



# Epignosis Quarterly

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A Quality Online Literary & Arts Journal

'epignosis' is a Greek adjective meaning 'perceptive' and 'insightful' having to do with a personal or spiritual knowledge, 'in-knowledge', rather than merely rational or instructional knowledge. This is the kind of writing and art that is of interest to EQ.

Submissions of poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, translations, essays, interviews, reviews, artwork and photography are welcome. If you would like to submit, please limit to 3 poems and/or 1 each of any other kind of writing or artwork and photography, or if you have any ideas you'd like to discuss, please feel free to contact the editor.

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## POETRY

- 1, 14 Ben Meyerson
- 1, 12 Michael Lee Rattigan
- 2-9 Jeremy Clarke
- 2, 14 Gordon Meade
- 9 Iain Britton
- 10 Bethany W. Pope
- 12-13 Dick Jones
- 13 Ruth Roach Pierson
- 15-16 Ágnes Cserhádi
- 15 Matthew Francis
- 15, 22 Steven Mayoff
- 16 Anthea Simmons

## SHORT FICTION

- 3-9 Erin Soros  
*Still Water, BC*

## TRANSLATIONS

- 11-12 Georges Rodenbach's prose piece 'The Graves' and Maurice Maeterlinck's poem 'Night Soul' translated by Will Stone
- 15 Paul Celan's poems 'Song' and 'Strung' translated by John Reibetanz

## ESSAY

- 18-22 'The Anti-Author and the Death of Personality', an essay about Arthur Rimbaud by Paul Stubbs

## BOOK REVIEWS

- 17 Bethany W. Pope  
on Will Stone's translation of *Poems — Emile Verhaeren* (Arc, 2014)
- 31-32 Ágnes Cserhádi  
on *A Ragged Pen: Essays on Poetry & Memory* (Gaspereau Press, 2006)

## ARTWORK

- 2, 6, 30 Paola Volpato

## INTERVIEW

- 23-29 Ágnes Cserhádi in conversation with Jordan B. Peterson about his artwork, 'The Meaning of Music'

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 33-34

## BEN MEYERSON

### *To Pasture*

City's nostrils open like  
petals late into their bloom,  
when it is sunny and  
everyone is already waiting –  
closeted away, not knowing it.

By afternoon, city has  
tangled its fibers like  
a mane buffeted by wind and  
everyone waits to feel its teeth,  
skin begging for the reminder.

At nighttime, city rolls in frantic mud  
to cleanse itself, lamp-lit eyes  
set to outlast dark reins,  
forelegs intended when they kick up  
their sparks and move in our absence.

This is the faintness of city constellations:  
the post-laminate splash,  
the hoof-sparkle  
when we stamp the horizon with  
our particular sorrow.

## MICHAEL LEE RATTIGAN

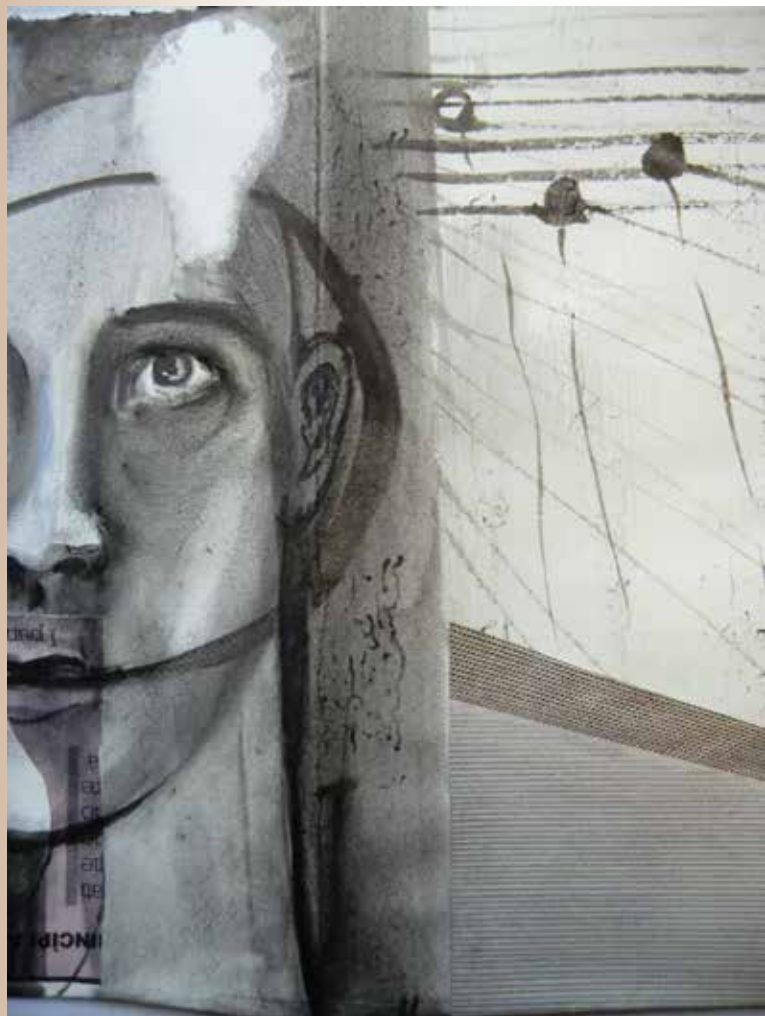
### *Impromptu*

Will rend here on this shore  
where eyes abolish border —

bits of brick torn syllable  
caught up once more, returned.

### *Korzenie (Roots)*

Presence not separate from objects  
perception apercus that body forth  
through pores blown, enchanted melodies  
from outside into something else  
pregnant of vital function.



This artwork was created specifically for Jeremy Clarke's forthcoming poetry collection, *Spatiamentum* (rufus books, 2014), in which six other drawings are also found interspersed amongst the poems. The term 'spatiamentum' refers to a time when monks of the Carthusian Order, who otherwise lead a very monastic life, take a weekly 4-hour walk at which time they converse with eight other monks in sequence.

GORDON MEADE

Local Weather

Here, the wind and the rain  
 can keep me in for the whole day,  
 watching from the relative warmth  
 of our living-room, as the trees

begin to take the strain,  
 and the dips and the hollows  
 in the pavements fill up with water.  
 On the coast, this kind of weather

would not have deterred me.  
 I would have strode out in it, walking  
 along the shoreline, dodging the incoming  
 tide, so that my feet, if nothing else,

would remain dry.

JEREMY CLARKE

Praise

light

The dark's so thick  
 that I'm stuck  
 half-way to sleep.

In too deep to turn back,  
 so I wait

to be rescued by the night  
 turning inside out,  
 revealing the light  
 and the contents of the world:

bed, basin, one high window  
 open to the weather,

whose iron bars  
 will soon be seen  
 as three claw marks in the dark.

How does something so huge unfold?

A little at a time.  
 Leaning some of itself against one wall  
 while it drops to the floor,  
 spreads to the bed.

Always leaving one corner dark,  
 like a trouser pocket not fully turned out.

Inhaling the light  
 this space expands.  
 And the cell's few things

begin releasing their shadows;  
 coming out of their shells

to start another day  
 of sending copies of themselves  
 to each other  
 across the floor and the walls.

I walk through the window bars  
 lying on the ground  
 like a thrown voice,

performing my morning routine  
 of a few shuffling laps.  
 Beating the bounds  
 of my elbow room.

A journey through worlds.  
 Through shades of dark  
 and different smells, past maps  
 of damp printed onto walls,



*Still Water, BC*

And it's my turn. The men nod as I stroll up to shoulder myself into their game, Olaf strapped to my back, legs kicking. I bounce him up and down to the wheezing beat of Whisker's harmonica. You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. Hitching up my skirt, I make a play of spitting on my hands before accepting the horseshoe.

"Give it a kiss, Eva." "Yeah," they shout, "give her a kiss for luck."

But I toss it through the air casually, feeling the warm metal leave the tips of my fingers. The arc is perfect. Then a burst of dust. The horseshoe rings the post with a loud clang.

The men clap and cheer. They cast bets on my doing it again. The young ones have climbed into the Doug firs that shadow the camp. They are greenhorns, still ready to shinny up a tree for some Saturday sport. The sky shines blue behind their outstretched limbs, each man dangling from a branch with one hand while he waves at me with the other.

I wave back, reaching around to adjust Olaf and check his diaper. He's dry. We'll see how long that lasts. I tickle his plump legs and he laughs the peeling glee of a toddler, all unprotected joy. The men grin as the sound loops around them. Last week the cook chided me that Olaf is getting too big to carry, but I can still move faster with him strapped to my back than I can dawdling along the trails beside his poking curiosity. I sewed his harness from one of Thorvald's canvas shirts and the straps have begun to dig welts into my shoulders but I like to feel the weight of my boy, how he balances what I'm carrying up front.

I start my sweaty walk to the commissary, and those men in the trees are whistling and shouting catcalls. The black-haired one sends me a mock salute. Chickadees join their cacophony celebration. The men's attention only makes me laugh. I'm eight months along and all the fantasy they've got.

"Use your left hand tonight, boys," I shout, "It'll feel like a stranger." I keep walking, Olaf's feet tapping my hips.

All the loggers are down the mountain, last shift of the week and the camp has lost that empty feeling of the hours when the men are gone. They are back. They are thumbing pulp fiction or talking lazy talk with the blacksmith. Two groups are playing poker on rickety tables they've set up in the middle of the wooden sidewalk. Whisker keeps blowing his desperate tunes into that harmonica and now Seaball has started croaking the lyrics. You make me ha-a-pp-y when skies are grey. Men nap in the sun, flat on their backs, mouths open to the flies. Men flick roll-your-owns and wander from bunkhouse to bunkhouse to bargain for moonshine or girlie magazines.

Thorvald is sitting upright on a wooden chair, beside the card players, head down—pretends he doesn't see us, sharpening the blade of a saw he's clasping between his knees. He told me to stay at home and rest today.

The open cookhouse door releases the smell of oil and burnt milk. The heat of the afternoon has its own stink—fresh tobacco, skin streaked dark with sweat, hair gone a week unwashed. I wave my braid to keep horseflies from landing on Olaf's nose, black specks skittering through the air along jagged lines as if bumping into invisible walls.

*t i m e*

over uneven ground –  
the varying textures  
and terrain of the flagged floor.

I'm disturbing dust.  
Lapping the light  
doing its day-long length,

stopping at the basin  
where a dripping tap  
is keeping time,

holding it hostage.  
Making the same single second  
play over and over.

Except there's no such thing as time.

How long does it take  
for dust to settle?  
For the sun to sweep a room?

As long as it does.

Only man is moved by a ticking clock.  
Handcuffed to a wristwatch,  
spending a life timing everything.

I've been set free  
from the mindless authority  
of the minute hand.

I'm returning to a beginning.  
Coming back to my senses,

repairing instinct and intuition.  
Making amends  
for the crimes of my confusion.

I'm being slowly restored.

Rewound to when I was knee-high  
and new in the world and astonished  
by the everyday, impatient

to know every ordinary thing precisely.

Then the world was sound  
and taste and texture,  
each new place an undiscovered country,  
a school for first thoughts,

slow learning  
by a heart wide and open,  
taking in everything –

With Olaf on my back and the baby in my belly I'm wider than the biggest of the men and I maneuver my body between their bodies like a canoe. Snowball pulls up his shirt to display the belly that beer has built.

"You got me beat, Twig. Looks like that baby weighs more than you."

"This one's a girl. I'm betting on it."

"Sugar and spice. What are the likes of you gonna do with a girl?"

"I need the company."

"Always got company."

At his feet is a large metal pail full of peaches. I reach down and take one, biting past the fuzz and skin into a sweetness that leaks down my wrist. Nodding at the men as I pass, I greet by nickname the ones I know. A few glance over at Thorvald as if asking for his permission to greet me back.

The mill town newspaper lies scattered across the sidewalk like splayed grey wings and by tomorrow each rumpled page will have made its way to the outhouse.

With today's sky wide-open, I like the lifting feel of stomping along the wooden ramp that slants up to the commissary door and into the dark room full of mailbags and canned food, the sound of my boots on cedar.

Inside, two men lean over the counter listening to the static crackle of a radio and murmuring about who has won or lost. Smokey rambles on about some whore he hasn't had.

"She's passing around the clap. The fallers' cabin is crawling. Must have picked it up on that last trip down south."

"Down south, you say Smokey?" The men guffaw then shush when they see me, as if there's anything I haven't heard.

I am the only woman among one hundred men. I wrote that very sentence in the first letter I posted from this mountain so many green miles away from anything as predictable as a street or store or church. Here the traffic is a black bear on your path. You must be awful lonely, my friend Emily wrote back. She'd underlined both words with some conviction she knew what I should feel. No point trying to explain. What must I be? A strong little thing, the men called me, when I reached out my ropy arms to yank myself up onto the cookhouse roof.

Olaf wants down. I unpeel him and let him loose. He picks up his feet and puts them down, watches them, glances up at me delighted and surprised. Look what legs can do. Then he points with noises of frustration at the clock on the wall clicking determinedly out of his reach.

On the counter three postcards haven't been collected. They will be addressed to men who are no longer in this camp, the ones who have travelled up north or died.

I've ordered pork, beef, molasses, flour, cans and cans, and the timekeeper has divided everything into two well-stuffed bags. Olaf has started tugging on my skirt. I've got to head home, get this boy fed. And Thorvald will want to eat at home. I scoop up the two bags, balancing one on either side of my belly as Simple comes through the door and he's eyeing me with that dumbfounded drooling look of his. He flaps at the groceries. I tell Simple no, I've got everything. I can handle it fine. You keep to yourself now. You keep to yourself. I turn back to those postcards. Dear Grizzly. Dear Sea-Saw. Slip the cards into my brassiere, the slick paper corners jabbing my skin.

*calm*

all the strange treasures  
in the world  
that made noise or moved,

or stood patiently in rooms,  
waiting to be loved  
and consoled and understood.

Until the arrival of reason,  
hormones and ego  
ruined everything.

Now, again  
I'm back in a classroom,  
paying attention, being reminded

how to look and listen. I'm teaching myself  
the nature of things.

And every thing says  
*slow. exactness.*

as the dripping tap  
searches for the perfect note  
and a strip of sun

moves through the room  
at the speed of light.

And me on my own  
journey through memory  
and imagination. Travelling light  
as though through dreams.

Sliding down my learning curve  
towards a state of innocence  
and pure understanding.

And in this sample  
of silence and calm,

the bored brain,  
used to the bells and whistles  
of busyness and sensuality,

begins to withdraw  
and turn away.

And the shy heart emerges.  
Begins to forage, feel around...

How does the heart know what to choose  
and what to disregard?

Attracted to the whispered,

“Stop it Olaf, I’m telling you. The games are over. We’re going home.” I walk out into the sun and start my way down the wooden ramp and Olaf is laughing and grabbing my legs, he’s run right under my skirt, and then I feel myself tipping.

It is not such a long way to fall.

My hip hurts first. I land at an angle on the damned ground and flail around to check that Olaf is alright. He’s on his feet, mouth wailing, both hands grasping his ears as if to block out his own noise. My water hasn’t broke, my belly is hard and round, the baby safe. All I can do is roll over on my back like a bowling pin. I want to stretch under that wide sun and let the pain leach into the ground. But Thorvald is quick to lever me up and the men have their laughs at my clumsy expense, trying to nurse a smile out of me. I limp along the trail to our home, Thorvald piggybacking Olaf. In the kitchen he’s ready to take the knife out of my hand and slice it through the ham. I tell him I’m steady enough to do it myself.



Our dirt yard is blistered with light. Clean sheets hang on the line, so white in the sunshine it hurts my eyes to look. I’ve washed all the bedclothes and in the hot middle of the afternoon the yard reeks of bleach. My mouth full of clothespins, I can taste the wood, I can taste my own spit and I think of the chunk of fir I bit down on when I was facing contractions the first time. I’ve got a few weeks yet before I have to start worrying about this one, two weeks at least, maybe three. Olaf came late—he was in no hurry to join us in the darkness of winter—but I can feel this baby has already dropped down into my pelvis.

Olaf gums my patchwork skirt as if nothing could make him happier than getting a fistful of this ragged fabric into his mouth. Red, blue, striped or plaid—the men gave me their old shirts. Here you go, they’d say proudly, handing over something with too many holes. I knew how to cover the holes. How to place each piece beside the next as though they were supposed to fit together like that, just like that, like one of Olaf’s puzzles. I’ve even got a square of someone’s canvas baseball cap, sewn right into the skirt near the hem, stiff as bark. Olaf likes to pull at it. I walk through camp and the men shout out what is theirs.

The baby was quiet last night. Olaf coated his fingers with molasses and happily poured stickiness at my feet. My skirt hid a bruise as big as a plate. I had to bandage up the gash in my arm—Thorvald said it needed care. He said he had warned me not to go striding through the camp in my condition.

Before we tucked into dinner, Thorvald went rummaging through the shed and came back with two white pills like unblinking eyes on his wide palm. What I wanted was a shot of whiskey to tip upside down at my lips.

Even with those painkillers he could tell I wasn’t sleeping and placed his hand next to mine on the bed. A ratchity nervous feel crept through my limbs, like they wanted to keep pumping my body away from the fall. I couldn’t stand the sheets on me. At dawn I sent Thorvald off fishing—he’s happy as soon as he’s got something to catch or cut down—and spooned porridge into Olaf and got it into my head to take the scissors to the sleeves of my shirt, just to get some air on my skin. Look at me now, loose threads hanging at the shoulders where arms had been. But the relief of that lightness was like water. As soon as I did it, I considered the picture I’d made

by the tug of things at rest,  
the quiet heart knows

of another, fragile world  
that co-exists with our own dailiness.

A world it hopes  
the senses go in search of.  
Returning with news  
of the shape of the wind,

the size of a season,  
how a shadow slides and streetlamps lean  
lovingly over their light.

*h o m e*

But the brain butts in  
with its prosaic concerns  
and the metronomes of our routines,

bullying the senses  
into believing in only the obvious  
and the everyday.

Still the hopeful heart  
keeps quietly

going about its business,  
seeking connections, affection  
and affinity,  
places to call home.

We feel it when it finds something.  
Feel it pull  
when we smell the sea,  
whenever it snows,

if we’re looked in the eye  
by a wild animal,  
or simply step out into a shining morning  
following all-night rain,

when every new-made thing  
seems stopped, says  
*wait. a minute.*

So we pause, for a second,  
without knowing why, without  
quite knowing what  
it is we’re being shown or told.

Each encountered thing  
sensed as a kind of homecoming,

a glimpse of something  
we feel we ought to know,  
vaguely miss.





*This is a Holding Pattern*

ERIN SOROS cont'd

of myself and burst out laughing. My muscled arms cabled around this pregnant belly could be mistaken for a man holding a woman.

If I sip something cool, or eat something, the baby will take to kicking like she always does. Such enthusiasm—this one will be a good eater, I can tell. A good walker too. Once I showed Thorvald the imprint of a tiny foot pressed against the wall of my belly, heel and toes visible so you'd believe this baby wanted to kick right through me.

Olaf got quiet too, toward the end, I remember that. I guess they sense what is coming.

A burnt stump scars the middle of the yard, black and shiny as soot. We used the cedar to build our home. The wood became the floor and the walls, the crib in Olaf's bedroom, and the same wood will soon surround my new child as I rock her to sleep. The stump is a place for me to rest, wide as a table, solid and smooth underneath my hips.

Bees drag listlessly along the dirt. Olaf mutters his contented babble. He brings me a pine cone. I thank him.

A breeze bulges the sheets and they flicker up into the air as full as sails and I believe for a moment that I've felt the baby kick, but it's my own heartbeat. Only that familiar thud. The sheets rustle and then fall. Olaf comes to curl up at my feet. I should get a hat on him. I can see right through his blond hair to the pink skin of his skull.

JEREMY CLARKE cont'd

Moments of truth. Fragments  
of the sublime.  
Subliminal lessons, long as eye-blinks,  
pitched at the heart,

coming from depths  
too deep for our ordinary noticing.  
(How can we hope to grasp the complex  
when the commonplace is beyond comprehension?)

Then somebody shouts.  
A telephone rings  
and the head restarts, returning us

to our reality, and the world  
of what we do.

Who I am is not what I do  
but how I see.

How long I look. How well I listen.  
What I choose to hold  
in my attention.

The sun has started to climb the walls.  
Its slow going  
creating time zones on the wall maps.  
And time is simply presence,  
the light first in one place,

then in another; each strange land  
having a turn at high noon.

My imaginary world.  
Its shapes and scars and variegation  
make it a view of the Earth

seen from outer space.  
This fretwork of scratch marks  
is a layer of cirrus cloud,

or whitecaps of waves  
moving some ocean on and on.

*place*

I can reach in and run  
my finger along a crack,  
tracing the route of a river

on its awkward journey  
towards a wide, dark patch –  
a stretch of forest, stain of city...

And I remember past lives lived.  
Places I have learned and loved.  
Or lost; failed, misunderstood.

The baby does not move. I watch the sheets. They are stark white. Sweat trickles under my arms. When Thorvald comes home he will ask me how I am and he will put his hand on my belly and say not long now, Eva, not long. She kicked when I waved to the men, I remember that. And when she heard Snowball's voice. Sugar and spice and everything nice. Now the sheets are as blank as the face of strangers. The sheets block the trees and the sky.



Thorvald returns from work suncooked and hungry, his big frame a silhouette in the door. Sawdust drifts onto the cedar boards around his feet. He takes off his boots and shakes them upside down, cupping his hand to collect slivers of wood and dirt and pebbles and tossing them into the airtight where they'll have to wait until the fall to burn or not burn and then I'll sweep out what remains. Thorvald is satisfied that the icebox is full of enough trout to last the week.

"That will do you." He washes his hands before he plants them on the bump. "How's my Eva? And how's my little minnow?"

"Not long now, Thorvald." I keep my voice even and relaxed. "She'll be out in no time."

He eyes my snipped sleeves and looks anxious. He's not a man who likes surprises.

We've got eight wooden trolls on a ledge above the chesterfield, each one with a wizened shrivelled face, and Thorvald takes one in his hands and holds it out to Olaf who is transfixed by the stiff creature. Thorvald points out a wart and a cauliflower ear, features echoing the shape of the wood as he found it, the knobs and swirls and oddities in the grain. Like a blind man he finds the face with his hands. When Thorvald expresses pride, he does it at arm's length. None of the trolls have names, though he treats them as gently as children, dusting them himself once a week with a soft rag. He taps this one on the nose before he puts it back.

Olaf runs to me, expecting the trolls to leap from their perch. In Thorvald's stories these trolls live under bridges and deep within the dripping gloom of caves, but in our house they sit on that shelf and peer down at me all day. They have small eyes and long noses that droop like icicles, and their fists hold canes or axes, a bucket, an apple, and when I look at the fine handiwork I can feel his loyalty to them and them to him.

Thorvald once told me a tale about a child being swapped for a troll. That was when I still loved the thrill of being made to feel afraid.

These trolls have seen me on tired mornings sweep the dust back under the chesterfield and toss the occasional saucepan through an open window when the stew had burnt into a smoking tar. They witnessed me stride joyously out the door with Olaf on my back, off to the cookhouse where I had every intention of playing horseshoes or a round of poker with the loggers who'd be boisterous after their last shift of the week. The trolls did not approve, these emissaries from the old world who wonder why a woman would ever try to make a life in a place that belongs to men.

Now they look down their long noses at my belly that has grown as still as their wooden limbs.

"The cook wagers it's a boy." Thorvald announces that the loggers are all taking bets. Sex, weight, date of birth: for the men it's still all up for grabs. "Won't be long now till we know."

Places I have been through, confused by,  
have nearly forgotten.

A place begins to be forgiven  
as soon as we've left it.  
Its perceived cruelties and excesses,  
cause of our griefs and disappointments,

start to dull and dilute.  
So that in time,

and time is merely distance,  
it is simply remembered

for the tone of a church bell,  
morning light on a wall,  
a row of trees, a local tramp,  
where pigeons slept...

Little things we absorbed without thinking,  
taken in by a heart  
always leaning towards the slight,

letting out what it's stored  
when we're looking back  
or reminiscing,

*still*

briefly escaping  
the demands of the present  
and our constant preparations

for a future,  
that keeps receding.

The consolations of the past,  
of what is permanent and fixed.  
The relief of something silent  
and still.

And I am still  
relearning human  
and what it means to be alone.

How do you cope with isolation  
without anxiety and fear?

Silence and separation are at first terrifying,  
then slowly miraculous.  
Once the brain has recovered.

Has suffered the symptoms of withdrawal  
from the fast foods of stimulation,  
and become open

to the possibilities of slowness,  
nuance and suggestion.

Thorvald rubs his hands together like he is trying to keep them warm.

I've managed to set the table without so much as a fork slipping to rattle its prongs on the floor. Last week I'd tucked a dandelion in the windowsill, the lion-headed weed, and now it has curled up as tired as an old woman's hand, its bitter juice staining the wood. Soon the dandelions growing in the yard will be those wispy halos I can blow into the wind to make a wish and it will be too late.

"I need to lie down. Just like last time, Thorvald, remember? So tired." But a dull weight nestles in my belly that I didn't feel when the baby was inside me tumbling toward the future.

Upstairs I find the postcards where I'd dropped them in the drawer with my nightgown. I turn to read the writing scrawled on the reverse, but the high-spirited splotches don't give much away. No telling why the women sent the postcards or what they were expecting to receive in return. Their bodies have been stretched and scarred by nights on Hastings and some of them will have had a baby or lost a baby or wanted to lose one. They have jumped down stairs or prodded themselves with coat hangers. *Down below* was the term my mother used, as if there were no better words. I was only a child myself, when I heard about women. It didn't put me in the right mind to become one.

My mind feels as fuzzy as unbrushed teeth. My mind is not right, I can feel that much. Did I brush my teeth? Did I wash the kitchen floor? Tomorrow morning I've got Olaf to clean and feed, but I have to make sure not to lift him. In the afternoon he will nap and I will lie down for as long as I can stand it. I tried to eat, that first day, when I still thought it might help. Now it seems important not to open my mouth, as best as I can manage. There is a stasis in my body I need to keep.

Olaf was a tadpole, that's what we called him, then a frog. Toward the end he was a frog. Froggie—we still call him that sometimes. This one's always been minnow. Little minnow, our tiny miney minnow—Thorvald's Norwegian accent lilts the words into a song and he hasn't noticed yet that I no longer join him.

The cards were shipped up here, travelling miles along the coast, through days and nights when the loggers could have been breathing still and able to walk right up that ramp and into the commissary to collect their mail. So the postcards have a bit of life left on them. It is a strange thing now to hold them.

One of the cards shows the black and white face of a movie star with her curled hair and painted lips, and that woman would need to keep her figure so she'd be spared birthing a child or losing one.

My aunt gave birth to a child without lungs, only as big as her hand. I lie down on the bed and hold my hand against my belly and take some pride knowing that my child is large enough to live. There would be nothing wrong with her lungs. Legs, arms, nose and eyes, even lashes—by this late, everything is perfect.

The doctor said I'm not built for birthing. Olaf had to be cut out of me.

This one won't gulp for air and kick its legs while the doctor slices the gristly cable connecting its life to mine. The doctor will not give that smack on the bottom. His knife and scissors will possess more energy than what has been born. Keep it from her, that's what the silent glances will mean, as if I do not know what to expect. The doctor will give it to Thorvald. They will be the ones to hold it.

Is no longer afraid of nothing happening,

has redeveloped a capacity  
for profound attention,  
remembering,

the longer you look at a thing  
the more of itself it will reveal.

And eventually,  
coming round to the thought  
of befriending the heart,  
custodian of our noticing,

and together discover  
how every thing so effortlessly is –  
from the arrival of dust

to the wind's nonchalance,  
how a drop of water  
is both substance and container,

the long slow dance of light and dark...

Beauty is so threaded through the ordinary  
it's hard to miss.

But mostly we do. Our senses jaded  
and bored,

too long exposed  
to the extravagant and the exaggerated  
in the hyperactive urban loud.

Too focused on ourselves  
and our day to day doing –  
all humdrum and high dramas,

false starts, self-doubts, second thoughts,  
best laid plans  
and carefully plotted routes that lead  
to where?

We all just want to find our way.  
Fall into a place where we belong,  
that's been specially made  
just for us.

We're already there.

And there is simply here.  
And now.

*praise*

And I am here  
in a place beyond desire or fear.  
Lying watching the day



**ERIN SOROS** cont'd

They will clean it. They will dig a fresh hole in the ground.

How can it not be alive if I am alive? This child needs to be surrounded by my own muscle and blood. My strength is still coursing down that cord. Nothing has changed, nothing will change.

I reach out to touch the sheets, their cool blankness. I lift my dress and examine the taut skin. My belly will stay this size, round and hard, the pale scar surging up and down like a river.

---

**IAIN BRITTON**

*necklace for the angels*

a light bulb  
shines  
on the table  
two plates / a jug  
candlesticks / mugs  
a crucifix  
to hang  
a tea cosy

you call them  
children  
to be handled  
with care

opportunities  
happen in small doses  
i get out of bed  
any time

does it matter?

*the thing is*

everything i want  
can be found in the pod of an orchid  
a chain reaction of theatricals is born  
dispersed / hybridised / the thing is  
the evolutionary belief of adaptation  
is never constant

*warrior mentality*

you look at the room / the man painted black  
the man black-coated in patent leather  
at the shiny man who sees only himself  
a man buffed up and almost lost in his room  
his stand-alone room amongst the elfin perennials  
the toadstool wings the carvings of prayers and  
lunchtime graces / you look to sign off  
with a bayonet

---

**JEREMY CLARKE** cont'd

turning inside out,  
pulling out the night  
until it's filled the room.

I'm disappearing,

going black and blind,  
becoming a lump of dark  
as I lie still listening

to a breeze playing  
on the bars of the window,  
a softly falling rain.

The dripping tap,  
the sound of my breathing,  
the thought of a fire

burning in an unlit room.

Of wind in tall grass,  
car tyres on cobblestones, water  
filling a bath,

a distant train, a shallow stream,  
every heart-felt thing whispering  
*praise. give thanks.*

as I close my eyes  
and curl to the shape of sleep.

And when I wake and see tomorrow  
I will rejoice and be glad in it.  
Led out of here

to the applause of the rain,  
towards the end  
and a new forgiving.

---

**IAIN BRITTON**

*just*

giving birth  
is precisely  
why we're here  
it's done

split dependencies  
betray a frailty  
for we sit at the table  
hands just touching

---

*Other Parrots Have Language, These Lost Their Flight*

Think of the creatures that live without threat.  
The puffy, sex-crazed New Zealand parrot  
That will thrust its cloacae against  
Round rocks, an explorer's reclined head, or  
Discarded melon; anything that looks  
Like the taut rump of its mate. Centuries  
Passed without the pressure of predators.  
It fell into Eden. Free from struggle,  
The furrowed brain smoothed in the absence of  
Agony. It fattened on abundant  
Food. Now it is nearly extinct. When the  
Carnivores came with their terrible teeth,  
Flesh fell into their hands like fruit. Evil  
Exists to save us from perilous peace.

*Striking the Lyre*

1.  
My voice is the lyre,  
my words are struck chords  
opening the bone-  
hinged door into the  
underworld. Enter.

2.  
I am not afraid  
of Death. I'll take him  
as a lover. My  
breasts will rot, in time  
I will be like him.

3.  
They say never to  
descend too far. Doors  
were made to slam closed  
behind you. The yew  
is food and poison.

4.  
I don't care about  
warnings. The treasure,  
story, worth every  
cost. This body is  
mortal. I'll trade up.

5.  
Death pours me a drink  
that's sweet and bitter  
like yew-berries. It  
makes me drunk. Opens  
doors. I'll go further.

*Through the Back Door*

*for Seamus Heaney*

We've all had our moments.  
You left off singing and ran  
past the thunderfaced custodian of Apollo  
who imagined she could stop you  
with nothing but a look

and the tag-end of a velvet rope.  
I picture you white-haired, straight-backed,  
hurtling those stairs to dive snout-first  
into the water, to drown,  
in the sweetness of dedication,

all those whose hubris is great enough  
to imagine they could bottle up God.  
I picture you horse-like, snorting and blowing,  
mouthing the promise as it is fulfilled.  
I see your eyes cast wide and gleaming

as mine were six years ago,  
when five minutes after I bribed  
the sleek Vatican guard with twenty euros  
and the promise of my travel-rank company  
for at least two meals, he hid me

in a Medici-era broom-closet, whose floor  
was edged with serpentine marble.  
I crouched among the dusty brooms,  
the rags which smell the same everywhere,  
of lemon and rot, waiting till the building

had sloughed museum-husk and returned to church.  
I crouched in a red silk long-sleeved smock,  
corduroy trousers, Birkenstocks, my long braid  
and the funk of a week without showering.  
He led me to the altar and left me to make my vow.

Michelangelo soared above my head,  
a sonnet about the Castilian Springs  
beat its rhythm through my veins.  
I touched my greased forehead  
to the embroidered space beneath the cross.

Twenty minutes after to sprawl on the tiles,  
a floor so warped its cooling waves rose  
to meet the small of my back, a treasure  
straight above my head that I yearned to match  
and was ready to struggle for.

The need to reach that moment of sweetness,  
to cross every barrier, no matter the cost,  
is the necessary blood. Now that we have  
drunk from the same fountain,  
let us both sing some songs about that.

*The Graves*

It was a very old graveyard and had been abandoned. There were little more than a few headstones still standing, as if the graves themselves had also perished. As in their turn the graves die out above the dead, a still more sorrowful dejection persists like tears spun in rain.

Here and there amongst the dense grass, a few more grave slabs show through. But so worn, so ancient! They have lost their inscription as an old grandmother her memory.

In particular there are three next to one another, exactly alike. It seems they were destined for three sisters.

But one has already given up, keeling over into the grass.

The two remaining stones remain upright and steadfast, giving the impression that each hammers on a door which merely opens onto absolute nothingness, above an utterly mouldered corpse.

The inclining stone on the other hand would seem to signal a more definite ending, that death might be restored to the earth, which is indeed bruised and swollen there as if burgeoned by the exact space taken by a body and enriched by the nourishment of decomposition.

But it was saddening to reflect that one of the three sisters was 'yet more dead'.

What confirmed this impression was a butterfly fluttering about the more degraded tomb. It was white and black, the colour of the procession of virgins. It lingered with an uncertain flutter, as if dazzled to be finally free and solitary in the naked air.

Doubtless it was born in this particular tomb, which was why it seemed able to leave it only under duress.

Was this the soul itself, only liberated at that moment? Does the soul remain with the body much longer than one imagines? Is the one interred along with the other? Does it not endure, invisible, to spin the spider's web of dream in the slumber of death as in the slumber of night? Perhaps it too descends into the grave, clings stubbornly to the corpse like a ship to water, and only departs later, at the last moment, when finally all the flesh has dissolved, all matter is trans-substantiated and only the futile wreckage of the bones is left...?

That moment then was the fulfillment of the interred virgin beneath her leaning stone. So, the white butterfly was her soul departing, yet still suspended and lingering over memories, above the clay which had appropriated the form of the extinct body.

In the old abandoned graveyard, there is also a great tomb set against the surrounding wall, a massive sarcophagus already virtually barren. The names and dates have wasted away and perished one by one, as if death itself was obliterated by death... The stones return to their natural state. Brief destiny for these stones that

acquire for a time their identity just as they do their passing.

They were tombs once, richly embellished with crowns, they were marveled at in the anonymous throng of tombs and humble crosses, whose outstretched arms recall those of a beggar.

For a long time the sarcophagus prevailed.

Now it is restored to an impersonal stone, a frivolous mineral. Only an urn, at its side, endures in the integrity of its form.

It was as if the soul of this body of stone had emerged from it like the white butterfly from its body of flesh and bone.

Curvilinear, it seemed almost to be taking off. This was the most agile and aerial object realised from stone.

An airborne urn, you would think it really was hovering there for a moment above the mighty sarcophagus of



*The Eye' Brussels Cemetery by Will Stone*

which it was but a part, likewise grey in colour, and that at long last was taking its leave, ceasing to be itself, and already seeming more like an anonymous stone than that of the tomb.

The few surviving headstones, embedded in the earth like anchors, stood erect and tall amongst the jaded grass.

Forsaken and left to itself, the grass was fading, tangled up with the jumble of hair belonging to the dead, hair that was no longer combed.

In this disorder of vegetation, the gravestones loom up, unyielding, geometric. Nothing could disturb them.



## WILL STONE'S TRANSLATION OF GEORGES RODENBACH

cont'd

Even the winds of the October storms are impotent, as if merely pounding on the door of eternity.

The sun alone thwarted their impassiveness; as, in spite of them, their shadow varied, moving around them. According to the sun's position the grave was sometimes in shadow and sometimes in sunlight. The interlude of light and dark! A pall of darkness over the grave then suddenly one of golden light! As if death had in turn opened and closed its eyes.

The old graveyard was denuded, one by one, of all its graves.

Nothing now remains but a vast livid lawn, whose ashen pallor recalls the older destination. None cares for such a dejected plot and has no wish to site their home upon the recollections of bones. Death has proved too obstinate an owner to allow this fold to be reconciled with life.

Now in the midst of this empty solitude at the place where the three standing headstones are, for those sisters side by side, somehow a beautiful lily shows through.

It rises up, white as snow or linen, above the grassy tussocks, like the cup of silence...to display those rounded edges, this languid nodding, doubtless influenced by the stone urn that vanished, but is seen once more here in the bloom.

Or perhaps it has taken its dull pastel whiteness from the butterfly which also vanished and yet is seen in the flower.

Eternal metempsychosis!

At the same time it's the urn which seemed to be the body of stone that was the sarcophagus, and the butterfly which appeared to be the soul of the interred body. It has the form of the urn and the colour of the butterfly.

Bell-like white lily, that typifies the fallen graveyard! Lily that rises from the grave, but signifies life! As, sprouting from the place where the three dead sisters lie, it unfurls, opens out like one great unviolated sex, this lily verging on the carnal, flower that proclaims the invincible force of matter and the chemical fecundity of death.

---

## MICHAEL LEE RATTIGAN

*Core*

rain's disappearance into stone  
direct and more insatiable  
than world without distance  
dazzling through darkness felt  
and laid into being

## WILL STONE'S TRANSLATION OF MAURICE MAETERLINK

*Night Soul*

At the end my soul is dejected;  
dejected finally to be so weary,  
weary finally to be in vain,  
at the end my soul is weary and dejected  
and upon my face I await your hands.

I await your pure fingers upon my face  
like angels of ice,  
I wait for the ring to be brought;  
I await their coolness upon my face,  
like treasure sunk in the water's depth.

And finally I await their remedies  
so as not to perish in the sun,  
to perish without hope in the sun!  
I wait for them to bathe my warm eyes,  
where so many sleeping paupers lie.

Where so many swans are upon the sea,  
straying swans upon the sea,  
stretching in vain their mournful necks.  
While, across winter gardens  
the infirm gather blooms of roses.

I await your pure hands upon my face,  
like angels of ice.  
I wait for them to moisten my glance,  
the dead grass of my glance,  
where so many weary lambs lie scattered.

*from Serres Chaudes (Hothouses), 1889*

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## DICK JONES

*Falling Water*

When your balloon burst, caught  
on a tiny soldier's spear, you cried  
across the tattered scrap as hard  
as if it were the dog had died.

Much later, in the dark whilst sitting  
you to sleep, I felt like crying too.  
Some unaccommodated grief caught like  
a morsel in the throat and everything

in thrall to suffocation for the time  
it took for you to sigh and turn.  
These seconds when like sudden beauty  
grief is as pure and clear as falling water.

**RUTH ROACH PIERSON** (from an upcoming collection, *Realignment*, to be published by Palimpsest Press in 2015)

*On theories of discursive construction and nothing existing apart from language*

I see the chartreuse leaves of the Honey  
Locust outside my bedroom window, taste  
the acidic tang of my morning orange juice,  
hear the metallic clank and pneumatic  
intake of air as the streetcar approaches  
its High Park roundabout, run my fingers  
over the knobby topography of my chenille  
bedspread and am confident these opulent  
coordinates exist independently  
of the tags and the descriptors  
I've assigned them. Nonetheless

the words on this  
page provide  
the chief confirmation  
I'm alive.

*You Are*

Striations of purple loose-strife and lilac-hued butterfly bush  
fly past in an aquarelle wash of green foliage bracketing  
vistas of tidily rolled bales of hay, untippable black angus  
and rotund sheep dotting pastures in a placid communality  
lacking among the seagulls punctuating Edinburgh's meadow

while overhead grey-bottomed cumuli devour the blue sky  
like a pod of ravenous whales vacuuming up an expanse of sea –  
their inauspicious, dour colour a match to the grey of Scotland's  
capital, its limestone, its all-too frequently rain-dashed streets,

the increasing gloom of the day's weather a timely complement  
to the rider's low spirits, her self-abnegation – the grey  
dark as a slate on which she, like a child kept after school  
ought to write a hundred times over: I am, you are, he is.

*Reading Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

and encountering the word  
"treacle" for the first time  
I retain it in my mind as inseparable  
from her hair spilling like molasses  
as she writhes on the grass  
caught in a sudden downpour.

**DICK JONES**

*Hinc Spes Effulget*

Whether to identify the stars as  
the finest of dust flung far and wide,  
or to speak of their intolerable heat  
and a distance that must stretch  
the elastic skin of your imagining  
to tearing point, or to identify  
the turning bowl of night as vast  
and flawed with tiny holes through  
which the light beyond is witnessed.

Gods and monsters jostle here, each  
behind his shingle. What can I say  
to you above their clamour? Best, maybe,  
beneath this implacable black that binds  
us all to settle for the tiny holes: that  
just on the other side there thrives  
a brilliance, godless, inexhaustible,  
the sum of all the very best of dreaming.

*Blues for Charlie*

*for Charlie Waller, 2008-2013*

*Your children are not your children but life's  
longing for itself.*

Kahlil Gibran

*(He) said unto the sea, peace, be still.*

Mark 4:39

Something lifts us up. We rise  
readily enough at the start.  
Something carries us forward  
in hope and expectation.

Is it life's own longing for itself  
that drives us? It must be for  
I feel it in myself, lifting me still.  
And this accommodates both

faith and godlessness, so primal  
is the force. So when it fails  
long before its fuel is spent,  
what are we to make of this?

I've lit a candle for you, Charlie  
and in the time it's taken me to  
think these thoughts and then to  
write them down, it's half-way gone.

I can light another and I shall.  
And then I'll rise and walk away  
between these pillars and these pews  
and that tiny flame will never fail.

## GORDON MEADE

### *The Mighty Thames*

For how long can I imagine  
that the River Thames is actually the sea?  
I have managed it for over a year

in spite of all the evidence  
against it. For a start, there are no proper  
tides, and the breakers are non-

existent too. The odd gull  
can be seen on the river's banks, but  
the banks of a river will never

be a beach. In the lower  
reaches, the mouth does meet salt  
water but, from where I am

standing it is still pretending  
to be fresh. It, too, is putting a brave  
face on things; water that only

recently has managed to support  
the occasional fish. How often am I supposed  
to try and amuse myself by watching

a cormorant dashing across  
the surface of the river, as if already late  
for a meeting on the other side?

### *Is it enough to know*

Is it enough to know,  
that the moon in the night sky  
is full, even though it is  
obscured by clouds?

Is it enough to know,  
that somewhere in the foothills  
of the Himalayas, there is a snow leopard  
hunting its prey, even though  
you will never see it?

And is it enough to know  
that the sea is still beating on  
the coastline you left behind you,  
even though you are

unable to return?

## BEN MEYERSON

### *On The Lapse Of Elegy*

In me, growth  
is dulled time, the hollow  
haste of  
birth in the garden the rib  
the fear  
of hardening then  
beaten earth  
in which I am  
encased:

when leaf veins crack  
like bird bones and  
sigh  
brittle little songs  
at our stepping – this  
is the syntax of yearning.

I am a creature not  
a blade to cut  
the cold or burst  
from this hibernal  
mold amid  
the friction  
of seasons turning –  
mine is eager earth the struggle  
for contrition then  
the touch:  
this is the syntax of yearning.

Here is the cringe of twigs  
as winter slips its curtain –  
the stumble the splinter then  
the grammar of hurting, how  
the ice removes its lips and  
stammers the meat of its going – now  
the heft of silence still upon  
the weft of sharp air taken in  
to further warp in me such  
lungless burning: this is the lapse,  
the idle and the syntax of yearning.

I am going back without you.



*Song*

Marked by chance, the auguries unwindblown,  
the numbers multiplied, unfairly blossomswept,  
the Lord a raining near-fugitive who looks on  
as lies sevenfold

kindle, knives

butter up, crutches

break into perjury, U-  
under

this

world

the nullth already roots,

lion,

sing you the folksong  
of tooth and soul, both  
rock.

*Strung*

Near the hailstone, in  
the blighted corn-  
cob, at home, in  
fealty to the late, hard  
November stars:

in the heartstitch  
knit from wormspeech:

a string, from which  
your dartscrip whizzes,  
marksman.

ÁGNES CSERHÁTI

*there is no rain*

there is no rain in obsidian spring,  
only fire and ice within the heart,  
never underestimating tide's pull  
into river flow or chasm of mind  
into depressions of rock that stir depths  
of old snow upon tinctures of new sun.  
it is as though you speak to me in a  
language fraught and sought amidst love's painful  
boughs of glory, in yellow daffodils  
and tulips, with blushed lips and most careful  
stems arrowed into truth's preposterous  
aim. love me nonetheless, forsaking light's  
bright confessions and listen to my dark  
weathered prayers only a pagan could speak.

MATTHEW FRANCIS

*Waterbear*

Pachyderm speck, comma of writhing  
punctuating the volume of moss,  
tardigrade, moss piglet, waterbear,

named for the heft of its eight-legged  
trudging through the droplets that gum up  
the broccoli forest it lives in.

The fumblings of its snub-limbed torso  
are almost cuddly under the lens,  
but it holds all its softness inside

with a crinkled skin tough as toenail  
that can fend off the zeroes of space,  
the scalding waters of sulphur springs,

and you can parch it for a decade,  
till it's hard as a stranded loofah:  
a blip of water and it pulses,

as if that was all there was to it,  
back in the swim, setting off somewhere  
in the lifeboat of its own body.

---

STEVEN MAYOFF

*Motifs*

I  
Let us improvise motifs on neck  
and shoulder, in the small of the back

and behind the knee, running blind fingers  
over an accordion's buttons, coaxing

a garlicky wheeze from cracked leather,  
a thin current filling the spaces (minute

pockets of eternity).

II  
The real music exists between  
the notes, a serpentine shimmer disturbs

the air. The clarinet's reed stiffens  
to life between saintly lips and confesses

all secret misgivings through a high black bell.  
Let us practice etudes on cuticles of keys and soft

pedals, tongues strumming inner strings.

## ANTHEA SIMMONS

### *The Kindness of Others*

He stares through the kitchen window,  
His hands steeped in soapy water,  
Mechanically rubbing at a tea-stained mug.  
The little heap of earth, three molehills-worth of loam,  
As yet unmarked.

Yesterday, a child ran, careless and carefree,  
And teetered on the margin of the mound  
Before his mother snatched him back.  
He watched her tell the boy a little of what lay beneath;  
Saw him shrink then pull away, red with shame and fright  
While she bent down to leave her little bunch of Spring.

Today, there's no-one.

These words sit heavy in his mind,  
Leaden landmarks in the unmapped landscape of his grief.  
He rubs and scratches at the cup  
Trying to find what made it new,  
And, seeing the fluttering tribute on the grave,  
Begins to weep.

### *Life Class*

The model paces, swathed, impatient to begin.  
The poses flit through his head, staccato shapes.  
He's seen it all before.  
The women sagged and pendulous or ram-rod thin, pursed.  
He notes the painterly trappings, the smocks, the hint of bohemia  
In the mannish trousers and craft fair jewellery.  
Pinned in by easels, he sheds his robe,  
Forms a great "X", arms stretched out, legs akimbo.  
Mrs. Allen's charcoal hovers, unable, unwilling to reduce the man's taut-  
ened frame  
To a mere black line.  
"Change!"  
He crouches and curls.  
A walnut kernel's folds and wrinkles.  
His back a landscape of wan wasteland, split by a stunted, nubbed fence.  
Mrs. Fantoni, defeated by the waxy whiteness, which revolts and fascinates,  
Recalls Spencer, Freud.  
"Change!"  
Neck stretched, jaw defiant.  
Arms in a balletic loop.  
Miss Cant, side on, sees tension in the clenched teeth.  
Her pencil grinds across the page.  
"Change!"  
Supplicant. Limbs outstretched in flattened cruciform.  
He feels the heat and chill of their collective gaze and listens.  
Pinched, restricted scratchings reassure.  
He lets his breath form a halo  
On the parquet  
And smiles.  
Seen yet unseen  
He changes  
One last time.

## STEVEN MAYOFF cont'd

### III

The bow glides across tightly-wound tendons,  
a loving scrape on an open nerve.

Let us dance beneath a score of crows... ecstasy  
across sky and wire and we two scarecrows, a voicing

of dry grass, hesitation and desire, pushing  
the 360-degree periphery, wind-loosened borders

disturbing our air.

---

## ÁGNES CSERHÁTI

### *beginnings*

i begin with a blank stare at the door  
knob, large and round, the colour of copper,  
before I cup my hand round its surface  
to open the door, and contemplate what  
it might mean to be a fraud, where every  
thing you do or touch has a doubleness  
about it, a dishonesty to the  
core that you hardly notice because it  
is so integrated in your every  
movement and thought, until you realise  
you are not trying to fool yourself and  
certainly not others, by choosing words  
that speak in heartfelt, laconic, ways of  
truths you may yet begin to understand.

### *black sun*

rays of ink delude me, deceive what is  
uncertain in your approbation towards  
me. your intolerance plays out judgement  
that may be seeds of conscientiousness.  
i've respected and loved you my whole life  
but that life was severely placed at risk  
recently and nothing changed. except that  
everything changed. all was blackness, blinding  
abyss, drowning, starvation, a soul's end.  
this time it wasn't you who saved me. it  
was someone else. told me to get the hell  
out. and other things. now i'll have to learn  
to respect and love myself without fear  
or recrimination. the black sun sets.

## A DIVIDED NATURE: THE POEMS OF EMILE VERHAEREN A BOOK REVIEW BY BETHANY W. POPE

*Poems - Emile Verhaeren* is a masterpiece of translation. Context is ever the king, and this volume (selected, translated, and magnificently introduced by Will Stone) provides an expansive, contextualizing introduction to the nineteenth-century border-world that Verhaeren inhabited.

The 'introduction' is really a beautifully-written twenty-page biography describing, in great detail, the life of the poet in a hybrid country that was barely fifty years old when Verhaeren began writing. Belgium was and is a border-country, a crack between worlds, between languages wedged between France, Germany and The Netherlands. Such situations often produce writers who embody more than a bit of The Trickster. Verhaeren wrote in rough, vital French, heavily influenced by Germanic Flemish, a mixture which strengthened his work.

Like Baudelaire, Verhaeren had a gift for describing the numinous. Poets who grow to maturity in the cracks between cultures seem to have the knack for symbolism. Because French was not Verhaeren's first language, it is clear that he had to think very clearly, very carefully about the things that he was saying. Like his translator, he had to remove himself from his own context (as much as he could) and see the world through an alien lens.

This dual-nature comes through very clearly in the poem 'The Silence'. The silence becomes a visual thing, leaving behind its aural nature. The thing that we all think we know is revealed as frightening and strange. The 'it' in these lines is the sound, the silence that follows thunder:

The old shepherds, broken by their hundred years  
and their old dogs, worn out like rags,  
gaze on it sometimes over silent plains  
on dunes of gold bedecked with shadow.  
It sits, in vastness, at the edge of the night.

Patrick McGuinness states, in the preface, that Verhaeren had the quality that Mallarmé called 'the double state of the world', a phrase that illuminates Verhaeren's statement that, 'Everything in our culture is contrast: we treasure the oppositions that coexist inside of us.' In order to be aware of these contradictions, one must first transcend them. One cannot write clearly about one's own culture until one is outside of it.

Will Stone makes it clear in his beautiful biography that for all of Verhaeren's numinous descriptions, for all of his wonderfully alien descriptions of his own world (in an excerpt from 'The Town' he describes the titular character as, 'the impassioned octopus, the osuary / and carcass of solemnity.') Verhaeren can often be a little conventional in outlook. For all of his images of death, he is always an optimist. He says, 'Death is coming; but not yet!' and goes on to write a scene of transforming revelation set inside a graveyard.

The front cover of the collection opens to a picture of Verhaeren taken when the poet was about fifty years old: a small, moustachioed man in a monocle, tweed-vested, long-nose shaded by a slightly crushed hat, angled at a slant. He looks as though he grew the moustache in order to obscure his own smile. He looks as though he

would like to be smiling. This photograph, this first impression, was selected with as much care as the poems and with as much thought to effect.

My favourite poem in the book is situated in the centre. 'The Crown' opens with the lines:

Yes, I too would like my crown of thorns  
and one for each thought, red hot, across  
my brow, right into my brain, to the frail roots  
where sins and forged dreams writhe  
within me, through me. I crave it like a fury,

The images are vivid, the poem is seriously meant, but also tinged with an inescapable smirk of self-awareness. The poet knows that only one who has never been crucified could think the state desirable. Wise people know that the desire for martyrdom is almost always really a secret craving for fame. That knowledge cannot crush the desire for such inarguable vindication.

'The Crown' also provides me with a wonderful opportunity to talk a bit about the high quality of this translation. Stone translates the line, 'Et mes vices de doigts et de lèvres claustrales' as 'my flawed fingers and claustral lips'. In one way, the translator is extremely faithful to the source material. Claustrales and claustral are interchangeable. But a more direct translation of 'mes vices de doigts' would lose the music of the line, so Stone veers (very slightly) and finds his flawed fingers.

Translation is in itself a transcendent act. The translator must set aside his or her own aesthetic desires in the service of revealing those of another. A good translator views the work as revelation, not creation. The self is subsumed in the art. This is why great poets make the best translators. The poem comes first, not the ego of the poet. Those of you familiar with Will Stone's other work will see what I mean here. The poets pursue similar themes, but the tone, the flavour of the poems presented in this book very clearly does not belong to the translator. This is a testament to the quality of the art. Only an artist of Will Stone's caliber could make a reader see so clearly, through the dust of decades and the limits of language, another man's work.





*The Anti-Author and the Death of Personality*

*'Perfection is impersonal. Our personality is the part of us which belongs to error and sin. The whole effort of the mystic has always been to become such that there is no part left in his soul to say "I".'*

—Simone Weil

The greatest poetry must always exceed its author, and take the place of him—free usage of personality and identity allowing one to create out of a 'new' substance of reality, an anonymous mind reliant only on finding a body lost to the foreign lands of non-meaning, anti-will and abandonment. Arthur Rimbaud, in overhearing *himself* speaking between his own words, heard nothing but the voice of absence, an absence inside of which all history had been granulated. Yet Rimbaud himself dissolved into a language so unique it defied language's right to claim it as its own. So can we dare still call him the 'author' of it, when everything he wrote left him *unsaid*, a mere etymological anomaly forced to proceed without the influence of any one poetical personality? He left the 'author' inside of him with nothing else to say, while his very 'I' lodged like a crowbar into the old critical machinery that still to this day attempts to catalogue the 'self' and chart the progress of all literary imperfections. For the poet interested in nothing but a metaphysical 'career', an inner violence is sacrosanct, to live, as Rimbaud did each day, from hand to mouth, on the breadcrumbs of atoms and on the spirit *incarnate*—personality then as something only to define the last stages of human presence. Seeking a truth always to the one incompatible to his nature, Rimbaud renounced all of his identities in the same way that a thief denounces *our* possessions before stealing them. In the grimaces of this agonized poet, all of the faces of the universe were played out long before the clay on the death-mask of the first visage of his imagination dried; Rimbaud was opposed to the presence of any 'body' that his imagination had not already imagined. This is the birth of authorhood, what causes a writer, for the duration of a word, to become a *false believer* in being. When Rimbaud feigned his own body in thought, he didn't know that he was feigning it, feigning as he was *himself*; and when he did not feign his own body in thought, he didn't *believe* that he wasn't, thus the primordial phenomenon of the rupture of every act that mistakes plurality for a singular act of truth. The outer-perfection of what, in Rimbaud's mind, was akin to a thought deciding for *itself* that it was anterior to the brain is what gave birth to the other existences lived out inside of his imagination. Dressed in the rags of his own flesh, he would wander like a nomad between the non-existent spaces of the absolute and the final burnt-down stumps of every last 'I' that failed to survive the fires of his mind.

When writing *A Season in Hell* Rimbaud was more like an epoch writing against its own subjugation by time. To detach himself from time was to celebrate the terror of *non-history* and to condemn 'authorhood' to a chronological ordering of sentences. The inspired torpor of the majority of poetical works are not, as it would seem, due to the illogical successes of the mind, but to a failure to transcend decomposition. Rimbaud on the other hand transcended even juxtaposition and in the process proved himself to be the most lethally expressive poet of them all, that is for those readers not so

superficially *distressed* by his words, that they fail to match his concentration. In the section 'The Infernal Bridegroom' from *A Season in Hell*, when Rimbaud, wearing the mask of Verlaine, asks himself: 'Sadly vexed, I said to him sometimes: "I understand you."' He would shrug his shoulders—a 'shrug' lost to oblivion, an involuntary shudder that balked at the *uselessness* of being understood; for of course to any true poet this is revolting in the most extreme sense, akin to watching on in horror and *impersonal* disbelief as the 'I', by a critic, is tape-measured. Since everything of any worth, without exception, came from a mind other than Rimbaud's own, his mind remained oblivious of all other minds. The 'author' in Rimbaud was present only in the same way that the memory of a seed remains inside the tree long after it has outgrown it; for 'authorhood' in the work of this poet was a nothingness, an amputated stump that tingled with the ghost-limbs of each body lost already to the 'anonymity' of literature. Rimbaud craved anonymity and the 'presence' of non-being so obsessively that he would wheel back the torso of himself from the precipice of every word so as to withdraw his body from language, and thus hide the 'I' trapped between the parenthesis of *now* and *now*. He absented from *naming* himself the author of anything not perfected outside of his mind, for his most prominent poetical position in the world was always to be found at the extreme limits of alienation, or whenever his own existence seemed but a hollow and verbal figuration crushed into the dust of the icons of his mind; every day, Rimbaud, from self to self, traversed his gait and baffled flies, driving himself on into both a spectral and triumphant misery. He reduced the universe to the *unique reality* of his footsteps, the unformulated and disincarnate therapeutics of instinct, that which required neither an author nor personality, only the extreme levels of self-absorption and *askesis* needed to transcend man. The personality of the author is nothing but the power the flesh holds over the skeleton, it has no imaginary worth, its logic is to express only the mental sanctuary of the writer, the self forever explaining itself to itself; Rimbaud, having evaded the 'author' in himself arrived at the bone-terminus of silence *before* silence itself arrived. In passing *through* human personality to reach its beginnings, he conceived of 'authorhood' as an act of incongruity, a mere grammatical journey into those innumerable and fleshless domains of the imagination in which the mediocre poet ploughs merely to uproot words. Authorhood, though variable, is just one of many 'literary' states of mind, but is not in any way a conclusive one; for while the great poems of the personality have all probably been written, the greatest poems of *no* personality, if anyone can be bothered, are still to be done. So where exactly does that leave the word? Hölderlin wrote that it was the most 'dangerous' of all man's 'gifts', because it 'could bear witness to the heritage that he is'<sup>1</sup>, which is to say that the 'word'

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin: *Essays and Letters*, translated by Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (Penguin, 2009).

beyond science is the justification of man's flesh. But first we must accept authorhood for what it truly is: a cloak thrown onto a hook where once hung flesh; that is the *true* flesh which haunts the spectre of every torso lost to the imagination of God. Rimbaud, growing tired of always seeking justification in the *same* body, would have agreed with Beckett when he wrote: 'What is the good of passing from one untenable position to another, of seeking justification always on the same plane?'<sup>2</sup> Humanity's truest author is the one of course who denies every ontological plaine for *any other* one, he who manages to step free of the rubble of his own bones, and then glorifies in their ruin:

'hold on to the step one has taken. Harsh night! The dried blood smokes on my face, and I have nothing behind me but that horrible shrub!' ('Farewell' from *A Season in Hell*)

Everything was behind Rimbaud, even the 'future', which was only a future 'now', a frozen lake above which flights taken hadn't yet *flown*, movements not *moved*, and where humans, even when speaking, had never yet *spoken*. In the mind of Rimbaud all oppositional levels of thought had to be broken down, whether noble and base, old and new, or evil and good; everything unanswerable was to be usurped by the paralysis of parataxis, the now disconnective tissues of truths freed of the flesh and bone cement of 'being'. Rimbaud fell more in line with the thoughts of Hans-Georg Gadamer who talked of a 'fusion of horizons'<sup>3</sup> beyond which we engage in a 'conversation' with the thing being interpreted. It is throughout the course of this conversation that man's prejudices get played out and where the truth finally emerges. Yet one thing for Rimbaud though remained consistent: negation is the after-birth of all truths, because it devalues hermeneutics in the process of becoming an argument, an argument of an 'argument' that reveals that all *unnecessary* 'interpretations' can only ever interrupt being. Rimbaud condemned the role of the author to a state of the purest conjecture, to the question-less centre of what, in the human, might be considered his most *negative core*, that is to say the 'place' where everything about us that becomes lost, mistaken or impersonal remains anonymous to who we consider we really are. An eschatological prophet, Rimbaud in every sentence kicked the final broken jaw of discourse back into the abyss. He was a fundamentalist of the only non-negotiable and absolute truth known to humankind, i.e. *nothingness*. One possible response to any future collapse of authorhood would be the rise of impersonal ideologies, hooded metaphysical factions and illogical-coteries, *ad hoc* 'specialists' of the mind who would become unable to either verify or deform their own autobiographical aspirations. Rimbaud, as shown in *A Season in Hell*, would have welcomed such a 'collapse', knowing full well that without the magnet of a poetic personality to hold an idea together, all 'speech' would revert back to 'tradition', or worse into a state of unexamined dogma. Not until the 'modernization' of the skeleton itself will man come to authenticate himself as a true 'author', not until when the 'Holy' word has passed off into patois, will antiquity refer to itself again as 'modern', and thus relevant for ALL times. Rimbaud, in living his life as if in an epoch *without age*, wrote as if existing inside a temporal and incongruous time-zone, one in which language, like a wound without the

<sup>2</sup> Proust and *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, Samuel Beckett (Calder Publications, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> German philosopher (1900-2002).

aid of linear time to heal itself, bled forever.

Christ was the anti-author par excellence, the most 'absolutely modern' of all men, he who depersonalizes man by speaking words that *no longer* require a body, face, mouth, lungs or tongue to utter them. Rimbaud also was fully aware of this gulf between the voice of the consciousness and the voice that always requires a body. Christ was the closest we have ever come to having just a *speaking soul*, that is someone tuned to the highest pitch of consciousness. To seek out the highest neural pitch of thought and *speak* was, in the poems of Rimbaud, a ceaseless ritual of acquiring illogical words to maintain an always paradoxical meaning. He was a superhuman writer for having (eventually) escaped his own personality, authorhood and being he managed to *naturalise* his own vacuity; enacting within himself a complete act of linguistic disembowelment, a 'state' reached which E.M. Cioran described as becoming so 'far from tacit convention between author and reader' that the 'former says he is sick and takes the latter as his nurse'<sup>4</sup>; alas there is little comfort to take from such a terrible acts of monomania: the majority of modern poetry is uneventful largely because it is an act for its own harmonious ends, lacking this most necessary 'disembowelment'; the *future* of the imagination is absent, likewise the *nature* of the anti-author, that which in Christ and Rimbaud sang the glories of the loss of egoism. When Lautréamont wrote 'My shame is vast as eternity'<sup>5</sup> he was admitting to the 'shame' of perhaps living on the *wrong* planet and in the *wrong* body, isolated as he was by such statements and by the realization that man represents, in truth, nothing but the automata of a speck of dust, a fabricated enigma in the 'form' of the strangeness of the soul on earth. The fictitious nature of the author results in only thinking fictitiously, likewise the personality of a poet has first to imagine it is imagining something before it actually *is*, which is the opposite to a visionary like Rimbaud who thought always in an anti-fictitious way, declining as he did the interconnectedness of words, for he thought in the medium of a 'speech' that required no tongue: the speech of no motive, the too-personal core at the heart of the distress of the herd. Authorhood, though versatile, is just another extraneous state of human obscurity, requiring *only* our personality to survive. When Simone Weil wrote 'it is precisely those artists and writers who are most inclined to think of their art as the manifestation of their personality who are in fact the most in bondage to public taste'<sup>6</sup> she spoke a salient truth, but one that demonstrates the falsehood that exists at the centre of a consciousness that seeks only to formulate 'literary' questions. Rimbaud, like all great and original minds lived *outside* of his own personality

<sup>4</sup> *The Temptation to Exist*, E.M. Cioran, translated by Richard Howard (The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> *Lautréamont Nomad*, Mark Polizzotti (Alyscamps Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> From 'Human Personality', by Simone Weil in *An Anthology* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2005).



and history: 'we know how to give our whole life, every day'<sup>7</sup>— which is to say he *knew* what separated the lost from the anonymous and what, in science, art, literature, and philosophy were simply manifestations of a personality that had failed. Unless being an author is a risk, a certifiable act that re-certifies the stupidity of it, it shouldn't interest anyone but the vain. It was Rimbaud's only hope that one day enough like-minded beings might gather together upon a reef opposite to humanity, the reef on which his own blood lapped. But if the poet no longer requires an awareness of ontology in order to write just where then can he hide his presence? Rimbaud, feigning a theoretical faith, and using his pen like a pneumatic drill, re-sculpted the heights and depths of a 'new' heaven and a 'new' hell from the inauthentic rock of theology, creating fissures 'modern' enough to hide away his many different states of being. Rimbaud's proclivity for new ontological surfaces (especially deserts) was also of course a part of man's larger (unconscious?) universal impulse to at least *try out* the surfaces of an alien planet. After out-pacing the inches, yards and miles of his own mind, Rimbaud moved beyond the entrapment of 'identity' by attempting to abnegate the need within him for *horizons*.

Unable to be classified by either himself or critics, Rimbaud lived outside of the laws of image, was a non-recognizable being amid beings, and thus all of his life chased icons, whether glacial, religious or Neolithic; for without any sense of an 'author' inside of him, impersonality soon became an intellectual song, a merciless irony, reducing his personality to an involuntary and apoplectic tic. The steep slopes of 'being', since time immemorial, have consisted of icy, frozen chutes, along which the human self has been forever sliding, but without once ever noticing the sign that reads: 'Beware of the slope'. Rimbaud remained an anti-author by re-wording the sign to read 'beware the "I"', and by preserving what is anonymous inside of the human who no longer requires a name or personality to be identified as one in danger of dying a linear death. The presence of the author inside of the mediocre poet is a supreme and inevitable triumph, while in Rimbaud it was a metaphysical *error*; we should not look for the author in anything, only perhaps in the smallest incidents of a metaphysical biography, for even amid a misplaced and inscrutable will, authorhood can only ever be a means, not an end, which amounts to a death. Rimbaud threw off the leg-shackles of every comma and semi-colon to cry *outside* of his personality and the fiction of language. By striking at the girth of language's trunk he felled forest after forest of unwanted syntax; speaking always *away* from the earth, he loosened humankind from the gravity of a planet that could no longer hold him. And thus his scatological crimes against literature on the pretext of changing it seem still today the most perfectly executed error in the history of literature. The denunciation of literature by literature being of course the greatest of all antithetical acts; for even when he did write Rimbaud managed to supersede himself by enslaving his own genius to action, not personality. Lautréamont saw early the death of the poetical personality: 'Personal poetry has had its day, with its relative sleights of hand and its contingent contortions. Let us gather up again the thread of impersonal poetry.'<sup>8</sup> Rimbaud, to keep ahead of the unimaginable became, in a corporeal sense, null and void.

Writing *ahead of* being he pushed into view the final shipwreck of authorhood, knowing full well that the mind and the mind alone is the only frisson in literature that will never actually age, for it will remain always happily *elsewhere*. The progression of the self is, in the work of Rimbaud, the equivalent to someone providing a graph charting the breath of life as it passes into and out of an imaginative body. Assuming the concept of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, Rimbaud metaphysically *refused* any form of 'personality' which claimed to be identifiable *inside* history; he knew that self-mastery of the flesh had eluded everyone from Plato to St Augustine to Kant to Heidegger, and would continue to do so. If the mind of the author is only a mechanism to write, it will be condemned forever to remain so, and thus will create under the guise and infinite falsehood of 'personality'. The relation between the impersonal writer and the author is what is too quickly forgotten in the mind of any reader who believes still in the *precision of words* to express himself. Unlike the author, the impersonal and 'visionary' writer does not merely express himself in words, no, rather he faints *into* his mind, and on waking finds that he is in possession suddenly of *all* opinions, *all* theories and *all* reasons to write, but no longer cares if he does or does not do so. Rimbaud, neither a personality nor an author, discovered the key to the secret terror of his own inhuman will and thus opened a door onto a language not used to the confined spaces of truth. The truest author, having passed beyond the personalities that *breathe* and the impassability of his own flesh, walks us, the reader, back through the new mental labyrinths that he himself placed inside of *our* minds, so as to reach a place on the other side of being where error and unpoetic organization abound, a contrary-world of all of the opposed antitheses of humanity, a place where all unity remains harmoniously unstable, and thus pure. A state reached which Hölderlin described as the 'truest truth'<sup>9</sup>. Any diagnosis though of truth is never a relief from the considerable anguish of living *within* a truth, for it is, in any case, always an inherited truth, one that Rimbaud would become an expatriate of, that which inevitably forced him into becoming an émigré of his own personality. So, apart from his name, was the only real 'literary scandal' of his life the fact that he failed to abandon all the other Rimbards inside of his mind? 'True life is absent. We are not in the world'<sup>10</sup>. He could never serve as a model, even to himself. He aped his body only in the way that it plummeted into the depths of *our* minds; therefore can a poet really prepare for his end, seduced by the charm of successive imaginative collapses? Can he clamber up onto the scaffold of a nation's mouth and resign an entire epoch to his final words? No, for even the recidivist needs the sum of man's syntactical deformities to preserve his own tyranny over language, and Rimbaud would, via an

<sup>7</sup> From 'Morning of Drunkenness' in *Illuminations*.

<sup>8</sup> *Maldoror and Poems*, Lautréamont, translated by Paul Knight (Penguin, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> From 'Seven Maxims' in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, translated by Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (Penguin, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> From 'The Infernal Bridegroom', in *A Season in Hell*.



impersonal finitude, continue to limit the impossibilities of a faceless and discredited age.

To invent a radical and irreversible genealogy for himself, Rimbaud re-invented modernity, helping other 'authors' to die. Or by literary definition, to see that they no longer functioned as practitioners of the art in the *old* way; and while freeing the impersonal of their presence, he understood most clearly what the 'spirit of the day' means for the poetic personality, i.e. its death, the demise of the vegetative egoism of the author. The visionary is unable to acknowledge the unreality of such a position—while the anti-author inside of him creates an impasse, a repudiation of *temporary* reason, subjected as the authorless author is now to the mere ideological illusion of words. René Char said of Rimbaud that he was undoubtedly 'the first poet of a civilization that has not yet appeared'<sup>11</sup> and he was right, hence Rimbaud's need to *pass through* the discourse of his age and to sing back existence to man's first bloodied tongue-root; that and to expiate the influence of authorhood by forfeiting time and by freeing language again from its origins. In his poetry, Rimbaud arrived *first*, then the words, his multiple 'selves' willing the whole of his presence to conform to his 'invention'. For to merely share one's own body with the imagination is to remain *always* an author, one doomed to become, in the imagination, a non-person; for just as the man without a religious idea would remain, in God's mind, a humanless presence, in the mind of the visionary he would, categorically, be called a *free* man. Only the greatest poetry can deny the name of the person writing it. The author and the celebrant of personality fall under the same guise as the zealot, fanatic, evangelist etc., trapped as they all are by a 'title' and because of the fact that they are believers in *somebody else's* idea. Only Christ, living for the idea of his father managed on earth to survive the authorhood of somebody *outside* of an individual mind; Rimbaud became probably the first poet to allow language to live out its life *apart* from itself, to rise up free of the knowledge of what it was once meant to represent. Un-reliant on flesh, or blood or 'presence', he moved always steadily towards the final sundial of the most secret anti-ontological word in his mind: God. Amid a dead language and the rise and the fall of the glacier of his soul, Rimbaud froze and became finally magnified in his own eye. It was the 'self' coming home and which gave him, for the first time, free usage of his entire being. By ignoring inside of his imagination any 'literary' need to become an author, he placed himself *anywhere else*; for the visionary must remain at all times anonymous, even to himself. The mediocre writer imagining that he is a writer while *using* his imagination to write has already suffered the greatest loss there is: the death of instinct. Yet such loss is for the great poet the perfect act of destruction, the final and purest uprooting of the historical roots that once tied him to the 'name' of author, to thus relegate the 'role' of the author to no more than the extent of a critic's *desire*. Even if Rimbaud were miraculously to have been *given* another mind he would have still overcrowded it with his own interior 'I'-swarms. The populations of his imagination were among the most diverse and non-typical in the history of thought. Rimbaud should be pictured in a grotto carved of his own images. Just as Nietzsche *needed* the contours of the Alps to help him re-imagine and re-mirror his own interior descents, Rimbaud

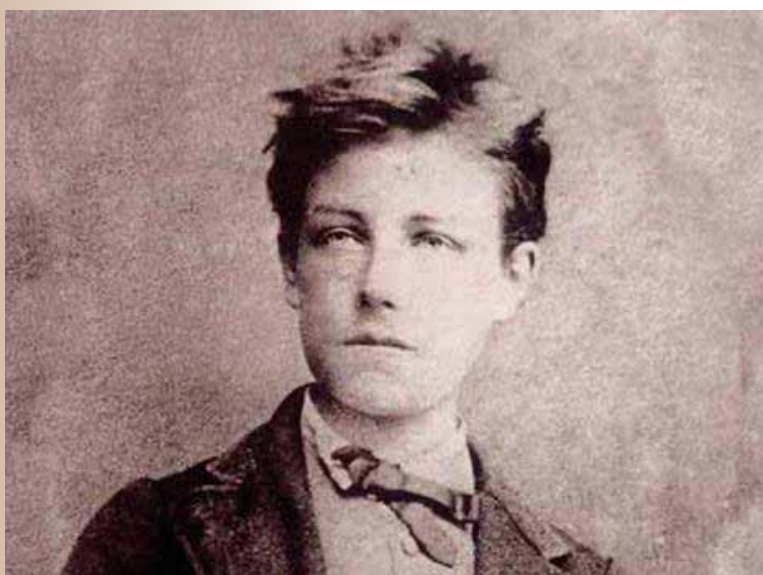
<sup>11</sup> From 'Grands Astreignants' in *Oeuvres complètes* (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1983).

likewise requires an imagination that disposes of all extraneous objects. He *thought* at the peak of the imaginative heights and *heaved* a new neural opera in every sigh on every day that he was made to suffer on earth. His final authorless state of being was as real to him as the idea of God is to God. And thus an invalid of time, Rimbaud still appeals today the critic's sense of the *responsibilities* of an 'author'; yet not until history has unattached the hooks of his name from *its* flesh, will his absence, in all minds, come to replace his personality. Nothing viable or generic can erupt from the superficial 'beings' critics call authors, only the sole modality of acquiring for oneself, a *new* friend. The fragrance of this poet remains an accursed abstract stench in the nostrils of any critic reading him who has not yet discarded the smell of 'poetry's flower from their minds. But because he was never governed by the word-laws inherent at the core of language, he smothered quickly the screams of any *false* personality with the pillow of his mind. At the intersection between being and 'author' he arrived with, underarm, a *lost* book of poetry. He left around the necks of the skeletons of *wasteful* poets trinkets of what would one day become his presence. Too lucid and overwhelmed by injustice *and* justice, he left each injured self to either oppose or contradict all of his resignations. Personality has a profound insincerity, that much is obvious, for only by adhering to the thought and action of a non-personality could he then ponder the phantom of what was once, inside of him, an author. Any metaphysical anxiety that does *not* include the fictions of the 'I' is, in effect, already a conclusion to the mythology of the *nom de plume*; Rimbaud's imagination was always *unfit* to reflect on itself under the guise of 'author'. His solitude, in the end, was but a hut in the clearing of a forest, and his 'personalities' stinking animal hides, hooked up onto a cabin wall. To exist like an animal, caterpillar, fly, plant was, in Rimbaud's mind, as primordially important as portraying the distress and anxieties of his age. 'I ended up by regarding the disorder of my mind as sacred. I was idle, the prey of a heavy fever. I envied the bliss of beasts,—caterpillars, who represent the innocence of limbo, and moles, the sleep of virginity!'<sup>12</sup> The stupidity of the author is of course the belief that *through* literature the absolute essence of a personality can be safeguarded, corresponded to; it cannot. The anonymous writer, lost even to the memory of himself, is the purest of all non-personalities and belongs already, if only organically, to *another* civilisation. It is what occurs when thought begins to *think* itself, when a new and purified concept of being comes into view, while the personality, now forgotten, returns to its original state of being a supreme affliction in the soul, as the 'author', for the duration of a word, in each and every mirror of the world, is vanquished. The end of authorhood therefore is the *beginning* of complete and absolute vision, the time when all 'literary' satisfactions appear as nothing more than a necessary defeat; a

<sup>12</sup> From 'Alchemy of the Word' in *A Season in Hell*.

'defeat' which was, for a disabused individual like Rimbaud, perhaps, the only true glory of his life.

So, by throttling the neck of his own personality, without either trauma or anything remotely detrimental to his mind, Rimbaud *provoked* inside of himself an unorganic evolution of the visionary's mania for decline. And so now at last I see him, there, where amid the least civilized tribes of the suburbs of absentia, he, he stands, with only a goat-skin hung around his shoulders for a 'personality', but who otherwise remains, as he should, abandoned, naked, defiant, alone, the antithesis of all of *our* personalities, and whose sole function now on earth is to cradle close to his chest an hourglass of the ashes of each of our passing worlds, while holding up a placard, for centuries to come, that reads simply 'etcetera'.



Arthur Rimbaud

STEVEN MAYOFF

*Excerpts from Postcard Series*



Chanting Postcard

language sweats  
its chanting through  
wind to whisper  
into worship



Flooding Postcard

raw love from  
tongue, breasts,  
or a finger  
flooding a thousand  
mad summers



Raw Postcard

smooth robes  
hover above raw  
skin music



Shadow Postcard

A diamond  
knife urged  
into a true  
shadow winds  
through the sweetly  
heated cry

Misty Postcard

drunk power drives  
the sad ship  
above its sea  
storm and swims  
after misty  
diamond death



Garden Postcard

man can fall  
fast & spring  
up next day on  
some bare  
iron garden



Bitter Postcard

lick a bitter  
peach under  
many showering  
blood moons



Delicate Postcard

beneath a crushing  
symphony  
of winter chains  
the road dreams  
a delicate likeness  
of rain petals



Delirious Postcard

mad honey recalls  
a delirious  
meaning two  
times its size



Atman Postcard

behind roselust, rocksmell,  
hairchant & headstorm  
the essential atman must shine



This interview was conducted on 24 January 2014 in Toronto, Canada, regarding Jordan B. Peterson's original artwork entitled 'The Meaning of Music'.



ÁC: 'The Meaning of Music' is a highly original work of art; was there an influence you can credit or was it entirely inspirational from within yourself? How did it come about?

JBP: The fundamental inspiration was Jung's study of mandalas – because he considered the mandala as a symbol of wholeness, and I didn't know what that meant; what the symbol meant. In my experience, he almost always knew what he was talking about – or maybe *always* knew what he was talking about, or he didn't talk about it. So I knew there was something there. Recently I've had mandala-like visions that have confirmed some of the early thoughts I had about them. I always thought of the mandala as a tunnel into time, for example. I've seen religious images of Buddha, for example, where he's represented as a hundred Buddhas, emerging out of a point in the distant sky, as if he's a recurring pattern in time. You see this in medieval art, too, where the sky opens up and there's a religious figure behind the opening sky. To me that's an attempt to indicate, technically, a dimension other than the four that we inhabit.

The mandala echoes that. It's like it's a portal into *elsewhere*, and it's the elsewhere from which things emerge. It's the cornucopia that you see at Thanksgiving which has its point of origin in nothing, and spirals out of that, and spills everything out. That's also a womb symbol, so you often see such things in combination. The mandala is a representation of the source of all things, but it's even more than that. I think that it's also a representation, if it's properly structured, of the depths that are within, and what comes out of those depths that we experience – which is all of our subjectivity.

It comes out of our bodies and it comes out of the microstructure of reality – the physical microstructure of reality. It manifests itself all the way up from the ground of being *underneath* the subatomic all the way up – because, of course, we exist on all those levels, and that's where thoughts and intuitions come out of; they spring out of that depth, and music represents that. It has this dynamic mandala-like quality, so it's springing out of the void constantly. That's what you experience when you listen to it. The notes continually emerge out of nothing and they do that in a beautifully patterned way. It's *variations on a theme*, which is what the world is. It's variations on a theme: that's how you can grip the world, because the same thing keeps happening, although in different ways. If it wasn't *the same* you couldn't deal with the world at all; if it wasn't *different*, it would be static. So it's variations on a theme.

I was also playing with the idea of dimensionality itself with this particular representation because what it actually is, is a cube set on end so that you're seeing the point of the cube and then the fragmented quadrants that come out of that, the circle quadrants, are actually a tunnel broken into four, and the grey and black points in the middle are far away from you instead of close, but I reversed it so that on the sculpture itself they're close to you. And I was also playing with the idea of fragmentation because that thing is fragmented – it's not perfectly circular – it's developed more on one side than another. I think that's partly because as things develop they don't necessarily... it's like you mature in some areas and not in others. And then it's also an explosion, and it's flames and it's a spiral all at the same time. And I wanted to produce something that would – you have to get a fair way away from it to see it properly, but – if you get far enough away from it, it sort of dances visually because it's so complex your brain can't really figure out, your visual system, can't actually figure out how to see it.

I actually had a profound religious experience at one point when I finished this; it just knocked me off my feet. The artwork took about three months to build – it's funny, because the thing I drew to base it on, I drew in about ten minutes, and I really didn't change it at all; I changed the colours because I had to experiment with the colours, and with what should be black and what white, but I got it down very quickly. Anyway, I was looking intently at the finished artwork and I was listening to Mozart's Jupiter Symphony at the same time (and I was really, really listening to it, and I was really, really watching the painting) and I had an experience like the experience Dostoyevsky had just before he had an epileptic seizure. The experience he reported was as if the structure of the universe started to reveal itself to him, and the sense of revelation became more and more intense – like an experience of awe, that becomes increasingly magnified. When it was too much, Dostoyevsky would have a seizure. He said, however, that



he would have given up his whole life for one of those experiences, because he felt he was on the dawn or edge of grasping the significance of *everything* (which was something too big for his brain – even though it was Dostoyevsky's brain – and that sense would blow him into bits).

It's easy to think of that as pathology, except that it's Dostoyevsky we are discussing. You diagnose him at your peril, because he's way smarter than you, no matter who you are, and way more insightful. So you can't just brush off his experience as pathology, particularly because he would have never been who he was without those seizures.

So, I was looking at the picture, and listening to the music, and I had an experience that was very Renaissance-art-like in its structure. It was as if (there's no other way of describing it, you have to use metaphor) – it was as if the heavens opened up in a Renaissance-painting-like manner and I had an internal vision (I wasn't confusing it with what we commonly regard as outside). I could feel what can't be described in any other way – the Spirit of God descending from on high, and I felt a tremendous enhancement of consciousness, an unbelievable enhancement of consciousness. And I thought, 'I could be like this for the rest of my life'. And then I thought, 'No way. I can't handle that. I don't know what I would do. I wouldn't even be able to go outside if I was like this. It's as if I would have been changed into something so different that I couldn't even imagine how I'd live.' The subjective feeling that was associated with that realisation was not one of *my* disappointment, but patient disappointment in *what had descended*. Then it pulled back and receded from me. I shook for ten minutes after that. I went and talked to my wife, and the pupils of my eyes were completely dilated. It was a very, very powerful experience. Something similar happened at a couple of other times at that point in time. Well, I wanted to know what the meaning of music was, and I got to figure it out! I got to see what was at the bottom of the tunnel that I'd built – because that's what's at the bottom of that tunnel.

I've come to realise since then that it's the same thing that stained-glass windows represent (I mean, Jung knew that, of course, because they were mandalas) – but I also think that the stained-glass window, especially the round, mandala-like ones, are cross-sections of the tree-like columns in those great Renaissance and medieval cathedrals. The tree-like columns are three-dimensional mandalas, like the Lotus that the Golden Buddha sits in, in the Eastern representations. The Lotus has its roots *way down* into the muck. Then it rises up out of the darkness like life itself; rises up out of the darkness towards the sun, and it blooms on the surface, and then the golden Buddha materializes out of that bloom, spreads out on the surface of the water, in the sun. It's a metaphor for the emergence of consciousness, out of the material substrate, underneath. That's a three-dimensional mandala: if you can imagine taking a cross-section of that Lotus plant, that would be a two-dimensional mandala. That Lotus, and the cathedral columns, are also the Tree of Life – that's another way of thinking about it. That's the tree that shamans climb, in the midst of their hallucinogenic experiences and that's the trees that gothic cathedrals are made out of, and that's all a representation of the illuminated balance of structure and non-structure that makes up the

form of healthy life. It's structure, plus space – and the space is illuminated and organised in a very patterned manner. It's also the chakra system the New-Agers always talk about, which is a representation of the internal tree.

The idea being expressed there is that all of the obstacles blocking that tunnel have to be eradicated, one by one, whether they're physiological or psychological or emotional (those are often referred to as blockages). They are something like structural defects, some biological, some moral. If you can get rid of them, through proper intent and action, then the right thoughts will come bubbling up untrammelled from the deep ground of being through you. I think music helps people do that. Music puts people in a state of mind that's as close as they ever get to that untrammelled connection, which is why they love it so much. It gives them a direct experience – an intimation of divine experience, fundamentally. That's what music gives its listeners. Our culture doesn't recognize such experience as a category of reality, not formally, but everyone acts it out, so everyone truly believes it. Even nihilists – even punk-rock nihilists – believe it. They'll get all nihilistic about everything out of disappointment and spite, but they're still into their music. It's very weird: if you're a real nihilist you should get nihilistic about your music too but you're not going to give *that* up, because it's genuine and incontrovertible meaning.

Anyway, so that's all tangled up in my piece of art. A lot of the things I told you about I figured out after I made it. I think it's a genuinely artistic production, whether or not it's of any artistic value... I mean, it's carefully done, it's colourful, *I like it*, you know, it's been useful to me – it's comparative artistic value isn't relevant to me, really. As far as I'm concerned it was a way of exploring and then representing something I didn't understand and, often, if you explore something that you don't understand, you can't use verbal means of exploration. It was genuine non-verbal exploration, and it did further my exploration, so it's served its purpose. In addition, I get to have it around, as an entity, and I used it on the cover of my book, *Maps of Meaning*, and I made genuine postage stamps out of it, which is pretty funny, because Canada Post allowed you to do that for a while. I've also been interested in seeing how it would make itself manifest in different formats once it was made, so there's electronic versions of it and it's on a bunch of books and I have it on my websites...

ÁC: You're answering all my questions at once! Really, you've touched upon everything here. But first, onto my next question: was there a particular piece of music you were listening to while you were working on 'The Meaning of Music', or a variety – or anything at all?

JBP: A lot of what really motivated this was probably

Brandenburg's 3rd concerto, particularly the third, fastest movement. Now, way back forty years ago David Suzuki had used that for the theme of CBC's *Nature of Things*. For a long time that program used it, and then there was another version – maybe this was the version that Suzuki used – made by this strange electronic organist named Walter Carlos, and Walter was strange because he became Wendy Carlos, and so it was either by Walter or Wendy Carlos depending on when you bought the recording, and then he was also one of the first – or she was – one of the first people who used electronic synthesizers and what he did with the synthesizers was... Well, the Brandenburg concerto is very complexly patterned (like most of Bach's work), and it's a very interesting piece because it goes spiralling upwards constantly. It's almost impossible to figure out how he did it because, of course, it's impossible for a piece to continually spiral upwards in pitch, because it would soon get so high you couldn't hear it – but it goes up and up and up and up in this spiral while staying in exactly the same place. Well, of course Bach was an unbelievable genius: there's multiple levels of instruments playing it, and they're playing the same patterns at different temporal frequencies, and one of the things that Carlos did was map each of those patterns onto a different tone, so not only do you hear the complex patterns that Bach put together, as you would in a normal string quartet (I think it's a quartet; I'm not absolutely certain) with Carlos' version, you also hear him highlight the structure by making each of the phrases sound slightly different, and it's also got this metallic aspect – it's very crystalline – and I thought it suited the piece really well. I think it was also used in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. (I can't remember specifically if it was the Brandenburg concerto that ever showed up in *A Clockwork Orange* because most of that was Beethoven, but that was definitely Walter/Wendy Carlos). So, that was one piece that influenced me, because the Brandenburg concerto really made me think, because it's so mathematically perfect, and so crystalline, and Bach's music was religious even though... well, I think it's religious because it's great music, it's phenomenally great music, and so that piece struck me, partly because of its complexity and its beauty, but also because of its mathematical perfection [here's a very good similar recent version: <http://bit.ly/1jPBvOS>; so you could listen to that and concentrate on the painting and see what happens]. But I've always listened to lots of music of various sorts.

ÁC: But while you were constructing this, what were you listening to? Everything under the sun or anything in particular?

JBP: I'm typical, in that way, to some degree... You become imprinted with music when you're around sixteen to twenty years old. I think that's actually part of the way people enculturate, and then define themselves, culturally. Culture partly is people organised around a shared corpus of music. I think you have a neurologically-specified time for that – basically late adolescence, when you make your entrance into culture, because humans are musical animals. It's not some little peripheral thing that we do for amusement; music is built right into the cadences of our language. So I like the sort of rock that is now referred to as 'classic', and so I listen to that most of the time. However, I've added all sorts of other types of music to my playlists. Jazz, blues, swing, western swing, and classical music

(although not a tremendous amount of the latter, even though I like it), and then various different forms of rock, and then there's this new form called 'gypsy punk' which I really like, and I like punk rock. I also listen to old country music from the 20s through the 50s, and I listen to a fair bit of music from the 20s and the 30s, but what I really like, what syncs me in to the music is still classic rock.

ÁC: So is that what you were listening to when you were making it?

JBP: It's likely that that was what I was listening to, although at that time I was also listening to a fair bit of classical music. There was an American composer who had written a piece for – it was a famous war movie – I think it was an Oliver Stone movie, *Platoon*, maybe... There was a piece written for *Platoon* that I really liked and it was American, relatively modern; Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. So I was listening to Barber, and Philip Glass. I was also listening to Saint-Saëns, particularly his organ symphony. Saint Saëns is underrated. He was a child prodigy like Mozart, and every time I heard a classical piece on CBC that I really liked it turned out to be composed by him. So I was listening to that a lot. Also, a little bit of another American composer, Gershwin: I liked *Rhapsody in Blue*. I listened to it loud.

I like listening to music in my car so loud that it's right on the edge of pain. I really like that, if it's a high-quality music recording, which actually isn't that hard on your ears. If you have good speakers, and they don't produce square waves, because they're not distorting, you can handle volumes that are pretty high. Especially if you know the music, because then your body knows how to adapt to it. Square waves blow out your ear drums because they make them move really suddenly – but you also hear that as distortion. I find that if I'm driving, if I have the music on really loud, and I super-concentrate on the road, then I can get into a different state of consciousness that's really clear and easy to maintain. And so then I can concentrate on the road with no distraction whatsoever, with no internal talk, and I can just stay that way for hours and it's a great state of mind: it's meditative. I love having that happen, I love doing that, but you can't really do it unless you're alone in the car. My son and I can do it together sometimes because we have similar taste in music and he also knows how to get into that high-volume trance-like state, but most people don't like the intensity.

ÁC: 'The Meaning of Music' is a very large work of art (about 5' x 5' and 6" thick at the middle). How did you construct it and using what materials?

JBP: First I drew the image. And then I bought the foamcore. This... isn't the first foamcore piece I made. I think it's the third – there are two others in the office –



they're Mondrian variations – and I had the idea to make this sort of art when I lived in Edmonton (in 1983, which is when I made the first one. I actually know what I was doing the, now, forty years later). I'd gone to Morocco and I'd taken a picture of this architecturally beautiful bridge in a city called Fez. It was so interesting. In some ways the bridge was very beautifully curved, over what could have been a beautiful river. There was a great Moroccan skyline in the back, where you could see minaret domes, but it was just worn down, and run down, and poverty-stricken, and dirty blue, grey and black. Underneath it, however, you could see these unbelievably clean and beautiful forms. I took that picture and made it into layers representing the distance. Then I used the colours of the rainbow (as clichéd as that seems – although it wasn't a clichéd painting when I was done with it) and I transformed it into what I now recognise as an image of paradise.

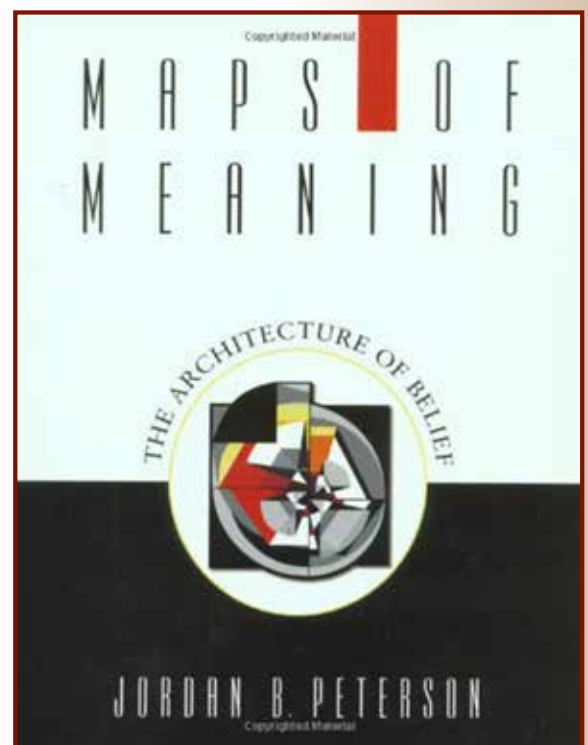
There's this statement in the New Testament that Christ tortures his disciples with. He says: 'The kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth, but men do not see it'. People think that's a metaphor, but there are some things that are so true they sound like metaphors, but they're not: they're just the clearest possible description of a particular kind of truth. That's one of those statements. Heaven and Hell could easily be right here in front of us, and in fact often they are, maybe they always are, and sometimes everyone sees that, even if they don't consciously realize it. But I was playing with that idea; the idea of radical transformation or redemption. I was playing with it unconsciously at that point. I mean, I had the intimation that *this* could be other than it is or was, and so that's what I was playing with in the painting. That's when I learned how to do this foamcore process. I made the design first and then I made a representation of the design and then I laid it out on the foamcore. Then I cut the foamcore with Xacto knives. I usually had to buy 100 blades because you can only make, maybe, two cuts with each blade before it gets dull enough to tear the paper on the surface of the foamcore instead of cutting through it. But you can make unbelievably precise cuts because foamcore has no grain. And it's light, and it's easy to work with and it lasts forever, and it laminates very well. I would build it up layer by layer, and glue it with standard white glue, and use books to press it down while it was drying. So it makes a very good lamination, and it's extremely durable. I mean, it looks exactly the same as I painted it – 32 years ago, now. And then it's backed by fibre board (it took me a while to figure out what to use for backing, because it tended to curve inward, but I fixed that). It's four pieces – quadrants. Each quadrant is backed by a board that covers its back, and then all four pieces are bolted to another board, and then it's hung. It's fallen off the wall once or twice, but it's pretty easy to fix too, which is another advantage.

ÁC: Did you paint the pieces before you glued them?

JBP: No. After. And it took me a long time to work out the colour schemes. The way I did that was I first of all figured out how to do that on black and white on paper, then I photocopied (this was before you could do this with computers) about forty of them and then I just played with the colours until I got a combination that I liked. I mean, I'm no genius with colours, so I had to keep it (in

some sense) irrelatively simple. One of the things that's interesting about it, and that's also quite funny, is that it's very much like Russian constructivism from the 1920s, and the Russian constructivists were among the first people who used geometric forms in art. They had a large influence on modern architecture. Suetin – I have one of his paintings at home now, a watercolour that actually looks quite a bit like this, it's quite funny, and he was a follower of another Russian, (not Kandinsky, who was also a follower of...) Malevich! – and so those were the Russian constructivists. Sometimes they called themselves 'suprematists' too. They were very interested in the interplay and overlap of geometric forms, except that they basically did their work in two dimensions – although now and then, they would make things like my piece out of wood. This was quite interesting to me, when I discovered it, because I've got this thing for Russian stuff (for one reason or another), and it was kind of surprising to find out that this kind of thing had been done before in the twenties, using different materials. Who knows? I thought I was original, but once *something's been done*, it seeps into everything... if it was done by geniuses, then you run across it. So I may well have been influenced by them without knowing it or realising it.

ÁC: You used a slightly abstracted/digitised rendition of this artwork on the cover of your seminal book, *Maps of Meaning; the Architecture of Belief*. Did you anticipate during the course of writing the book that you would use it as the cover, or did that decision come after-the-fact?



JBP: That's a tough one, because you never really know what is an *after-the-fact* decision. The themes of your life weave together, like a musical piece, and things you think are separate are very likely not



separate at all. I finished the book and then I found a publisher, Routledge. Then I asked if I could design the cover (because I was very possessive about the book and thought... well, I had no idea how covers were designed at that point, really. They said 'that usually isn't what happens', as of course they use professional graphic designers). I said, 'well, can I send you some ideas?' and they said yes, so I sat together with my wife and we put together the cover, and sent them an image, and they liked it. The cover isn't exactly the same cover we designed – but it's like the cover we designed, redone by a graphic artist expert who knows how to design book covers. So that was cool; that was a nice plus to the publication of the book. But no, I hadn't planned that all along, maybe... *consciously* I hadn't planned that all along. God only knows what was going on underneath.

ÁC: What (additional) meaning do you think 'The Meaning of Music' gave to your book, if any? Did it influence what you were writing about in any way?

JBP: Oh, sure, I would say in some ways it was part of the same process of inspiration that gave rise to the ideas in the book. It was all part of the same thing. In terms of what it meant, well, *Maps of Meaning* is partly about what attitude you have to adopt and live by in order to minimise the probability that you will become cruel and resentful and ideologically bound. So if you think about that as the worst possible outcome – you're a rigid ideologue, bent on genocide – what 'The Meaning of Music' represents is the opposite of that. And the opposite of that is... in some ways it's *the death of the ego*, I mean, that's how it's been described. It's a weird thing to think about... A lot of what people cling to, with regards to their own personal identity, is nothing but a collection of their own flaws and weaknesses. They're bound to that collection by pride. Really, it should all burn away. What's left, then, is not even the individual you, in a way. It's the voice that speaks through you from the depths (it's something like that), to the degree you've managed to allow that to happen. That's the antidote to that other hellish way of being.

So this painting and music both represent in some sense the manifestation of that voice from the depths, or that creative spirit that rises from the depths, and that can flow through you. And you need that because if you aren't allied with that... well, if you're oriented against that, well, good luck to you! That's like being oriented against a hurricane. It's just not going to work out for you very well. But if you're oriented *with it* (or, *to the degree that you're oriented with it*), you have the same strength represented by those tree-like pillars in European cathedrals, that can even be made out of brick and still hold up a ceiling 200 feet high.

Just as music represents meaning in its purist form, in a sense, the painting represents the source from which that meaning emerges. That is also the source of strength because, in some sense, meaning is the source of the existential strength that enables you to live without corruption, as a vulnerable being. And music definitely bolsters that. I mean, people feel that when they're listening to music; that's why they say 'this is good, this is good!' Yes, well, that's *right*.

ÁC: You are a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto and teach a course based on *Maps of Meaning*. Have any of your students ever asked about 'The Meaning of Music' once they've seen it on the book's cover or in your office where it now hangs? What kind of reaction do you usually get?

JBP: They ask me about it in the office, when they come in here, all the time. The office is a funny place to bring people because of course there's so many things... First of all they're shocked about the office, to begin with, because it doesn't look anything like this building. I mean, it does a bit, because when we fixed it up there were elements of the architecture that we left alone – and they receded into the background, like they should have. But there's all sort of weird things in here, so people come in and first they're shocked that this exists, here, and then there's so many weird things to look at that they don't know what to look at. They often see this large painting, but it's funny... One person came in here a dozen times, and then came in one day and said, 'where'd you get that? I've never seen it before'. So people do notice it, or not, and sometimes they say, 'well, I saw that on the cover of the book', but then whether or not they ask about it depends on their aesthetic sensitivity, and their capacity to pay attention, and then the degree to which they're distracted by why they're here. Then some people are unsure when they come in here, and that makes them less attentive than they might be too.

ÁC: What was the most novel reaction you've received?

JBP: 'Oh, that's on your book! That's what's on your book!' And then they say, 'Where did you get that?' And then I say, 'Well, I made it 32 years ago', and they say, 'You made that?' That's about it.

Well, art intimidates people to death. They just have no idea what to do with it. It's like a light that's too bright to even look at. Now, I'm not claiming that's the case with this piece, but people are very terrified of art, so they often won't even look at it. Not really. That's why we keep art in museums where it can't get out and cause trouble. You have to keep all the art in one box so it doesn't get out and transform the world.

ÁC: And the box's walls have to be off-white.

JBP: Yes, that's another rule. I've often thought that the best thing you could possibly do with the collection of masterpieces in the great museums of the world would be to take all of the paintings and sculptures out, and then put one in every town. Then that town could build a shrine to that piece of art. Then wherever you travelled there'd be a great piece of art. Then people could go look at it, in their little towns, and then there'd be a reason to go to every town. Instead, we

take these things that are each worth half a billion dollars – the great ones – and we put them all in the same room! As if four half-billion dollar pieces of art are better than one. That's pretty weird behaviour.

ÁC: You have come to use the digitised version of 'The Meaning of Music' as a logo and, generally, as a representation of yourself, if I read that correctly. Could you comment on that?

JBP: 'Logo' comes from 'logos', and Logos is 'the Word that rises from out of the depths', so, yes, I definitely use it as a logo. It's a representation of *the* Self, and also of *my* particular self. Yes, that's right. I think it's me to the degree that it is distorted in some ways (because it's not radially symmetrical, precisely, the digitised version, or the real one; it's more developed in some areas than others, and that's typical for people, so it's undoubtedly typical for me). So, yes, *my* self and *the* Self at the same time. It's like a brand.

ÁC: Because it's on your website, it's on your Skype...

JBP: It's on the <http://selfauthoring.com> site. It's my little trademark. So that's been fun, too, to have that.

ÁC: Has that ever been a conscious decision?

JBP: Oh, that's a conscious decision. It definitely represents me or my being... being and my being; that's what it represents. In that order. It's also an experiment, in a sense, as was the book. I tried to make these things to... I didn't make them; I did not make them to *communicate*. I made them to *figure something out*. That's a limitation of the book; it's not audience-friendly. But the book in its entirety is an attempt to figure something out, and to make it as clear as I could. The fact that it was a *book* was in some ways incidental... I mean, not really, because of course once I had written it, I obviously wanted it published, and I'm very glad it was.

You asked, 'how is this picture related to the book'... The book is a cornucopia, too. It's tossed out in the world to live its own life. The existentialists had this idea of alienation (which the Marxists also used, but in a different way). The existentialists would say that man could get alienated from the things he produced. He would invent something, and then it would go off in the world and have its own life, like Frankenstein (which is based on that idea). It's like – well, no one knew what television was going to do. TV was invented, and no one knew what was going to happen. You think you know what you invented, but you don't. The computer's like that.... In fact, almost everything is like that. Books are like that. They can bring down whole societies, or build them up.

I wrote this book and sent it on a voyage, and I was very curious. This is why I've been unconcerned, in some ways, about its fate. I learned a long time ago that it's not so obvious when something is succeeding or failing. You just can't know, especially if it's a complex thing. There's a two-by-two matrix of success/failure. One quadrant is 'it's stupid and it fails' (okay, it's a drag when *that* happens); then there's the 'it's stupid but it succeeds.' That's a really complicated occurrence, because you made something useless, but it's really, really

popular (and so that's confusing). That's low-quality success. *Low-quality failure*, that's one quadrant; *low-quality success*, that's another. I'm not sure you want to wish the latter on anyone, although people dream about it a lot. Dreams of undeserved fame are dreams of low-quality success. I don't think that's a dream you want to have realised, because it's the sort of dream whose success will make you ultimately cynical.

Then there's *high-quality failure*. If you manage that, it's really tremendous success. That was Van Gogh's success, and it was Nietzsche's success, and it was Gregor Mendel's success. It's hard on the creative individual, but that that doesn't interfere with the quality. Then, finally, there's *high-quality success*, which just never happens in a lifetime – well, sometimes, but it's just too much to hope for.

This all means that if you produce something complex, and you float it out onto the ocean like a message in a bottle, it's almost impossible to evaluate its journey. It's out there, doing whatever it's going to do, and you can't draw any straightforward conclusions from its journey. Plus, I was never sure even what to really wish for, in terms of success. What I wished for when I was writing it was that I would solve the problem I set out to solve – the problem is, to put it bluntly, 'what's the opposite of genocidal intent?' We certainly know that genocidal intent exists. Therefore, it must have its opposite, and the desire to engage in genocidal enactment is the ultimate in evil (not exactly, because there is even a hierarchy of evil in that intent). Thus, you could consider the most horrifying possible example of genocidal intent, and that's like the lowest circle of Hell. Then there's something that is the opposite of that. I wanted to find out what the lowest circle was – and then what the opposite of that was, which would be the upper circle of Heaven. As far as I'm concerned, from my own personal perspective, I found it. It's completely, radically, changed my life, in every possible way for the better, and it never seems to stop doing that. I've seen the same sort of change for the members of my immediate family, and my extended family, to some degree, and to my students, and it seems altogether like a good thing.

So, back to the conscious intent question: it was an experiment, all that I have done is an experiment. It's an *existential experiment*. It's the sort of thing that Kierkegaard talked about. He said (the existentialists, in general said): 'look, here's the problem with life: no one can prove to you what you *should do*. They can lay out an example, they can suggest things, but the only way you're ever going to find out if something is true is by staking your life on it.' There's no other way, because you can't find out, unless you live it out, and of course you're using up your life while you're doing that. So, that's Kierkegaard's leap of faith.



So we were talking about whether I am using my artwork consciously. And the answer to that is, *yes* and *no*. I'm doing it consciously but I'm not doing it to manipulate the world to an end. That's the difference. That's the thing I'm saying. I'm experimenting: 'What *x* happens if I do this?' But I'm not saying, 'Well, I want a specific *x* to happen'. Because I don't know what would be *best*... That's also why I described that matrix; you might wish for *high-quality success*, but that's not necessarily for the best. You give up your privacy, for example, at that point. Do you want to do that? Are you sure you want that? I'm not sure I would like that. In fact, I don't think I would like that. I'm sure I don't want *low-quality failure*; that would really not be good... *High-quality failure*: that's not so bad, you get your privacy that way, and you might have some genuine inkling that the quality was there, in spite of being ignored.

So when I completed this work of art, and when I communicate about it, it's curiosity that's driving me. It's like, 'What happens if you do *this*?' *I don't know*. And whatever happens, is that good? Well, maybe; maybe not. *I don't know*, so I'm not counting on something to happen. It's interesting what happens, it's often surprised me... I mean it's certainly surprised me that I ended up teaching a course based on this book at Harvard before it was published; that just shocked me to death... I thought, that's an interesting occurrence... And it's so funny, because in many ways the fact that I had written this (and that I was the sort of person that had written it), stopped me from getting other jobs at the same time I was looking – that I was on the job market. It turned out that at Harvard my idiosyncrasy was actually a plus; that was interesting, because people with my best interest at heart (at least sometimes) told me that I should downplay my interest in the psychology of religion and mythology because it was... for a young scientist, it raised questions. And it probably should!

You never know... if you're interested in weird things, you just might be weird, and not in a good way, either. *Not necessarily, though*, and maybe the things you're interested in really aren't weird. But probably they are. So that was interesting. And then I talked widely about all the things I'd been thinking about, and that seemed to go well, and that really shocked me too. I couldn't even believe it was possible. The TVO series and lectures (for more details see <http://selfauthoring.com/Video.shtml>) came out of it, and that was very interesting. The major consequence of pursuing the path that in some way is represented by that painting is that *no shortage of interesting things will happen to you*. That's also one of the things I've learned about speaking the truth – because that path is very tightly tied to truth: there's nothing you can do for your life that's better than just to tell the truth. You have to give up the outcome, though, because if you're not telling the truth, you are manipulating the outcome, and that means you've specified what the outcome should be. I don't know what the outcome should be. So I think, well, given that I don't know where I'm going, what's the best way to get there? And the answer to that is, I'm going to state things as clearly and accurately as I can, and carefully, and I'm going to see what happens. That's an adventure.

ÁC: That takes courage.

JBP: Not really. It takes... There's this old idea in the Old Testament: 'The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom'. I can tell you one way taking that path *doesn't* take courage (this is also something I've learned about the cognitive errors that people make when they're calculating risk): If you say to someone, 'well, just go to your boss and tell him the truth', they'll say, 'oh my God, I don't know what will happen if I do that – I can't do *that*'. But they don't say, 'oh my God, what is going to happen if I *don't do that*?' In reality, it's a catastrophic risk to *do it*, and a catastrophic risk *not to do it*. So, you can pick your risk, but that's all you get. So I'm not sure it takes courage. It does take appreciation of the Hell that waits for you if you tangle yourself up in your own lies. I think that that's a Hell I understand quite well, and it's one that I do not want to be in – period. In consequence, whenever I'm tempted to do something that isn't straight or to say something that isn't straight, I just remember where that pathway heads and I think, 'I know, that's okay, I just... no, really, no, I'm not going *there*. Not even one step!' Once you know *that*... well, running away from the worst thing you can imagine doesn't require courage. It just requires being willing to understand what the *worst possible thing* could happen to you is. And, although I've been fortunate enough to live in a society where those sorts of most terrible things are not happening, and haven't happened around me in my lifetime – I think I understand the place of such things quite well, and that is somewhere I do not want to go, under any circumstances, whatsoever. Not even a bit. Once you've got that figured out... I believe this is not a metaphorical statement in many ways: *you cannot understand Heaven until you understand Hell*.

ÁC: [*knock at the door*] It's a good way to end.

JBP: Nicely timed. Thank you for the opportunity.



Jordan B. Peterson





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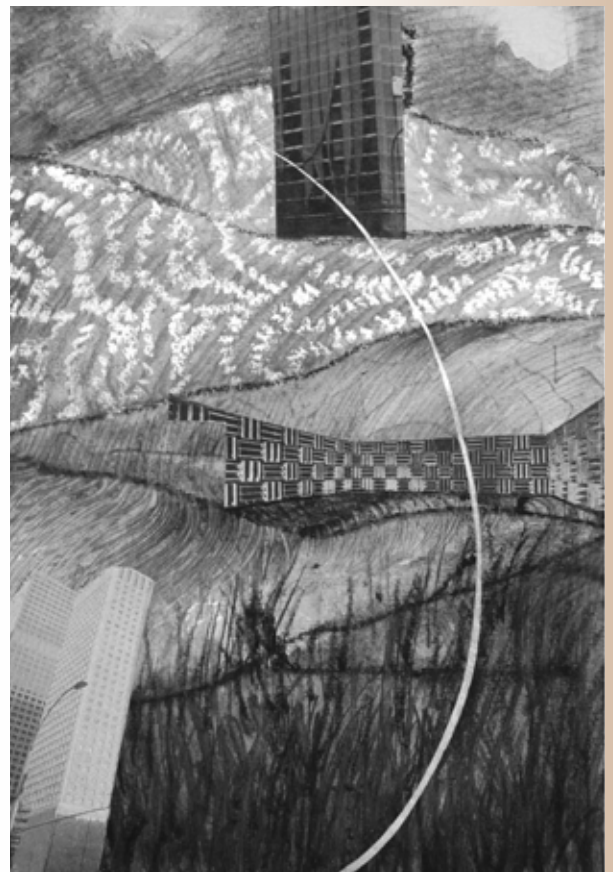
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## HOWEVER RAGGED A PEN: POETRY BEYOND MEMORY A BOOK REVIEW BY ÁGNES CSERHÁTI

*A Ragged Pen: Essays on Poetry & Memory* borrows its title from a Chinese proverb that captures the essence of what is to be examined inside: “A good memory is not as good as a ragged pen”. First published by Gaspereau Press in 2006, my own initial memory of the essays is certainly not as sharp as the ragged pen I think pertinent to set to paper about them even now. The introduction opens with two significant points: “All writing is a species of remembering”, quoted from Susan Sontag’s ‘The Wisdom Project’, and “What are the poet’s responsibilities to the past, to the dead, to truth and to history?”, quoted from Aislinn Hunter’s ‘Constructs of Memory’, which was the topic header for the panel of writers who first presented their essays at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference in Vancouver in the spring of 2005 and which are now gathered in this book.

Opening with an essay by Robert Finley entitled ‘readingwritinglistening’, it seems confusing that the main topic’s focus is on a photographic collection by François Gaudet. Would it not be a matter of ‘seeing’ rather than ‘reading’, especially if the past is falling beyond the bounds of memory and therefore unable to be ‘read’? Finley takes the time to consider Martha Langford’s exploration of “the relationship to the past as it is mediated by domestic photographs, and treats especially carefully the circumstances which arise when these photographs become separated from those who know their stories, and so fall silent”. But do such photographs truly fall silent? As entities in and of themselves, “with their ability to elegize and vitalize simultaneously”, one may argue that such photographs are capable of telling stories that are no less true to the ‘seer’ than the supposedly hoped-for ‘actual’ truth that may have been devised as close to itself through memory, however good (or poor) that memory may have proven.

Finley goes on to explore the artistic work of Gaudet in detail, where the black and white photographs are painted with transparent coloured inks, and so each negative reworked in such a way several times “becomes a distinct reading of a recorded instant outside of the artist’s immediate experience”. Here the relationship between the ‘seer’ and ‘reader’ finally makes itself known. Finley goes on to say “It is also work necessarily informed by wonder in as much as it retains at its centre a mystery, a moment outside of his experience which the artist can know only in terms of its loss” and then again “like all photographs, mark, by their presence, an absence, a loss which cannot be recovered” and again “Even while they can make memory come alive for us, as going through a photo album can bring memories to life, they do so by pointing to a loss”. And so Finley seems to argue that loss is central to memory, as is longing: the want to speak to the person no longer there (but there in the photograph). And with longing comes wonder: the want to listen to the person no longer there (but there in the photograph) and imagining its happening. In this manner ‘reading[seeing]writing[speaking]listening[wonder]’ are woven together rather beautifully, if not in an obvious way. But then as Finley himself points out, the form of the essay (l’essai) is “a trial or attempt, something innately partial”. Even so, Finley’s ragged pen has made its mark to explain such compensation for loss and longing in memory’s creation of something afresh through wonder and imagination: for this reviewer, at least, the

lingering heartbeats of the poetic form.

Since the causal concepts of loss are picked up by Patrick Friesen, the reader is once again confronted by the idea of longing being central to memory and its expression in poetry. However, “not longing for memory itself, but for something outside of memory, the absence which is the context of memory; the state of longing in and of itself”. If, as Friesen suggests, we long for the “unremembered”, then I would posit that poetry that is able to express longing in “what can’t be named” has the innate ability to move beyond memory. As such, Sontag’s pithy “all writing is a species of remembering” is called into question. Friesen goes on to cite the Portuguese concept of *saudade*, “something that cannot be named” as being central to loss, and suspecting that this is why “poetry of longing pays attention to physical detail, is awake to the material world”, which is especially the case as he grows older “quite possibly because I recognise, deeply, that I am losing that world [because] in my body I know I am nearing the mist [of death] ahead of me”. Aside from the matter of loss and longing, what is of particular interest in Friesen’s essay is the claim that he makes memories up since he relies on the stories of memory, shaping and honing them as he moves through time in order to better understand his existence. What is truth seems to be a shifting mechanism. It may be well to ask, “what on earth can one do / with everything that’s happened?”, but the answer is the more intriguing, which comes from a poem that follows the essay:

what passes from hand to hand  
what passes mouth to mouth  
sometimes becomes truer  
than what began

Jan Zwicky’s essay completes Friesen’s thoughts and moves them further into a debate between lyric and narrative forms. Zwicky places into a question Sontag’s claim at the outset: “Is there any gesture humans make that is not a species of remembering?” and quickly concludes that “every lyric gesture... is a song of longing [but] for what? Wholeness, I think. Integrity. A homecoming, which must feel like remembering – nostos, a return – even if we have never been home before”. For my own part, I cannot help but recall a 4-day coastal trek in Wales all these many years ago that felt like home in a way I’d never experienced before. I had never physically experienced the reality of Wales, had never before stepped on its crags or paths, and yet even as the sun dipped below the horizon and I made my way to the first cottage off the path for help, that wholeness was there: that integrity of the moment(s) that seemed to fall from my very being into the setting that consumed me. I had returned home though I had never been there – and I have never been home since in quite the same way. Zwicky has to be right when she says that “lyric knows the world is whole, that every part of it is integrally related to every other part – and knows that we cannot



## HOWEVER RAGGED A PEN: POETRY BEYOND MEMORY

A BOOK REVIEW BY ÁGNES CSERHÁTI

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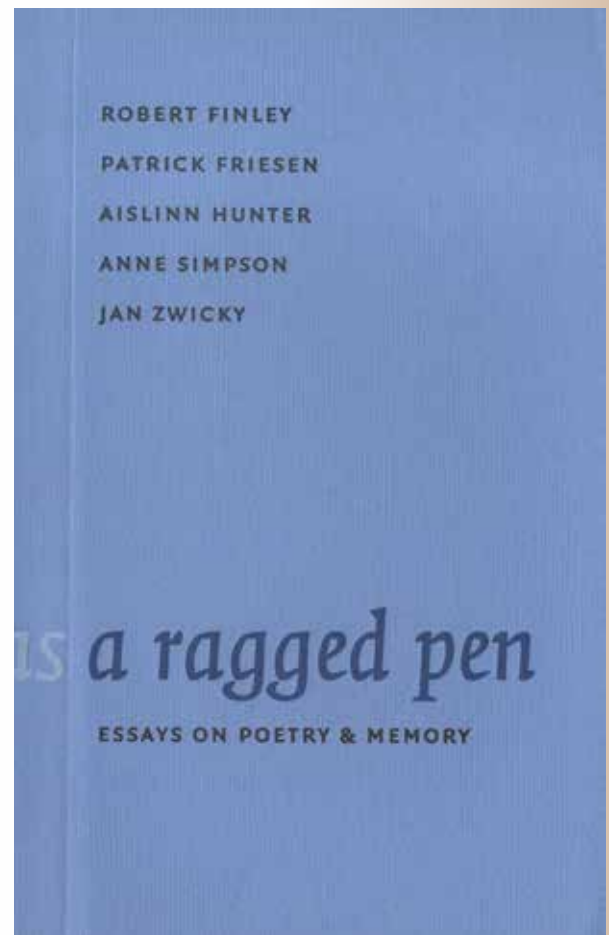
be other than overwhelmed by this recognition... lyric attempts to listen – to remember – without imposing [as narrative does] a logical or temporal order on experience... the difference, then, between lyric memory and narrative memory can be cast as the difference between witness and explanation”.

Where Zwicky, Friesen, and Finley lay claim to philosophical reasonings for their forays into loss, longing, memory and poetry, Aislinn Hunter (who invited this panel together) purports the scientific as well. Zwicky’s ‘witness and explanation’ could well be coupled with ‘presence and representation’, something that Hunter wants to get to the bottom of in terms of the “cognitive distinction” between them, and yet, “memory and poetry both come out of what neuroscientists call interpretation”, and so we seem back to Friesen’s stanzaic premonition. In such a way, perhaps, Hunter’s conceit of a picnic with Jorge Luis Borges seems perfectly in keeping, especially her answers to his would-be criticisms: “in my poetry... what is true, changes”. The conceit alone, thought about in detail, brings us back to Finley’s ‘listening’, or wonder, which Hunter still believes in, citing Seamus Heaney’s poem about monks seeing a ship appear in the air as they are at prayer as one source for that belief. These things can exist side by side since the scientific tells us that “our memories are elaborations and not, for lack of a better term, accurate recordings”. Hunter distinguishes between language and memory: “Language is an act of construction... built out of perception and experience. Memory, on the other hand, is an act of reconstruction flawed by design”. In other words, if we are to take on Hunter’s argument, belief trumps memory, where “what we believe becomes in essence, the known world”, and it is a world one should delight in constructing.

Anne Simpson structures her essay on the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus, bringing into being again the concept of loss, but it is the relationship between memory and imagination – their closeness rather than their separateness – that is of interest here: “What is created out of the haunt of memory can have an intensely animated life of its own. Writing takes on incantatory power as it stands for the other”. Simpson cites the poetry of Paul Celan (he was born in 1920, a Romanian Jew, and his parents were both killed in the Nazi camps) as revealing the “dilemma that occurs for the writer when an attempt is made to bear witness”. There is no standing aside, but the poet must take on and embody what s/he is writing about. In this manner, “what is summoned from memory to stand forth on the page has the power to hold the poet hostage”. Again, we have the close connection between memory and imagination, but at last the distinction is made that agrees with Hunter’s ‘construction’: “Imagination draws on memory, yet goes further, since it is the work of making”. This ‘making’ brings to life – to our senses – what otherwise would not come alone from memory. And although Simpson does not speak directly of longing, Orpheus’s longing to see Eurydice is what allows him to sing (even in Hades).

And so a very clever pen could construct a single essay out of the panel that is represented in this book without much distinction between the main concepts at work in terms of memory and poetry:

loss, longing, wonder, imagination, construction, belief. Of the poet’s responsibilities to the past, the dead, and history, it would seem that we are looking at a shifting landscape, as we are with the truth, where memories may be made up to better understand one’s existence (Friesen) or the truth may change depending on what is to be believed or constructed (Hunter, Simpson). Therefore, it is acts of wonder and imagination – outside the singular scope of memory – that take over and determine the truth to which poets must give voice. On the other hand, if there exists a wholeness within and without the bounds of memory (Zwicky) and that wholeness is integral to longing to what is and what is not there (Finley), then memory and longing prove synonymous and truth merely secondary. Or is it? In any case, the additions to the essays in the book – the poems, translation, description, conceit – lend an ear to what would otherwise be puzzled over à solo in a way that brings each writer’s creativity to the fore and in essence demonstrates just what they’ve been on about in probably the most convincing fashion. Aside from, and likely because of, philosophy and neuroscience, this is a book whose arguments are to delight in and that helps every reader and writer (re)conceive what it is that they are doing in terms of both acts of memory and poetry. A book worth having for everyone from the average reader to the specialist writer, Gaspereau Press knows what it’s doing (as usual) in bringing such a book into being. May we rejoice in reading it afresh and coming to terms with our own ragged pens.





## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**IAIN BRITTON** Since 2008, Iain Britton has had five collections of poems published, mainly in the UK. Also, his work was included in the Shearcatcher Poetry Anthology published by Shearsman Books, 2012. A new collection of poems has just been published by Kilmog Press. Besides living and working in the UK for many years, he has travelled extensively throughout Europe and now lives in Auckland, New Zealand. This year he returned briefly to the UK to read his poetry in Oxford and London.

**JEREMY CLARKE** was born in Bedfordshire, England and has lived and worked in Canada, America, Europe, the Arctic and the Middle East. He currently lives in London. Published titles include *Devon Hymns* (2010), *Incidents of Travel* (2012) and *Spatiamentum* (2014) with rufus books.

**ÁGNES CSERHÁTI** is based in Toronto, Canada. She is the publisher of rufus books and the editor of *Epignosis Quarterly*. Ballet, rowing and photography are her other interests, whilst the Urboros makes its mark on her chaotic, mystery-filled life (and now on her arm in the form of a small but significant tattoo).

**MATTHEW FRANCIS** is the author of five poetry collections, including *Whereabouts* (rufus books, 2005) and *Muscovy* (Faber 2013), as well as two novels, a collection of short stories and a study of the poet W. S. Graham. He lives in west Wales and lectures in creative writing at Aberystwyth University. His poetic adaptation of Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* is due out from rufus books in 2015, the 350th anniversary of the original text.

**DICK JONES**'s work has been published in a number of magazines, print and online, including *Orbis*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Qarrtsiluni*, *Westwords*, *Mipoesias*, *Three Candles*, *Other Poetry*, *Rattlesnake* and *Ouroboros Review*. In 2010 Dick received a Pushcart nomination for his poem 'Sea Of Stars' and his first collection, *Ancient Lights*, was published by Phoenicia Publishing in 2012. A translation of Blaise Cendrars' iconoclastic epic poem 'La Prose du Transsibérien...', illustrated by Natalie D'Arbeloff, is due for publication by The Old Stile Press in 2014.

**STEVEN MAYOFF**'s first book, the story collection *Fatted Calf Blues* (Turnstone Press, 2009), won a 2010 PEI Book Award for fiction. His upcoming novel, *Our Lady Of Steerage*, will be published by Bunim & Bannigan Ltd next year. His poetry collection-in-progress, *Red Planet Postcards*, will be published by rufus books in 2016.

**GORDON MEADE** is a Scottish poet now living in London. He divides his time between his own writing and running creative writing courses for vulnerable young people. His most recent collection, *Sounds of the Real World*, was published by Cultured Llama Publishing in 2013.

**BEN MEYERSON** is a young poet who grew up in Toronto, Canada but now resides in Portland, Oregon. He has been writing poetry for as long as he can remember, a pursuit nurtured by a summer at the Iowa Young Writers' Studio, among other things. Ben's poetry reflects his passion for music, philosophy, mythology and the classics. His other interests include songwriting, blues harmonica, and soccer.

**JORDAN B. PETERSON** is a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief*, which provides a theory of religious meaning, and which has been transformed into a series of public lectures televised by TVO.

**RUTH ROACH PIERSON**, professor emerita of the University of Toronto, has published three poetry collections: *Where No Window Was* (2002), *Aide-Mémoire*, a finalist for the 2008 Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry, and *Contrary* (2011). She is editor of the film poem anthology *I Found It At the Movies* (Guernica Editions, 2014) and has a fourth poetry manuscript coming out with Palimpsest Press in 2015.

**BETHANY W. POPE** is the author of three collections of poetry: *A Radiance* (Cultured Llama Press, 2012), *Crown of Thorns* (Oneiros Books, 2013), and *The Gospel of Flies* (Writing Knights Press, 2014). Her fourth collection, *Persephone in the Underworld*, is to be released by rufus books in 2016. She is also the Assistant Editor of *Epignosis Quarterly* and a card-carrying member of the human mythos and secret wifwolf. She lives in England with her beloved husband, Matthew David Clarke.

**MICHAEL LEE RATTIGAN** is a poet and translator. A chapbook of his poems, *Nature Notes: fragments for an elegy* (2006), as well as the first translation into English of the complete collected poems of Fernando Pessoa's heteronym *Alberto Caiero* (2007) have been published by rufus books. *Liminal*, a full length collection of his poems, was also published by rufus books in 2012.

**JOHN REIBETANZ** is a poet who lives in Toronto and teaches English and creative writing at Victoria College. After spending an overly long winter working on his ninth collection and on translations of contemporary German and French poetry, he is looking forward to spending the summer cycling and kayaking — though not simultaneously.

**ANTHEA SIMMONS** quit the City for a rural, sylvan idyll with her son (who is now ready to fly the nest). The landscape and animal husbandry inspired a collection of poems and illustrations, *Pig Nuts & Peacocks*, published by rufus books (2011). Recent work has been dominated by darker themes as the poet attempts to make sense of the power of love and the pain of loss.

**ERIN SOROS** has published fiction and non-fiction in international journals and anthologies and her stories have been aired on the CBC and BBC. She also collaborates with other artists, studies philosophy, and teaches subjects like psychoanalysis, modern literature and human rights. In this manner, she manages to eke out a living. She has even worked as a professional puppeteer. "Auntie Erin," her nephew once asked, "Are you a *real* adult?"

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES cont'd

**WILL STONE**, born 1966, is a poet, essayist and literary translator. His first poetry collection *Glaciation* (Salt, 2007), won the international Glen Dimplex Award for poetry in 2008. A second collection, *Drawing in Ash*, was published by Salt in May 2011 to critical acclaim. His translated works include a recent series of books for Hesperus Press, with translations of works by Maurice Betz, Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth. His recently published Emile Verhaeren Poems will be followed by Georges Rodenbach Poems in autumn 2014, both published by Arc Publications. Pushkin Press will publish his first English translation of Stefan Zweig's essay on Montaigne in 2015 and Seagull Books an expanded collection of the poetry of Georg Trakl in 2016.

**PAUL STUBBS**, British poet, is the author of three collections, *The Theological Museum* (Flambard, 2005), *The Icon Maker* (Arc Publications, 2008), *The End of the Trial of Man* (Arc Publications, 2014), of two long poems, *Ex Nihilo* and *Flesh* (Black Herald Press, 2010 & 2013) and of a book of essays about Arthur Rimbaud, *The Carbonized Earth*. He also co-edits *The Black Herald*, a Paris-based bilingual literary journal.

**PAOLA VOLPATO** was born in Venice, and attended the Accademia of Belle Arti of Venice - Scuola Libera del Nudo under the guidance of Vittorio Basaglia and Luciano Zarotti for painting, and the International School of Graphics where she also practiced experimental techniques courses with Riccardo Licata and Vittorio Basaglia. Her realised works include engravings and etchings, along with experimented photography and industrial lithography applied as a monotype art.