Amilcar John Nogueira

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swell

by

Amilcar Nogueira

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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swell

by

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April 27, 2016
Author's Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this Master's thesis and that no part of this creative writing project has been published or submitted for publication.

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Abstract

“swell” is a poetry manuscript accompanied by a critical essay that examines the functions of grief in contemporary culture through the lens of the long poem. This long poem seeks definition within the space of the closing parenthesis, responding to its function in previous contemporary texts, while at the same time delving into narrative to focus on the disjunction death, grief, and mourning can have on a persona. This long poem employs the use of a column to show the inescapable fracture that these living processes can have on a persona, while forcing the reader to examine the same lines both across and down the page for meaning. This long poem also employs techniques such as puns and mathematical language, to highlight a linguistic search for meaning that crosses language and the word. The text ends, revealing that language and image together end the persona's search in/from grief.
Dedication

for my family
Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Author's Declaration of Originality iii
Abstract iv
Dedication v
Acknowledgements vi
swell 1
Critical Statement 62
Works Cited 85
Vita Auctoris 87
**let me tell you of home**

my Papa starts
in the garden

lit cigarette in hand
gestures like fireflies
mating
pushes his glasses
sips homemade port

pond water splashes
Spike sniffēs the deck, the grass
a dead bird
Pele bawks from inside the house

by the bookshelves
the grandfather clock
chimes the quarter

weights in the basement
thirty years older than
us grandkids
love *lingua* lost

inside the hallway closet
the hotel bell's inscription:

> “Sweet Heart of Mary,
be the salvation of Russia, Spain,
Portugal, Europe
and the whole world”

---

gounin, montreal
back further

boats / stars
the planes / the plans
back to lisboa
back pain as pallbearer at *tio's* funeral
tiny man, large head, larger hotel

bury his casket after *oração*
*pára a noite*
awake at the wake
the guitar vibrates the pine

out of air-force
done cutting aces
twenty-five

porto on port
starboard stares
nighttime arrival
gounin, montreal

people flooding the streets
press shoes / new walk
depress feet
start down gounin
wading in
the canadian tide
sauna off
the culligan bottles
ferment grapes
impress friends
fill the cellar

in the extra bedroom
avó’s babels paint the walls

flesh peels back
sagging open
muscle tissue
pulsing--

cut to the story:
chase down street names
from gounin to st catherines
rue port de montréal

first km,
blister grind the ground
fifteenth,
foot touches gravel
fiftieth,
muscle greet mud
stopping
with the setting sun.

poise menino menino poise menino canta oração [in-side sterile walls
[you look so much like your tio
[muddy eyes, small head,
pining voice]]

noventa e sete
noventa e oito
noventa e nove
['The Blow was Great, The Shock Severe']

EXT. EVENING. A FUNERAL HOME.
(snowing)
ALL: ...
melted pond, koi nibble
for firefly hands, listening
for absent mouth:

*all your uncle could say was hello*

†the foreman gives him the contract, tells him to read
and signs

my left hand to his
a mirror

veins pulsate / roots run
his body

the road
horns

my body
under books

his plywood shelves cover
the walls

hand cups
ear for words
hand cups
my chest

sings

oração

---

EXT. MORNING. A FUNERAL HOME.
(not snowing)

taps head, thinker cap
from alloys and arc welding
never wet his lips on the dry dock

and sign

greetings on the dock

hands speak

in sparks

*ola hello* bonjour

a small house in collingwood
blue mountain smiles

*I take his hand and
make his signature*

worn, wear, water
two languages

memorial cards
held to the jackets
of old novellas
basement carpet imprint
stretch out by the bar
tapping on the bottles

the song changes
the house quiets

buried side by side (by side by side)
four suits in the sun
tapping phones

aye menino

pen curled
hand
in hand

reach the marble
boot on fresh dirt

no problem
if it's his hand.

[Do Not Stand at my Grave]
her note: key
between ink and letter
smears out of tune

me

*can bad writing kill ya
I dont wanna live and find out*

she spoke and smoke
carburetor heaves
through essex county

word on
word on air
word on out the window

chairs link
a fence away from the fields
harrow in

dirt and grass
a bruising
pumpkin

her note:
my last
writes

re: writing

car as old as
the money tree
in the backyard
hammock up
reading *from this day*
dipping ash
in the tray
napping and downing
marinol with water
a bandana

no
car, carburetor
chugging gravel
lugging hockey bags and hockey
bodies whose parts
resemble wholes
car breaks down
in a ditch,
engine failure, the doctor tells you
in the hospice

just tell another

no
story
the last page
the last ink/tension, I on and on
keys in the ignition
can she hear
here, the farm/ the far

curls to her hair
half a funeral at the wedding

words
on air
smash an engine
bruise a fence

flattened wheat, words
force
a crop circle

her note: I

forgetting turn signals
fly into the ditch,
dirt in the scratches of the boots,
six pallbearers
smoking in the winter sun
coats off/ sleeves up
dressed in overalls,
mismatched socks

[canta
oração]
exterior shot, day,
an anglican church,
no.

to find out
two minutes on the phone

Aunt Christine died last night.
love you and off the phone.
fingers. nails.
back rubbing against cotton.
toritate
sudden-cant
sit still

he ad detaches and floats to the sky
inhaler precipitation cough hail.

the line

Aunt Christine died last night.

the nose

is the photo

(who took the shot?)

smiling

faces, two
crayon moustaches drawn on
(who took the photo?)

this photo

these two

the desk

(this photo, the smile)

from exhaling to
each pore of skin.

her memorial

an olive sangria,

here, me, her, more the real time.

suit suited (suits you in the shot, but who took it)
back rubbing against wool.
in-vent words: restand, unclaim,
destroy pictures

lights shake,
kiss a corpse and

shadows sit

smile in the photo

(but who shot the photo? who was there?)
Nami has a family recipe for Pastéis de nata.
Eight people RSVP the wake.
Half a carton of eggs makes forty pastries.
Nami's hands bulge purple/
Nami sets up two stand-mixers.

How much flour will Nami use in her Pastéis de nata recipe?

For bonus marks: how many will mourners eat?

= 
If friends equal family and if family equal handfuls of eggs,
friends equal eggshells in the dough. If egg minus shells equals eggs and eggs equal smooth and smooth equals dough then eggs equal dough, which equals seventeen waffles for breakfast.

Friends equal dough and waffle about the room smothering eggs.
Friends bake family in the heat.

)
a photo:

a basement bedroom,
inside a photo album
the resting. the *familia*.
Amy,
found. orange light
in the photo. blankets
and two peeking eyes.
three months. paper marker.
cursive on the back and
this is why you hide
in a basement scrapbook
cribbed curled and tucked
between page and red-light exposure

picture:

in the car, mum turns into a roundabout and begins
the story:

*my friend*, she starts, because this story
can only have friendship.

family drowns

in

a postcard of the ambassador bridge

*mon ami*
she begins the story in
her mother's tongue,
we are all little *grenouilles*,
in a big *marais*.

she begins,
this time
just the question,
and it storms the car doors/
croaks the radio.

but who took the photo,
i ask, as we continue round
and the rain drenches us through
windows and clothes,
windshield wipers
a photo:

the only bedroom, inside a crib
photo of the smile
cursive and the story
where Amy. found
plastic crib bars
in the photo sat
forecast and too many eyes.
three months span
on the back and
this is why you hide
inside a breath, you open
your lungs, close your eyes,
and never exhale

picture mum:
in the roundabout, mum turns into the conversation and continues the story:
your father can't build the crib for your nephew.

and the speed limit increases so that we drive through the night.

she exhales as her storm takes the wheel,
he hasn't built a crib since then, he can't now.

his breathing, she states, is a flawed circle.

the back of the car has been empty for years, she remarks

but behind us no one talks and in front
a photo:

a box too small,
giant
divider in between
for two bodies
for where Amy.
flame reduces skin, bones.
in the box sat family
and too many
times written and rewritten
this is why you hide
inside garage lumber,
so hands can pull pine
and un(ite)

this picture:

in our roundabout, mum finds words:

when we die,
she says.

- and I say stop
just stop-

when we die
the storm sings,
puts us in the box
breaks the law.

and the roundabout empties
we. alone.
except our voices
warming the car.

instantly the sky
separates. rain slows
as she turns off the roundabout

in front
windshield wipers weather
a tide. subside
a photo:

our bodies, two, swell,
wooden box in a palm

the same photo.
with Amy.
our handful of dust?
in fingers, *família*
and shovels break
hard ground, dates the picture
this is why you hide
in ink, re-inked, re-ink-inked
so lines gnarl about an empty room
and

picture this:

i never learn to drive.
oil sputters, engine light fades,

when we, we, die

i wrote

-

-i erase storm songs
as thunder strikes
-oak trees

if a car drives itself,
when does the roundabout end?

tide, i,
tight-eyed, water fills the seats,
washes the glove compartment,
windows
-windsor, under water

-drown / dry
a photo: swell, alm.

Amy. our in in round, in you hide in lines about and picture me:

the photo: gone.

who took the photo?

but we can't re-produce it.

i check the album

she says it's the same photo.

but no wheels on the crib,

i dig up the concrete floors

dad says,

we have a copy,

dad says,

so you took the photo?

but we can't re-produce it.

i check the album

she says it's the same photo.

but no wheels on the crib,

dad says,

we have a copy,

dad says,

so you took the photo?

but we can't re-produce it.

i check the album

she says it's the same photo.

but no wheels on the crib,

dad says,

we have a copy,

dad says,

so you took the photo?

but we can't re-produce it.

i check the album

she says it's the same photo.

but no wheels on the crib,

dad says,

we have a copy,

dad says,

so you took the photo?
from there
(the roof)
the procession
mutes the shuffling feet,
(magnetic flags FUNERAL/
police bookend the line)

the smoke, touches
the garage

lying on the roof, quiz Kendall
what do you think his girlfriend thinks?
what's it like to live when he dies?

stones cut skin

the scene:

hiding the stones in pockets
(yellow grass, mud shoes)

we throw
marble-sized rocks, pennies, from the roof
rain the ground

and on

two hear
with wind
step/step
each car
slow roll
pass by

fire watch
in hale

bare words
don't know
don't know
what the fuck's wrong with you

voice cut
car crawl
low scratch
sun smile
fire ball
slip
and on

gaggles filter in heads turn talking
slop talking flame garbage in a can burns
the smell hangs in the towns clouds
burns the skin hovers

the walls of the school shelter the light blinds closed to hold out
the last blast the air that whips hair into the face two slip the roof
hearing
(the crowd)
Karrie's in the back of the first car

How
?

(bookend the magnetic /
FUNERAL flags police)

scene:

but the janitors cleared
the rocks off the roof
and only one smokes

the same
end:

i speak to rock-less rain

or

The school will impose recess on its surroundings as the classes return to their studying. Grief counsellors arrive and prepare the guidance room. All welcome. The roof remains off limits to students but this does not stop me from returning and smoking or skipping. A line to the guidance to speak about seat belt failure all welcome. Word spreads: accidental, promising, cough, accelerate, locker, overdue library book. The last stone from the roof left on a bookshelf next to a yearbook.
a card:

Thirteen and you trump all numbers
when I see your flag, your skull,
you signal me, come and see,
came, saw, horse drops the king
I didn't know black armour could shine
me down

let me sleep in the horse's eye
announce your name in bold
with sleep, come and see
I know no tarot and now know
shuffling names you

a card game:

mum splits the deck,
I ask for war.
with a bridge,
she builds crazy eights
the cards pile, split.
lines divide the table,
a table story--
grandma used to read
the table begins( )
grandma used to read the cards

I change suit

mum extends the into spades
queen draw 5

I spit diamonds
she spades Amy
she clubs me
she fills my hand with every suit
and calls last card

I play it out but know that she has the ace she needs
a card:

dad places you upside down
you hold the flag like a tether.
the world, a crib.
dad listens, reads your pennant
(he hasn't built that crib. the roundabout)
tear or tear, mum never tries

would you flip if she did
you would let go without
the crib: put away or lost or
plastic,
he wouldn't go and see
if he left you in the basement

a card game:

mum divides the cards by faces
twos to tower kings, and everything else

let's play crazy eights
mum sets up speed

fine speed
mum sets up
slap jack.

cards. any cards.
mum says euchre,
but the table's empty.

there's a way to play euchre alone
she solitaires sideways.

what about a board game?

mum splays the deck and swipes it to the ground,
fifty-two flying squares
flutter
a card:

tell me the hand or send me a suit
paper speaks rocks marble
bridged from crib to cribbage
smash cigarettes pick scabs
songs shift do-re-mi, do, write
tell me comfort do you come in pairs?
tell me come forth did you count cards?
cheaters tap-tap-er, to late if caught.
cheaters break words fast, glass
sharp as pebbles trick and tick,
when a bridge collapses, partner split.
tell me, did they pass, or double down?

a card game:
mum.
me:
what's the stake?
mum:
this photo,
A large dog

a hockey bag

choirs

needle-point pen

handstands

high schools

curtains stuck half-closed

Portugal

two peas

bar tabs

a two-by-four

a forty-year-old elephant

the penny

the pen chant

where'd it go, eh? where'd it go?
dipping hammocks

stage directions for a number

a photo negative

ink splattered around the lips

And I imagine the room the day after: nurses flipping blankets, no visitors the (day) after, and everyone's dying these days, don't you know? but placation sounds like play, and I grab her jacket forgotten on the chair, her new slippers, her last cigarette half-smoked next to a loonie for the pop machine. maybe she could've called home, phoned a friend, or at least anted up

hey, i'll flip, you call.
the bathroom cupboard still pops off the wall aiming for my face
chocolate bars come in two-packs
the 401 has regular pileups
christmas starts on november first
papa still smokes
mum tries not to smoke
noah isn't old enough to smoke
bruce springsteen breaks the bass in the pickup
aunt christine's daughters come to saturday game nights
dad works fifty-five-hour weeks
the basement floods
fleas glue themselves to the layla, spike
the basement drains
noah eats chocolate for easter
I discard dvds for blueray
the penny disappears
toronto remains four hours from windsor
my titan arum survives
global housing discussions run on
the money tree survives the winter
divorces postpone
the toilet breaks
we keep trading turns pall-bearing
nails never stop growing

)
on my last:

I didn't exaggerate enough

my dog bit my bones early

my doctor said I laughed too much

my comedian said I didn't laugh at all

what does dad say to the mortician?

please don't muck up the carpet

not at the border

rent camoes club and prepare streamers

death and dirt

too much pizza

can intestines explode?

spontaneous tapdancing

if methodical/method acting then consult nearest comedian

not enough pizza
When you remember the backyard,
you watch a pool swallow a swing-set, a shed
the garden. Down came the concrete. Layla, gallops up
the steps after digging up only potatoes. Get to the root of
the problem, but potatoes grow stems and Layla
lies underneath concrete. When you lie on the concrete you
can hear the tail wag, thump thump. Dirt dug and moving.
Entropy: the act of you noting how much concrete it takes
to fill a flower bed, how many weekends it takes to flatten
tomato vines, and how many blisters must grow before two
backyards mingle and merge, until Layla unburrows,
drinks the pool, and barks at potato seeds.
maybe rent caboto?

invest in vest for burial

Windsor-Essex County Cancer Report, 2010

minor tuning, followed by minor chords

light source| subject| object | wall|

don't store near sub-pump

miniature ontarian flag

hide in vent?

sun| tree| I saw the tree| wall|

will travel without driver's license

if I'm scared of heights and I jump is that irony?

3d model of the cn tower

maybe ativan

smoking: too much a slow burn

re-find Amy

buy new sneakers, wide foot

THE ABOVE CHARGES ARE APPLICABLE ONLY ON PAGES. THERE ARE NO HALL CHARGES HELD BELOW GROUND.
When you enter the hospice, you find dead hair and dangling bonds. This chemical reaction leads to silicon shoes stuck to the floor. Example: weddings.

Another example: television shows lasting more than four seasons. Final example: these notes. When I replace the wood in the hallway with these words, the chemical reaction diffuses. Instead of the clank of schedules and perfect sleeping hours, water rots the paper-thin flooring and you fall into the basement. You can't jump if you're falling. Although your body expands into the body of water, you can't swim when you tire. Even if gills do not deploy, droplets of water breathe by joining clouds in the sky or pores on the face.
read between lines

can pizza explode?

rewrite suicide haiku

Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard

pregunta – with the heroic stanza?

Am, Dm, Em, repeat times four

learn adobe in-design

hide body in the clock

maybe pills and ambassador?

Elegy Written In A Basement Bedroom

hire a new comedian (schumer?)

maybe muddy, slip on mud

As light first struck, bending the world in two

netflix and terse discussion

disposable camera, three pictures left

essential waters
A painted picture for you: re: goodbyes (not another). This still life paints me. Apple, Grapefruit, Banana. I am not afraid. I name dirt mushroom, but a bowl of fruit? Not today. Nor a painting or a goodbye. Once, I asked dad if a car crash equates a heart attack. But you can only find the notes and tie them on a leash and bring them to the park. Maybe fly.

A painted picture for you: re: painted pictures for you (re: not another). I do not know how to paint.

A gift canvas, covered with no colour, at each birthday, titled: Birthday One. A note on the gift: please paint. The still life hangs above twenty-six blank portraits of yourself. Later, you gather and remove them from their frames by cutting at the edges of your body and retitling them be: 1.
dove moisturizer for the (body)
you| me| the pizzas| wall|
A family gathers split on sides of pine
show the clock on the stomach
arctic monkey “505”
ex-hale
wednesday, 830am, bank
Throwing rope across the papers for you
trapped in brain pit traps
snows of kill > drown minus Entropy
stress management
Knowing they must take from these words, a line
four-oh-one or macdonald-cartier
re learn one tu trees
frostbite on absinthe
snow dampens tapdancing

dove moisturizer for the (body)
you| me| the pizzas| wall|
A family gathers split on sides of pine
show the clock on the stomach
arctic monkey “505”
ex-hale
wednesday, 830am, bank
Throwing rope across the papers for you
trapped in brain pit traps
snows of kill > drown minus Entropy
stress management
Knowing they must take from these words, a line
four-oh-one or macdonald-cartier
re learn one tu trees
frostbite on absinthe
snow dampens tapdancing
When the clock replaces mum's ribs and the hands replaces dad's feet.

When the sun rose for the second first time.

When the stones shifted from circle to oblong, to square, to dodecahedron.

When dad sits around the pond, observing gravitational waves.


When the sun rose for the second first time.

When the clock replaces mum's ribs and the hands replaces dad's feet.

Some times:
Can broken words tend?

the car the car the car the car the car the car the car

wikihow: driving

show stomach in the bathroom portrait

tense portense

Will your plants without you grow or end?

game over screen

“hello world” in the mud

pizza with too many toppings it breaks

re. stressed. syl. la. bles.

passkey to the school roof

Until the word breaks free and bodies send

ROI on therapist notes

resposta – stabbed with the quatrain

cheat sheet (person – first: textual language)

Windsor-Essex County Cancer Report, 2040
Me: No last goodbye for family left by the boats with holes in their hulls and farms made up only of pig iron and black sheep. You can have a book or a bookshelf, but none of the letters. Gift my student loans to the government to pay for my debt to the Centre for First Nations Governance, for the use of their air and water. Please rip off the covers and burn them. Eat a page, I know I won't. But my worms will: they need to survive in my stomach. If there's an agency I've forgotten, please leave a video response.

(pause)

Me: I can't seem to figure out how to shut it-

End video.
new old vest for old vest contest
shoe| foot| sole| concrete|
the car's hood typeface
Amilcar Nogueira (elder)
a meal on the dark road
The trumpets playing and un-end.
scratch that.
wide foot no longer issue, just close bottom half
top half intact if pills
first crown I ever get
maybe the world can explode? in one go?
putting the pen down
the poem| the author| words| wall|
my doctor said my irony levels will rot my kidneys
my comedian issued no comment from the grave
no exaggeration in shoes.
my will:

My brothers take vacations to the backyard.

My mom wears the twelve holiday sweaters.

My dad borrows the hockey stick.

My godparents take god.

My sisters kijiji my bicycle and split the change.

My aunties double down the poker game (without me).

My papa already has his name, so he doubles up.

My nami kneads her counters and solves her recipes.

My uncles say auntie.

My friends drink this last parting party.

My acquaintances have a drink.

My comedians keep their mouths shut.

)
The parting of the wills:

Cathy:
ac/dc back in black sign in the interior by the band,
cover cracked and vinyl scratched by a bad needle.

fourteen pairs of bellbottoms
florescent green to worn-out black, tagged by and

for Cathy, who cut the fifteenth pair up for fabric
forging a hundred denim patches of famous cat
felix, twelve sold, the rest resting underneath the lamp
fixture still broken from the indoor frisbee party
where her frisbee decapitated and also punctured the
window screen and landed outside

by the hammock.

and i would lie down and yeah yeah yeah the wind
carries you without a push.
that was the best time to smoke and sleep, then wake
and smoke and throw up and eat

her black cavalier, covered in mud and
weathered by the corn detassled in the back seat,
blankets shaming the dog-scratched interior, distracting
eyes from the orgy of macdonalds and burger king

“happy meals,” next to the 2002 tax returns, and
a broken lava lamp.

sold on ebay to crispyvenom for twenty dollars, which she stored
in her memorabilia room after playing it once on arrival

from goodwill to goodwill, seven for ten dollars
tags torn out
taken to the dump
donated to the felix the cat museum in barrie
taken by refurbisher who replaced the wiring, ordered a new
lampshade, and sold it to the pawn shop
melted down that night during the bonfire, sent to landfill
repaired screen seven months later
unmoving, except by the wind during the summer months, or when
uncle tim moved it to the backyard shed after summer, where he
repaired each damaged and frayed rope, inspects daily during the
summer and one after the winter ends, boxing it tightly to avoid rat
feasts,
now unused.

first given to Christine, cleaned for sale, then removed from sale
due to a will dispute, then driven illegally for three months while
the estate made no attempt at sale: replacing the leather and
constant vacuuming to remove the smell of “loving it,”

uncle tim stores in a cabinet then shreds when tax season ends
on top of the cabinet, he wonders who owns the damn broken thing
ashes in a blue urn

an empty plastic journal, a gift from mum Cathy
used as a level for the computer desk

her wedding ring

the library, with nora roberts's
from this day to midnight in death and four
john grisham novels with ripped fronts, the
sides she wrote on, and the back she scribbled over.

a collection of baby scrapbooks from 1989-1990 and
1993

two bank accounts, one maxed-out credit card, and
a 1000$ bill in the safety deposit box

one mug with felix the cat

sleeping, another one plastered with sand and
shells

the pysanky

oregano, basil, hibiscus, african violet,
peace lily, seeds and the empty pots.

a single of “tin soldier,” scratched to the point
where the record loops the second half of the chorus

moved from the crematorium to the mantle by the pysanky
plastic cover damaged by rain, the rest of the journal
holds up the new broken computer desk

left for her son, he used it two years later, returned it two years
after, it rests on the mantle on the other side of the pysanky
given to goodwill, sold for pennies
boxed by uncle tim for posterity

moves from a box underneath the desk to a new plastic box in the
attic, opened by mum during Christine's death

slowly paid off by estate
left alone

tim cleans and breaks the first one at 4am, rebuilding attempted
but deemed a waste, throws the second one into the sky and
sledgehammer smashed, into dust

from ukraine from dido from ann from cathy to the mantle to the
children
planted by mum, each pot colour-coordinated to each seed, lived
until the cats got to them, who puked up seeds for weeks.

go ahead, go ahead, go ahead,
ride ride ride away
Richard:
thirteen wrenches same size and make
chess set, missing a pawn
a pile of notebooks marking licence plates:
fleas
a bucket of toy cars, including an almost complete collection of the 1996 hot wheels releases, missing only the dodge viper
three large brown eggs, half a stick of butter
the apartment
jack nicklaus greatest hits three
res-med sleep apnea machine
willow tree figurine angel collection
six burnt-out light bulbs
straight razor circa 1955, handle replaced circa 2000
a box of chocolate easter bunnies in the freezer next to a compress

twisted together forming an art piece called “twelve wrenches”
I replace the pawn with a shot glass
lost
I vacuumed, drugged, poisoned, and coerced them into the landlord's shoes: left for future landlord/tenant tribune

where do ya want em, where do they go, plastic little wheels bent at the choking hazard. and this one you'll drive and this one you'll race, and this one

baked into a quiche, when I read the expiration date, fed to the neighbours.
empty for two weeks until landlord loopholes new geriatric friend in
hit with nine iron, putt into garbage with driver, albatross
sold on craigslist, I returned to res-med for new machine, slept loudly
the figurine angels plant their feet on the floor, wrapped with nicklaus face, sold at yard sale, watched, sold at yard sale smashed
causing bleeding

you get sharp.
a squirrel nicknamed Daly shreds them
we fill them with mulled apple herbal tea, dislike it, fill them with lemon thriller
we flatten it with a book shelf and two televisions only removing one of the edges. slept for three months inside his outline.
dated the same day as his showing: sell on tickethub
return to right baby, frame until frame breaks, scrap-book
gather from coin collections and dustpans, roll and disperse among great-grandchildren's bonds
gather with the newspaper, turn into a paper maché mask by a grandchild's face into the grandchild's face
for final burial, a brighter tone than his skin, eaten away by mushrooms
not good enough to keep, I shredded and re-purposed as kindling
grandchildren created ancient maps by dabbing the grounds and baking the paper, taping the maps to walls so he could find home
reread and don't laugh, reread and don't laugh, reread and laugh
black resigns, white player attempts initiation of new game until sent a memorial prayer card, on which he responds with e4
record onto blueray, digitize and store on the family youtube channel
dissolve after one shower, small chunks of yellow survive the trip to the sewer, soap croutons eaten by ducks
given to local play company for production of blasted
paid
Me:
cranium
mandible
cervical
thoracic
lumbar
sacrum
coccyx
clavical
sternum
scapula
manubrium
humerus
ulna
radius
carpals
metacarpals
phalanges
femur
patella
tibia
fibula
tarsals
metatarsals
phalanges

separate into boardgames and bird beaks, sell to stratford for future stage production about a yale fraternity
query chiropractor for purchase as an example of improper cell separation, donate to uottawa so students can file tightening nerve tracts while articulating the sum of the sorts: see one, saw one, saw another, remove, clean, organize, and wrap in a sheet
glue to the front of a hope chest, so nieces and nephews can crack it open searching for lego, or, reassemble the pieces above the oven so the last juices drip into the meals, or, joke about losing one in the garden, lose one in the garden, unsmile, and paw at the dirt
stash in a hope chest.
during just for laughs gags
measure the distance from elbow to lisboa
fish in the conclave until a fisher-friend gets a bit hand-sy, push him into the conclave then write about him grinding these bones into sharp pens, flipping angels to anglers
patter along wyandotte leaving chocolate pellets behind, attract carpenter ants who can extend pathways and, in case of safety pin failure, place sharp metal shivs inside their veal
leave these heals
leave these metres
with rows of figurine anglers
**compost:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>you</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| they | i | i | they |

| swell | mould |
| break | flip |
| crumple | dry |
| whittle | wheel |

| picture | stick | backseat |
| tongue | you |
| frisbee |   |
| maggots | i |

**germination:**

|   | i swell backseat |
| you mould dry |
| they whittle frisbee |
| they turn tongue |
| mum flee you |

| i backseat crumple |
| they picture turn |
| they stick swell |
| you maggots flip |
| i i flee |

| whittle i backseat |
| turn you tongue |
| mould mum maggots |
| dry they picture |
| break i you |

| turn backseat i |
| you flip you |
| crumple maggot they |
| break tongue mum |

| backseat break i |
| you crumple mum |

| backseat i swell |
windswept i, maybe swell. you
“they twice mould oblong maggots”
docile i thunderously crumple backseat:
mum! yet dry “zealous tongue?”
brown they still flee picture
... i latterly whittle high-school stick-
cute i so flip frisbee;
sweet you quite break i()
veeler
waring
fillking
torrenhite
spot
caken
rewble
basemerite
cnt
have
dopeful
mad
drum
blip
rink
stoar
smeer
stash
prick
daise
fogrop
drigy
winve
cheter
toena wed
fils
galea
wrrote
wring
ist
y
solve:

ferris wheel - wheel
fairs – fairness
(fair²)ness x centennial - cents
+ three-second delay between tracks
- trains
- storm + or
+ in vent
- strawberry pasta sauce
+ gin - cranberry juice
+ european union
- non
+ halloween hayrides
- hellos - bonjour
- (hi³)
x (suicide hill + cioccolata + perogies)
- monarch mountain
- no lunches + 8 exhales
÷ family trust - minors
+ (debt settlement x stanley cup)
- lisbon letters lisbon
x giggle at your own puns
x strawberry festival
+ radioisotopes
+ intravenoushospital outfit
half - life
x (county ditch ~ wallaceburg tournament)
+ wheels on your cavalier

= 

i collapse festivals within falsetto
at the top of the wheel. I gamble my half-life
while these mixtapes approach non-zero

i golden spiral to a critical maximum
within the identity scrapbook
i theorum recipes
derive onion and garlic bases
converge the arc length
of a climber’s rope

i mask parameters
inside my língua
i limit the crown
smushed against the wall flower i glow for her when i taste iron
and tin from chewing lips tongue little flesh bits stuck in the throat

tonight

i

to
wrist
te

asleep:

fin

cough
down the family path
  i pitch stones
mums hangs wreaths
  a marble lamb melts from years of acid rain
not the first, maybe the second, never the last one
stones

carbon

grass
in volumes or can i find my monsoon
can i fleet and lose the letters
chasing word junk this lingo this noun this foot
grown like a tree can i reach the root of this
will i take pine or oak or flame or none

launch
sigh

stones
awake:

eyes clench a ret i t a r en or f ng i
the stomach's kn ot. while sm all p il s s t i
ills st ill e nd in a c o fin: c los e brain's curtain

earlobe
toenails
autolysis of an empty house:

- wet tiles
- kitchen sink
- toothpaste
- pancake mix
- bent blinds
- brown carpet
- record player
- luggage
- amp
- unopened carton of cigarettes
- lightbulbs
- broom
- doors

}
solve:

httperson - 404

Ahhhhhhhhhh. This person you search for got zapped.

We broke someone or you can't type.

You just 404'D.

Could you please go back to 404?

Sorry but the person you requested cannot be.

Broken.

In case of person, do not use elevator.

The person you seek has moved, deleted, or doesn't break

even.

= 

the template you
white screen
black text

i scan for malware
so i can cache coats

refreshing guests
cheese plates

common sorries
dictate
webmaster

but host memory
reaches fatal error

mod_rewrite disabled:
flower checker
overload

if i google
i see you

but the page request
never stops loading

)
ending:

I will wake up. I will pour a glass of grape juice and will drink. I will eat wheat germ and half a grapefruit. I will compost myself. Rotten banana under the thumbs. I will take a shower. Suave hair and beard. Sud armpits to ass-crack. Wash away. I will finish in under three minutes. I will dry. I will try. I will dress myself. I will floss the back teeth. I will floss. I will remove cerumen from the ear canal. I will cleanse the toilet once a month. A deep cleaning. I will use a toothbrush for the shine and the always yellow rim spot. I will snapchat friends. Photo of me 140 characters and a palate of emojis. Umbrella. Volcano. Ghost. Train. I will snap on a tie. I will sit on the porch. Gravel cotton polyester blend. I will sort the recycling. Cans, glass, cardboard, pizza box bottoms. I will care about the environment. I will get in my parent's SUV. I will sit in the back. I will fix my jacket. I will say hello. I will talk games.
Hockey. League. Firewatch. I will be a good companion. Humour in pop culture. Sport reference. Play on word play. I will snap back
of the SUV. I will entwine my arm with Nami. I, cane. Family. I
nothing. I will hug aunts, uncles, cousins, one poodle. I will not
rise or kneel. I will attempt Ukranian. I will kneel. I will listen to
my mum's quake. I will chew my cheek. I will pass down kleenex.
I will condolence my uncle. I will kiss the body. I will offer my
Facebook the suit, no emoji. Upload. I will get in mum's yaris.
rock. I will change the station. I will change the station. I will talk
small: mhm, yes, ya. The flag falls off mum's car. Last car in line.
I will roll down the window. I will change the station. I will roll up
the window. The car enters the cemetery. I will enter the cemetery.
begin
stay
fim
her hand. I will condolence whisper. I will hug mum. I will stop

my arms. Bright green. I will hover around the wake. I will shake
hands. I will shake hands times three. I will eat. Cheese. Crackers.
Taco dip. Pastéis de nata. I will dip. I will sip. I will crack. I will
swallow. I will balloon. The large object floats. I will stop

Go home. I will text back to friends. Tweet grass stains and

bathroom. I will wretch. I will call. Busy. I will crawl the
stairs. Wood bends and snaps. Cuts the knee. I will bleed and
streetlights cut the room. Shine midnight. I will toss adjectives and
turn blankets: Baleful, taciturn. I will add caloric intake. If the taco

journal. I will find a pen. I will write morning, midnight. What I
did. What I do. I will put the journal on the ground. I will sleep. I

chose

wound

chews

wounds
Hums to life. I will write a letter. I will print it. Nice font. Gothica Sidelnyk. Nogueira. Gomes. I will touch my sister's name. I will kick McDonalds bags. Stale fries mix with sneaker. I will put on cry. I will catch up to mum. I will stand next. I will hold sigh and climb. I will enter my room. I will turn on the computer or Times to be safe. I will check the time. I will let the sun set. I will find my pillow.

CLOSING THE DAMN (ED PARENTHESIS

Amilcar John Nogueira

In the last chapter of Margaret Atwood's book, Negotiating with the Dead, Atwood hypothesizes that “perhaps all writing is motivated, deep down, by a fear and a fascination with mortality – by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead” (156). Atwood, believing in an intrinsic connection between the writer's fear of death and the act of the writer writing, makes two statements. The first is that a writer chooses to write because her reaction to death is strong enough that the writer needs to record something that has some permanence. The second is that the “something or someone” that the writer attempts to bring back from the dead can only be brought back to the land of the living as writing. My poetry manuscript, “swell,” attempts to create a record of the dead my persona encounters and the effect dealing with mortality has on him. My manuscript does so by engaging with the events that happen after a loved one dies, such as wakes, services, and wills. In this essay, I explore how Canadian poets, such as Robert Kroetsch and bpNichol, have employed the specific technique of the open parenthesis and how this seemingly tiny punctuation marker functions within a narrative about death.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the parenthesis as “[a] word, clause, or sentence inserted as an explanation, aside, or afterthought into a passage with which it has not necessarily any grammatical connection, in writing usually marked off by brackets” (web). The use of parentheses change depending on the textual form. In scripts
for plays, parentheses can indicate emotion in a line of dialogue or an action for an actor to take. For example, in *Doc*, by Sharon Pollock, stage directions guide the actors “(CATHERINE and EV look at each other. CATHERINE looks away)” (347). In prose, the parenthesis often relies on an aside within a text, such as in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Traditionally in poetry, a parenthesis predominantly suggests an aside by a persona attempting to provide detail on a situation or to note a specific contrast between what is written and what is in the parenthesis. For example, A.M. Klein's *The Rocking Chair* uses the parenthesis to extend the image of the rocking chair's. The rocking chair “is a character (like that old drunk Lacoste / exhaling amber, and toppling on his pins)” (467). In more recent poetry, post-modern poets have employed the technique of the open parenthesis to denote the fluidity of time to confuse the line between aside and main thought. In the Canadian journal *Open Letter*, bpNichol and Frank Davey's article, entitled “The Prosody of Open Verse,” focuses on detailing notations often used in contemporary open form poetry (5-13). Nichol and Davey define the open parenthesis as “commonly used to indicate an interpolated comment that becomes the main text”(12).

This interpolation changes the original context of a line in a poem. By breaking the boundary between the line's original comment and the aside, the text removes a hierarchy between the aside and original statement creating a sentence where the beginning and the ending of thought are impossible to discern by traditional markers. Many poets engage in this practice: Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Barry McKinnon, George Stanley, and Phyllis Webb, to name a just few.
For my project I aim to provide a concrete exploration of the difference between beginning and ending, especially in the case of mortality, by closing the parenthesis. I aim to explore the difficult space of dealing and working through loss, rather than wallowing in the writerly underworld in perpetual remembrance. The closed parenthesis becomes a symbol that encapsulates the complexity of dealing with mourning.

In the preface to Kroetsch's *Completed Field Notes*, a collection of all his poetry books published prior to 2000, Canadian poet and scholar Fred Wah examines the poetic styling Kroetsch uses and to which he constantly returns. Wah remarks that as the collection is “seek[ing] awareness of its own making, [readers] find only the impossibility of either beginnings or endings” (ix). Wah writes about how Kroetsch utilizes a pluralistic idea that life continues past the poem or the object. Instead of existing with the life and death of the writer, the poem takes on a life through self-awareness of the poetic process. Through constant self-assessment, the poem seeks to survive in a landscape where it lives in a state of flux. The first poem in Kroetsch's collection, “Stone Hammer Poem,” revolves around a persona who attempts to discern the history of a stone found by his father in a field. The poem constantly raises questions about the history of the stone: Who made it? What is it now used for? The stone holds a history longer than Kroetsch's or the reader's: it spans thousands of years. In Atwood's terms, the object becomes representative of the memories connected to the stone, allowing the memories to live on with the stone in the poem. The poem begins with the persona describing the stone shape and history:
The rawhide loops are gone, the hand is gone, the buffalo's skull is gone; (3)

The persona defines the stone by what additions of it are gone, parts that previous owners shaped or added to change the stone into a hammer. But revealing that the stone had once been a part of a stone hammer, the persona finds no rawhide loop. The hand of the original owner is lost to memory and time. The buffalo skull, which the hammer could have been used on, has decayed and disappeared. All that remains to convey these memories is the stone itself.

In the second section of the poem, the persona re-examines the artifact:

Cut to a function, this stone was

(the hand is gone-- (3)

Kroetsch opens this parenthesis by rewriting the same line from his first section—changing the spacing, punctuation, and word placement—and does not close the parenthesis for the rest of the poem. By leaving the parenthesis open, Kroetsch ties the history of the stone to the object of the stone hammer and vice versa. The history becomes harder to uncover as the persona delves deeper into its history. The distance between “the hand is” and “gone” grows because the history imbued in the object is no
longer remembered. Thus, the stone finds its “function” in the poem. Aside from representing the tool, it becomes a representative of memory. By recording the stone in the poem, the stone and its history live on. Kroetsch encompasses history known and unknown by leaving the parenthesis open to the possibilities of future knowledge. While the persona cannot entirely know the past of the object, he can present the object as still existing and continuing to create a history as it changes hands.

This idea of extracting time and history from objects happens again in the fifth section of the poem, this time using three open and unclosed parenthesis:

(the saskatoons bloom
white (infrequently
the chokecherries the
highbush cranberries the
pincherries bloom
white along the barbed
wire fence (the
pemmican winter (5)

Here, the persona overlaps the flora with a proposed indigenous history of the land. First, the persona focuses on the specific details of flowers and berries. The first flower leads to a memory of berries on a fence, which leads to pemmican. Pemmican is an indigenous food often made from meat and the berries the narrator mentions. Here, too, an extra space divides two words. This division between “pemmican” and “winter” suggests a
similar loss of historical detail. The gap holds an untold narrative of the people who
would take these flowers and fruits and make the pemmican. The persona can only guess
what the narrative may be and he leaves these narratives up to the audience to fill in the
possible details that would involve a pemmican winter. The persona's goal is to reveal
how, just like the stone hammer, the land and its peoples holds its own lengthy narrative.
These stories are not complete. Instead, the readers receive fragments of these possible
stories and creates their own narratives from the fragments. The story in the “Stone
Hammer Poem” is not about the people who once held the stone hammer—except to note
how that history is beyond the persona's knowledge—but the details of the stone's various
pasts, the gaps between words, and the persona's efforts to connect the part to/through the
present artifact. The unconventional punctuation gestures toward a whole history, still
largely unknown.

By excessively closing parentheses in my long poem, “swell,” I aim to show that
even a short life may include untold narratives, yet that life still has an endpoint. The
constant forced closure of death frames the relationship of my persona to his loved ones.
Where the “Stone Hammer Poem” becomes a stand-in for the stone hammer itself, the
story of the stone hammer is only partially offered by the persona as the persona suggests
that an object (or even a person's) entire history cannot be known. In “swell,” I emulate
Atwood's suggestion that the writer must return from the Underworld instead of staying
or becoming immobile: “all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care
not to be captured and held immobile by the past” (178). My poem is a poem of endings.
I close the parenthesis in different ways. A closing parenthesis ends each section of “swell,” signifying a shift in form. The first section of “swell” concludes after shifting away from a narrative focused on specific family stories (such as a phone call to the persona noting that another person in the family has died). The persona responds by thinking about a photo he has:

(but who shot the photo?

who was there?). (7)

The persona is stuck on the question about who took the photo, seeking a way to record all possible details revolving around an enjoyable memory with the now deceased. The persona keeps asking himself, but finds no answer. Instead he comes to the conclusion that focusing on the details around the picture, rather than on what the picture signifies, detracts from his connection to the person. The “extra” closing parenthesis closes not only the aside, but also suggests that the photo is enough because it is something to remember the loved one by: the punctuation gives reminder to the persona and the reader that closure can be a deliberate decision. Similar importance can be seen in the line from the “compost” and “germination” section of the poem: “()” (39). This double closed parenthesis reveals the consistent ending processes within my manuscript. The persona constantly seeks to answer his own proposed questions about grief and death. The extra closed parenthesis allows the persona to stop his search for the answers to “who took the photo” or on how to deal with mortality. Instead, the persona comes to terms with the questions and with the ideas of existing within grief by moving past the current moment,
until another moment arises to create a new but similar challenge. The closed parenthesis then, both closes the moment of grief that may feel endless, and at the same time signals a progress, a movement forward- both textually and in grieving.

My long poem concludes with a prose section slowly consumed by closed parentheses. The persona becomes overwhelmed by the act of dealing with mortality, of the author and of the author's loved ones:

) her hand. I will condolence whisper. I will hug mum. I will stop )

my arms. Bright green. I will hover around the wake. I will shake (57)
The parentheses interrupts the act of mourning while showing the silence created from the grief of the author for the loved one. The persona continues through the day, in the future tense, seeking a way to ground himself in the actions he will take, only for those actions to be shaped by the closed parentheses. With their inclusion, the sentence breaks and the persona presents himself as lacking not only control over how to function within the spaces of ritual, but also control over himself. The last page combines these silenced sections with the image of closed parentheses obscuring his words, making it hard to read. This page gives the reader the idea that death simultaneously creates and destroys the persona's attempts at understanding mortality: “my face. Red, running. Snot-nosed punk. I will leave. Grass stains”(60).
The closed parenthesis acts as both image and signifier. The image of the repeating
parenthesis on top of the persona's somewhat erased dialogue suggests that death and the act of dealing with death infuses meaning into life. This section merges the persona's experiences with the marker of death and endings, forcing readers to engage his representation of grief either by trying to find the words through the image, or to ignore them altogether. The persona cannot escape that the end has come, causing his statements within the last section to lose coherence, nor can he escape the effect the end has on him, which is in a state between having no ability to communicate while at the same time only communicating in a confused state.

**Closing the Parenthesis on Canadian Identity**

The search for identity is not a new topic to the Canadian Long Poem. The Early Canadian long poem often functions within the parameters critic C.D. Mazoff presents in his book, *Anxious Allegiances: Legitimizing Identity in the Early Canadian Long Poem*. Mazoff begins his discussion by examining what he sees as the main focus of the nineteenth century Canadian long poem: “Early Canadian long poems, in particular those that are topographical, have often had the telling, or, perhaps more accurately, the retelling of history as one of their ancillary functions” (3). Mazoff focuses on the cultural divide between the Imperial British subject and the developing Canadian consciousness. His idea on the topographical and its relation to the retelling of history is not far off from what Kroetsch or even bpNichol attempt to do in their long poems during the second half of the twentieth century. Kroetsch’s poetry often focuses on the topographical, infusing
the space of his poetics with local colour; his most well-known example, “Seed Catalogue,” a book-length poem written against the backdrop of a seed catalogue, or “Stone Hammer Poem, about a rural Albertan family field where a farmer finds a stone tool. Kroetsch defines being Canadian by retelling local history. “The Stone Hammer Poem,” for example, connects the persona, his father, and his grandfather to the stone found in a farmer’s field.

In my long poem, the story splits history on the page between the present and the past. My long poem begins by invoking history: “let me tell you of home” (1). I am able to explore death through the different cultural lenses of my persona and his family. Atwood remarks in Negotiating with the Dead that “[the dead] want to be recounted. They don't want to be voiceless; they don't want to be pushed aside, obliterated. They want us to know” (163). Stories, inherently, are a retelling. Stories function as a way to return to the space where the dead still live, if only for a brief moment. The persona in my long poem retells the stories his family has recounted to him, explore his own experiences with grief, and writes both down so he can reveal the impact that these stories have on him. I move away from the specifics of telling an individual’s history and instead focus on situating an individual within a plethora of different stories. In my research, I searched for a possible way to intersect Canadian identity with poetic technique. I looked to the Toronto Research Group (TRG), a poetic organization created by authors bpNichol and Steve McCaffery to explore the theory and practice of contemporary poetry during the 1970s, as a place to begin my exploration of
contemporary poetry. They state that they “maintained a common subscription to Gertrude Stein's credo that the writer's responsibility is to be contemporary. Contemporary for TRG was non-canonic and international” (18).

McCaffery, an immigrant from the United Kingdom, argues that the Canadian scene, especially during the 1970s, was “a milieu obsessed with establishing a Canadian identity largely predicated upon nationalist narratives and values” (18). This definition of Canadian identity largely emerges in the ideas Margaret Atwood collected in her book *Survival* which aims to discern a national Canadian identity that distinguishes it from the United States and Britain. Atwood explores texts written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, building a list of texts that support a nationalist Canadian identity. My long poem deals with the tension between a nationalist Canadian identity and an international and contemporary Canadian identity by moving into a space that fuses Canadian narrative into a poetic swelling. By shifting focus from the specific death of one person, to another, and another, I place the elements of narrative within the poem in contrast with the different types of poetic wordplay, specifically puns. In my long poem, I replace the humour found in the resolution of a pun with sadness through the words with which I play. For example, in the section entitled “on my last,” I break the word “ending” on the right column side of the page, putting focus on the words within that section: “ding/an” (25). When the persona deciphers the pun, the play on the word comes back to the constant endings the persona faces. His identity and the moments and words that define him come through the puns. The pun reveals attempts at distance from the intense
emotions created by grief. The focus in my long poem is on closing the identity narrative that Atwood insists on with the role of katabasis in the writer's journey. In Canadian critic Smaro Kamboureli's text *On The Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem*, Kamboureli traces the lineage of the Canadian Long Poem in a chapter entitled “An Archaeology of the Canadian Long Poem.” Kamboureli begins the chapter by discerning the difference between nineteenth century poets and contemporary poets:

“[T]he nineteenth-century poet wanted to define an identity, whereas the contemporary poet often and resolutely resists the proposition that there is such a thing as identity; the older poet wrote out of a belief in the truthfulness of history, while the poet of today sets out to unwrite and rewrite history by deliberately suspending its purported objectivity and inclusiveness” (3).

For Kamboureli, both identity and history are foci of the long poem. These early Canadian long poets aim to define Canadian as something within the British Empire but at the same time unique. Contemporary long poets still work within similar ideas: those of history and identity and the ways a poet attempts to define them. For example, both Kroetsch's poems and Webb's *Naked Poems* seek self-definition. As well, even when these poets subvert or attack the idea of the definition of an identity, they still engage history (like Webb's connections to Sappho in *Naked Poems*) and identity (Kroetsch's persona's connection to the stone).

In *The Long Poem Anthology* (edited by Michael Ondaatje), Kroetsch provides a

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1 Contemporary in her definition, is poetry from the sixties to the publication of the book in the early nineties: Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, Robert Kroetsch, Eli Mandel, to name a few she explores in her book.
statement about his long poem “Seed Catalogue.” Kroetsch discusses the idea of “the
dream of origins” (311) and the merging of myth into beginnings. “Seed Catalogue”
examines origins through its persona's search for self-definition within the prairie
landscape. The persona combines memory, familial origins, and text from a seed
catalogue, that, when presented on the page, fragment the persona and the persona's
understanding of self. In the line, “How do you grow a poet?” (33), the persona seeks an
answer to growing a poet, as if there is a concrete way similar to the growing of the fruits
and vegetables within the seed catalogue. The line “How do you grow” changes through
the poem, from “How do you grow a poet?” (33), to “How do you grow a lover?” (26), to
“How do you grow a prairie town?” (28). These questions take place throughout the
persona's personal history, familial history, and town's history. These permutations on
what is growing within each section of the poem allow the persona to create an identity
from each answer he seeks. He is a poet, but he's also a lover and a part of the prairie
town. Each separate permutation reveals a new part of his self-definition. Each new space
of identity comes from a separate and distinct beginning space, as if the persona is in a
constant state of flux. Kroetsch strongly engages the idea of constant change of identity.
In the “Statements by the Poets” at the back of The Long Poem Anthology, Kroetsch
engages the idea of identity through metaphor stating: “Do not feed the apocalypse.
Metamorphoses please” (312). Kroetsch finds the possibility of constant evolution and
change through ideas of redefinition preferable to that of a stagnant state of “apocalypse.”
Kroetsch's remarks decipher the constant searching within “Seed Catalogue” as one of
growth and development. Kroetsch defines his writings as a “continuing poem: not the
having written but the writing. The poem as long as a life” (311). Kroetsch focuses on not
the product but the process. The life-long poem\(^2\) aims to constantly evolve and change. It
renegotiates the parameters of the audience and the poem. This metamorphosis becomes a
renewal. The apocalypse comes with the closing of the parenthesis. I search for a space of
understanding within the search of how endings function, rather than focusing on the
metamorphosis.

bpNichol engages metamorphosis at the level of the word. In Books 1-4 of *The
Martyrology*, Nichol focuses on constructing “Saints” by breaking words that begin with
the letters “st.” For example, “St Orm” from the word storm, St Reat from the obsolete
word for street, streat. Nichol changes the current meaning of a word and finds new ways
to employ it poetically. In Book 5, sections of the poem function as an exploration of
streets, with footnotes connecting the sections at different points within the poem. Street
names even become a part of the poem: Daven’s port, St. George, St. Clair. Nichol
contrasts St Reat with names of Toronto streets such as St. George. Nichol wants the
reader to experience the streets linguistically as well as markers of routes and continuous
pathways that the reader treads. The physical space is interspersed with the language.

\(^2\) The “life-long poem” is one way to access bpNichol’s *The Martyrology*, or American poet Ron
Silliman’s *Universe*. In *Wave Composition*, Silliman describes the design of his project for *Universe* as
having 360 different sections: “should I live long enough to do enough of this to make sense, and let’s
hope I do—that the rest of the project, the 200 sections I might not write, that they will seem at least
implicitly clear to the reader in that sense.” Silliman notes that the goal of such a project is to reveal a
certain thought process to the reader in the case of in-completion: the poem, then, despite being a
project that reaches decades forward – beyond the probable life of a poet now 76 years – can only
function as a life-long poem. I aim for an opposite idea. Rather than a long poem that seeks to remain
open and incomplete, my manuscript should stay closed through it’s self-reflexive nature. The poem
reads as an end to itself rather than a continuation. There are no after words.
Nichol shifts words and makes puns, revealing the connection between contemporary and archaic words. For Nichol, language holds its own history of development within itself. Language develops and changes over time by breaking apart words and creating meanings from words that can be found within the word. Nichol reveals the intrinsic connection between ancient and modern words, or rather a sense of a history, as part of the word:

here

ere i begin²

[...]

arch a is m

a connection seen

bridges tween. (n. pag.)

Nichol follows a tangent through the new beginning he creates using a footnote. This footnote leads to the start of section 2 which begins “arch a is m.” Nichol finds the obsolete “ere” within “here,” leading to the line which breaks apart the word “archaism.” Nichol plays with connections as a reminder to the reader of the importance of the way history and language intertwine: connecting the reader to language's past through each break of a new word. “Ere”, an archaic word meaning “Early, at an early hour” (OED Online), comes from “here”, meaning the persona is situated within a specific time and moment. That moment is a blend between the immediate and the archaic. Because “ere” leads to “arch is a m” Nichol reveals that archaic language still reveals connections
between modern thoughts on language.

In Section 11 of Book 5, Nichol presents an erasure poem. He makes this poem by taking a section entitled “Clouds” from Book 2 of *The Martyrology*, and erasing each stanza, save for the first word and the repetition of the last letter of the first word. In Book 2, he presents this lyric:

```
surely when they fell
it was into grace

left the white streets of that higher town
to tumble down the long blue highway to the trees' tops saint reat &
saint and travelling thru those lands of colour
they'd followed the rainbow down to find
the land at the end of the rainbow
the ancient saints had taught about
this day they'd set their feet upon the earth
as if it were the lost home
the lost planet of their birth (n. pag.)
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In Book 5, he removes most of the content, leaving behind only remnants of the past books, forcing the reader to find the connections between the original clouds and the repetition:

```
surely y

y

y

y (n. pag.)
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Book 5 replicates the original text space for space. Each “y” sits in the same line and spot as it did in the original passage from Book 2. This replication allows *The Martyrology* to retread its past. In doing so, Nichol once again examines the poem’s history and how the poem uses history to expand itself. Reusing a passage from “Clouds,” Nichol uses the same words and comes to a new conclusion: in this case, “surely” becomes a cloud, almost floating off the page, untethered from the original specific meanings of the “Clouds” text while still tied to these meanings due to its relation to the source text. The focus on the specific word “surely” becomes a space of new importance on its own. “surely” floats on the page leaving behind “y” after “y.” Meaning becomes about how “surely” works within the next context of the blank page and what it holds on its own. Nichol often reworks the created mythology of *The Martyrology*. The entirety of Book 5 could be, in a way, construed as an exploration of a phrase from a passage near the start of Book 3:

-suddenly the sky opened-

it is all blue
(bluer than blue)
it was all blue

bluer

BLUE (n. pag.)

The poem opens with the sky stretching above the word “blue” on the page four times, and twice as “bluer.” Book 5 opens with a similar phrase “blue/bluer/bloor” and closes with the words “blue/bluer/blur.” Nichol’s search is one of constant opening and merging.
By repeating the word in different permutations, Nichol offers the reader choice in meaning. Each “blue” may lead the reader on different poetic “streets.” “blue/bluer” could express the shifting of the persona's feelings until it's all a “blur.” Perhaps the relation between the last words of each “bloor” and “blur” offers the experience of the Toronto street: a blur of constant action. Nichol wants the reader to have multiple interpretations from such a seemingly simple phrase.

I explore the possibility of opening words to multiplicative meaning, while directing that meaning through the lens of a grieving persona. In “swell,” I attempt to break words in half through the use of a column on the page as a fracture representing the emotional resonance of the persona. I also explore the multiple meanings that words hold. By taking prefixes, suffixes, and compound words, and separating them from their original roots, I create new words such as as “re|stand and “under|bruised” (43). By the end of the section, I abandon using such a break and instead move to break the word to explore possible words that make no logical sense such as “baseme|rite” (45). This change allows me to explore the multiple possibilities these words have, especially when these words overlap in meaning with words repeated throughout the long poem, such as “m|ad dr|um” (45). The word and person “mum” becomes part of the words mad and drum, shifting the possible role that the mother figure takes within the text. I take from Nichol the idea that severing and reconstituting individual words creates multiple meaning for readers to explore. Since each created word follows another created word, readers are able to find relation in their meanings. “c|nt / h|ave / d|opeful / m|ad / dr|um”
(45) become a miniature statement about what the persona can and cannot have emotionally. The reader can seek to reconnect the words to their original phrase and can connect those meanings to the created words possible meanings. Each relationship with a new word provides a new chance of expansion. Ideas about death and mourning force an emotional connection that can provide the reader a specific lens of meaning around ideas of grieving. Since I create new words through the use of the column on the page, I am able to imbue grief into the creation of the words. The column functions as a poetic tool to express the loss of a loved one through literary markers. Sometimes the blank space provides the experience of loss, as in the section “autolysis of an empty home,” where one side of the page is blank, indicating something missing. Then, on a facing page, I overlap words, once again obfuscating the original word. The sections of the phrase that blur suggest new words and meanings within the original phrase:

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we tile kitchen sink (53)
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“wet tiles” become inherently connected to “we tile” and “we i.” The words contain more than their original intent. The tiles become representative of a possible event between the persona and the loved one as well as the now distance “we” becoming “i.” The poem represents autolysis, the first process of corpse decay, through both the visual decay of the word and the emotional bond between the persona and the unknown loved one.

My work focuses on exploring culturally taboo topic of dying, death, and grief through wordplay. Historian Philippe Ariès outlines the shift in Western society’s attitudes
towards death in his (aptly named) book *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, remarking that in the twentieth century “[death] would become shameful and forbidden” (85). In texts, the topic of death often ends up relegated to the technical or the overtly sentimental. One such example of technical writing is Ariès's book *The Hour of Our Death*, which provides an important understanding into how Western culture processes and deals with grief. Readers may turn to Aries's book for comfort and to glean more information about how contemporary North Americans deal with death. What such a book does not provide, however, is an emotional or artistic response. Sentimental writings, such as formulaic gift cards or literary poems placed on the back of a memorial card, move into the cliché through transference into popular culture. Often times the poems on these cards are reused over and over again for each funeral: thus, the poem moves into the area of the cliché due to its constant use.

I engage both sentimental writings and scientific terminology to reveal emotional resonance within the process of grief. Early on in my long poem, memorial cards interject themselves into the narrative, often between a line of dialogue that attempts to cross the page:

```
no problem
if it's his hand, | [Do Not Stand at my Grave]
right? (5)
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The dialogue on the left division of the line competes for the reader's attention with the interjection of the cliché sentiment from the poem listed on the memorial card. The card's
interjection reveals that sentimental language cannot represent the complex feelings of
grief. Rather, the card placates complex emotions by repeating the same phrase that is
commonplace in a funeral home, instead of becoming an important marker of the death.
The line becomes a nuisance, interrupting the sentence from the persona's grandfather.
The grandfather attempts to relay a memory to the persona but the message breaks
because of the layers of communication: the column and the card. Thus a powerful
moment is undercut by cliché, distancing the persona from his grandfather. This theme of
language as distance repeats in the sections entitled “solve:” which rely on mathematical
writing to simultaneously create this distance through detail while revealing the grief the
persona holds:

\[ + \text{ intravenous}^{\text{hospital outfit}} \]

\[ \text{half - life} \]

\[ \times (\text{county ditch} \sim \text{wallaceburg tournament}) \] (46).

The persona attempts to break death down into specific mathematical understandings. In
doing so, the specific moment of “+ intravenous^{hospital outfit}” forces the reader to add the
intravenous to the other images in the poem while also seeing the relationship between
the intravenous and the hospital outfit. The hospital outfit sits in the exponential position
in algebra, where a number is usually multiplied by itself a certain amount of times. By
applying this algebraic notation, I create an image that merges IVs and hospital outfits.
“intravenous” becomes the main descriptor while “hospital outfit” attempts to fulfil the
notation of how many times the persona has seen an IV. The mathematics fail, but the
image attempts explanation for the persona. The “x” becomes a marker of both “multiplies” and “time.” Time becomes both a unit of measurement of grief (the times shared between the persona and the loved one) as well as a search for meaning: if the persona can solve the memories and emotions that rise from grief, perhaps he can find an answer to his specific response to their deaths. The attempt to mathematically extract meaning from grief provides a disconnect between the persona and his loved-ones. The representation of times as both multiplication of events in one's life as well as a mathematical purview allows the persona a chance to disassociate from grief through the notations that come through ritual. Mathematics merges into a grieving ritual: if the persona can solve the problem, he no longer needs to mourn. This tension between mathematics and poetics reveals to the reader the persona's attempts and failures to quantify grief. Since his equations are faulty, so too are his solutions.

Conclusion

My long poem attempts to close the parentheses within the contemporary Canadian long poem, specifically noting the ways that poets have used the open parenthesis to provide an idea of plurality that focuses on expansion within the text, breaking from form. As Atwood suggests about the metaphorical land of the dead: “you can cross over into theirs. You can go on a journey from this world to that. You can go down into the land of the dead and then you can get out again, back to the land of the living” (167). My long poem attempts to take this journey and explore the possible ways
that grief inhibits and inhabits my persona, who constantly attempts to dissect the effects of mortality and mourning.

At the end of Kamboureli's book, she remarks that “the long poem never lets itself be entirely seduced by either silence or words, death or life. Nor does it cradle the reader in a cozy world of familiarity” (203). I have attempted to represent the moment of fusion between death and life within my long poem. My persona goes on a journey wherein he enacts mourning, the mechanical processes of grief, and the understanding of the totality of death. And then he comes back again. And his words are marked by the silence and the dead. My long poem approaches death through life, ending in both silence and words. Examining the traces left behind by the dead; whether through wills or through wet tiles: endings come. The apocalypse is now.


Vita Auctoris

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