly irrelevant brain in its protective embrace. I lost track of time, and of my name, and of the significance of this ball of dirt across which I bounced, bounced, bounced, and I became merely impact and motion, impact and motion.

I remember a story my father once told me. A boy is playing in the sandbox in the schoolyard, and darkness falls. He hears the voice of his mother calling him in for supper. On his way home, he loses his way in the shadows and walks until his feet are sore. He curls up against the side of a stranger’s house and falls asleep. In the morning, the sun pries open his eyes. He is back in the schoolyard. He realizes that he is not the boy at all, but the sandbox, and so he is already home.
FOUR POEMS
by Robert Dassanowsky

BEFORE THE BATTLE AGAIN
For Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

Moving the statue
of a riderless horse
to expand the street
to let the traffic flow

Kissing the dead
stealing souls with poetry

Ten millions are your father
creating ready made salvation

The news report relates the
wisdom of small nuclear bombs

less an offense to large targets
In the swoon of a dance

We prepare to brush the ashes
Into the grout of path stones

To raise them again
for small victories

Brocade shreds, libraries burn
Even smaller, even smaller

Like bursts in an artery
like the ash, like the shriveled
of forgotten trenches
like the atom.

EURO

Bits of wood pressed
to a great thinness
unite, promise
elevate and bridge

Treaties break and mend
paper burns, more trees
fall, scribblings end lives
books fail and rot

Bits of wood into
wrappers, paper rolls,
boxings, parchment
seals fate, heals wounds

Under glass, ink fading
long lines form to see it
in trade, less can starve
more can own the centuries

Trees are felled, trash collected
dyes examined, imaginary gold
weighed, millions embraced
bridges carefully etched

With new tint, continent unites
the wounds heal, bridges
drawn, money is sent for
survival of distant tribes

for separation, for detachment.
ANTHROPOLOGY

If the building was an embrace
meant to be one, it didn’t
even regard my presence
but I insinuated myself up the
spine of its stories, an organism
living in one of its many chambers

Soon, when I opened a window
I let the heat out; I would sleep
and its eye closes

I shower and corrode the structure
wear it down with my skin
as others have and will
until it is pulled down
on some distant day

what remains will not
be in an urn or box but
a scraping of lives
an embracing of all microbes
of the soil turned, turned
for a cornerstone for a
shelter to serve
bones to stone
stone to bones
rusty pipes
amoeba

DESCARTES REDUX

It isn't about the
thing itself but
that around
it, always
the haze circling
a planet, a nimbus
on a head, rain
from above, holiness
in other words

A friend's riding
accident cleaved
her brain into
two halves, and
she would see
layered prisms, focus
divergently, and
smell rotting meat
at Christmas

it rejoined, grew
together again, as
the doctors insisted
but the questions.remained between
the prisms, and
perceptions, falling
through a crack
in science, entering
thought between
life and life
POEM SUITE
by rob mcLennan

still
i am uncomfortable in this age
the split of winter 2004
into spring
if you had taken all the words
away

82 ave + 104 street
the uncle alberts grease fire, where
a chili house grows
a past tense pancakes, steak
on the corner, the fluff dog
loses her collar, stays
the remaining eye of measure
one foot, & one foot,
a blind stick taps
i am working against description
on the construction site, i am
two feet of plywood
in the long wind

still
long in the tooth, a rabbit or squirrel
34 is the loneliest number, grey
is spalding grey
there is a photograph of your body,
shadows where the lines should be
leans in close, & picks
the first degree
where we go still, & still, where
do we go
alberta beef the lie
you cant recall
& tall grain at the fore

a word for this
roxy music, brian ferry, more
than more
& still
once the deck is shuffled, no
unpronounceable words
a narrative kind of proof
the door sounds, after sixty seconds,
an alarm that cant be opened
into a deep fine point
different nights, different tastes
for thursday still
a mark emblazons wellness
into a spit
frames
a vancouver poem loathe
to take its place

in the dry this, a province
to the east

cut from the cloth
of a millennium & rail

cardboard cuts it,
big rock brewery

on the plus side, this
& this & this

a sightline north
into oblivion

"
"

it hurts to think abt

the perilous movement of houseflies
& construction

the hat that no longer wears the man

yellow curls on pavement
Excerpts from: *BLACKOUT JOURNAL*
by Carla Hartsfield

*The past will provide humanity with any fate you might like to imagine.*
*O history, how many truths have been committed in thy name?*

— *Everyman*, 15th c. Morality Play

**June 24**
He’s a pixel president with a pixel mind.
In his pixel world only pixel truths:
blood, torture, sky and bones,
crunch through computers with forgone humanity.
When his pixel fire flew into pixel bodies,
voices were cut, distorted, consumed.
Pixel children cradled by pixel soldiers:
pixel houses as pixel graveyards:
pixel journalists banned from picture phones:
but the *real* pictures from Iraq, digitally clicked,
downloaded in seconds—haunt and stun
with non-pixel clarity. How to freeze-frame
ignorance, pixel governments?
Delete this president’s pixel heart.

**July 1**
Did you drink wine and dance
under the shawls of sparkling embers
the night of the blackout?
Did your TV launch into a new dimension
when the first cruise missile burst from the Red Sea—
with all its apocalyptic fire plunging Iraq into darkness?
Five months later it was our turn
to land into a powerless vacuum.

Why do I think of these two events in tandem,
holding hands like satanic lovers?
I stare at the word *satanic*,
bloodied inkblot corroded
onto my screen, and wince.
But when you grow up Texan,
the nightsky belongs to you—
you own the Milky Way—
and when I was miserable there,
stamping bare feet
on the still-warm summer concrete,
even the most embedded star
living inside dusty bands of light,
could envelop my senses
like a shrine.

Bush didn’t grow up Texan,
so his ranch in Crawford bugs me.
I wonder if his Demonic Equivalent
runs with the armadillos at night,
scouring for ex-patriots?
I live daily in the weary heat
of his pixel presidency.
My psyche blisters.

July 3
With neighbourhoods in Toronto
singing multiple versions of Kum Bah Yah,
I’m glued to my father’s shortwave,
small inheritance.
Updates on the blackout
(mixed with weakening light)
swirl down our street
and erase our heads,
leaving disembodied shadows
hunched at the table.
We want to believe every word
droning from that Radio Shack speaker.
The live Country & Western show
beamed from Japan, seemed
most convincing.

July 23
On the third day of the third month
in the third year of the third millennium,
a windchill of minus 33 causes Trinitarians
and CBC radio to trumpet like oracles.
Chance of rolling blackouts, one says.
Invoke our Lady of Remedy, suggests another.

Two weeks later, I tell a friend at the Art Bar:
“I like going backwards—because I know then,
where I’ve come from.”

I’m reading Ovid and writing my first sonnets.
The sonnets are ill-timed and difficult as weather.
On that pristine, brutal evening,  
war blaring through infrared cameras,  
I'd reached the Victory Café  
in spite of knife-edged wind,  
cutting, spinning me sideways—  
wishing the lights would stay on  
because we had no fireplace—  
wishing they wouldn't,  
so no one could see Decapitation Attack,  
the green-tinged Immorality Play  
masterminded by members  
of Skull & Bones.

The first wish comes true.  
We don’t freeze in our beds.  
The second wish, eventually—  
television, computer, cell-phones, gone!  
For a few blessed hours,  
colour-coded alerts,  
and the image of flag-draped coffins,  
vanish.

My third wish,  
as in all good tales,  
must remain for now,  
a secret. Like Skull & Bones Initiates,  
I’m not supposed to talk.

Not even if those Yalies dressed like  
Satan, Don Quixote and the Pope  
(who knight Bonesmen in sadistic rituals)  
confess sexual histories.  
This is how generations of Bonesmen,  
George W. included, supposedly  
reap power and more power.  
But, I don’t want to know.
August 5
Up until now I mythologize my father.
Up until now my Dad has no equal.
It’s time for a secret, my third in this tale.

How thoughts of my father, his radio and guns,
forced me to claim I’ll never tell.
In the dusty, smog-filled summer air

my father consumes me bit by bit.
Every pore on my skin
covered with freckles,

are his freckles, ours,
hands and feet twinned.
In his rusting, yellow, cotton field truck,

he’s playing the shortwave,
my blackout shortwave—
with Nyx* descending from fire-breathing stars.

Weakened by cancer, chemo, my mother,
he hits the gravel like a first-time drunk.
In this rural soundbooth, Rush,

his soothsayer, mantis not praying,
holds him enthralled flapping carnivore jaws.
He listens as Limbaugh bites the heads off Democrats,

mates with remains. These sacks of lies,
infertile news-eggs, corrode his mind,
fuel his illness, makes him one with Republicans.

And my secretive Pistol Daddy cheers Rush on;
his love of guns explodes in his heart.
His attic arsenal, where no firearm is registered,

bleeds every solution—there are no answers.
So my mother has banished him
to his cotton field truck, with Rush

and the shortwave, my blackout shortwave—
our secular saviour, the only voice left
after Nyx tumbled down.

* Greek goddess of night, mother of sleep, death, dreams, doom, retribution
CHAIN SAW MYSTIQUE
by Bob Wakulich

City-soft wusses posturing at the window tables of zip-water cafes in the tortured rebel district might find talking about chain saws lame, but honestly, what are the chances they’d want to learn about anything that doesn’t come with a remote control?

Then again, maybe they’ve been searching for something more constructive to do with their hands, no longer content with those uptown Yuppie/Bohemian attitudes pervading their waking lives. Chain saws are a perfect choice; not only are they exquisitely functional, they also have MOTORS, making them ALMOST ALIVE. They purr, they roar, and they spit out smoke and sawdust. There are Hollywood actors with less range than that.

Consider the chain saw taking its rightful place with other power objects of our time: the guitar, the Smart Missile, the automobile, and (sigh) the cellular telephone. The obvious similarity in penile design is enough to launch two PhD dissertations and a conference paper, yet the allure of a spinning chain and tree domination has never been properly urbanized.

Mind you, there is the unfortunate matter of chain-saw-as-standard-horror-movie-implement; put one in the hands of a scarfaced or goalie-masked psycho and voila, instant Count Floyd: not quite ridiculous, yet not quite serious. Sure it’s loud, noisy, and pollutes the atmosphere, but let’s face it, it can’t possibly be the most efficient way to thin out high school cheerleaders.

According to inventors.about.com, the chain saw got its start in the mind of Bernard Heine, a German prosthetics maker who invented the osteotome in 1830. Dr. Wolf Seufert saluted this achievement in a 1994 edition of the Canadian Medical Association Journal. “The links of the chain carried small cutting teeth with the edges set at an angle; the chain was moved around a guiding blade by turning the handle of the sprocket wheel.” It took almost another century (1929) before another German, Andreas Stihl, patented “the tree-felling machine,” the first mobile gasoline-powered chainsaw, though there are examples of more cumbersome “automatic logging saws” developed by various Americans later in the 1800’s.

While it’s doubtful that any of these pioneers considered their inventions as a prelude to a fashion statement, they set in motion an industry that defines its customers as independent, self-reliant, powerful, and maybe a little dangerous; when you swing one of these babies, you’re definitely someone to reckon with. It’s an image that automatically adds toques, beer and whiskey, plain-end cigarettes, loud plaid shirts, and under-dressed calendar girls.

In the city, a trip to a neighborhood pub might include overhearing discussions at the next table about cars, with the participants trying to out-macho one another with tales about horsepower, torque, and re-tooled cams, but once you get past the suburbs, industrial parks, and streetlight pollution, the conversation is just as likely to be about the size of their “bars” (chain guides). When you drive through Gray Creek, BC and notice that the only lit sign in town prominently features a picture of a chain saw, you have to concede that the paradigm may be a little different in places where going to the corner store can be a ten mile trip.

A chain saw is practical and adaptable to both the lowly labourer and the high-end artiste; one can easily cut away deadwood and carve a masterpiece in the same afternoon. Like the stance of a traditional farmer with a pitchfork, the swagger of a rustic country gentleman cries out for chain saw accompaniment: enough firepower to level a stand of second-growth trees if necessary. Why wait for someone to put in a sidewalk when you can blaze a perfectly usable trail with a few cupfuls of gas? This is a level of nature management that those wielding weedeaters and leaf blowers can only dream about. Set the choke. Pull the cord. Feel the power.
Post Script
by Richard Scarsbrook

Normally he sleeps right through it, but tonight the noise of a train thundering past his apartment window rattles him awake. On top of the clock radio, digits glowing red 2:35 AM, there is a note written in her small, ornate script. It reads:

*I know what you did, you bastard.*
*I’ll be leaving on a train tomorrow and you’ll never see*
*or touch me or hear from me again.*
*Janet*

*P.S. I hope you die and go to hell.*

He immediately goes into Crisis Containment Mode. He sits up in bed, dials her number on the bedside phone, his mind racing to invent a reasonable explanation.

*“The number you have dialed is not in service,”* a pre-recorded voice informs him.

He dresses quickly and sprints for the door. Maybe he can catch her before she leaves, tell her it wasn’t what it looked like, it was all just a big, crazy misunderstanding. He waves frantically for a taxi, but each one passes him by.

*“Shit! I’d give anything for a cab right now.”*

As he steps from the curb, a black taxi appears out of nowhere, engine roaring, tires screeching. He is frozen in place, the taxi’s headlights mesmerizing like squinting, glowing eyes, its grille locked in an aggressive sneer. The grille snaps, shatters into plastic shards as it bites into his legs. There is a loud smack from the impact of his torso slamming against the hood, then his body careens over the car, an elbow and knee leaving spiderweb cracks in the windshield glass, his pelvis denting the roof. The taxi’s trunk lid pops open as he bounces from it and rolls in the street.

His body comes to rest face down, his arms and legs splayed awkwardly on the blacktop. The black taxi screams away into the night, the roar of its engine swallowed by the thumping rhythms from the nearby nightclubs.

On a train bound for somewhere new, her face pressed against the glass, she watches the moonlit scenery race past, her heartbeat playing counterpoint to the rhythm of the wheels on the tracks, and she wonders if he’s found her note yet, and if it’s shaken him up at all.
eh

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