

# poetry in transit

Commemorating the 20th anniversary  
of a project to celebrate BC  
poets published in Canada.



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*serpentine loop* by Elee Kraljii Gardiner,  
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from **WORK OF RAIN**

Gulls gather in the rain. Together  
they alight, flock and wait on the diamond  
for a man and his bread. Come,  
watch his hand glimmer while  
he casts a fortune of crumbs.

Ask me what I can trust so much  
as his defiant act of communion.

— Elee Kraljii Gardiner

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from **DO NOT GO BEFORE THE  
BLAZING CORONATION**

I wasn't raised by wolves but by women,  
though we've been mistaken for a pack of huskies;  
our sharp blue eyes ensnaring eye contact.

My sisters dressed me as a dancer in fine linen;  
I laughed through character changes with ease.  
I wasn't raised by wolves but by women.

My mom sang, *don't let the wolf eat the children*,  
Before night shifts as she searched for her keys.  
Our sharp blue eyes ensnaring eye contact.

— Kevin Spenst

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from **SPIRITUAL  
MEDIA**

At the crossroads of #4, the drivers switch places,  
and the passenger beside you demands your pause  
for his question, black and metal teeth,  
breath of tobacco, Listerine, laughing when you insist  
you don't understand his 20th-century Mandarin.

You focus on destination. Westside, a windowless office  
to change your core beliefs with alternating pulses of sound.  
Where you feel the trauma up from your stomach, twitter  
of a long ago memory, linked in to 1990s foam headphones,

she-MSW, RCC, carved Haida silver earrings—offering only  
her hesychastic whisper  
*good, good...*

—Jennifer Zilm

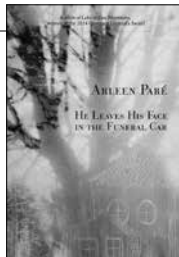
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## ON BALANCE

The Great Blondin walked across Niagara Falls  
more than twelve times on a rope no thicker than his upper arm,  
once with his agent on his back.  
Which begs the question: why?  
For money or meaning? Fame? Something to do?  
Once, mid-way, he scrambled six eggs.  
The question why is a hook, baited with hope.  
Or despair.  
Who doesn't ask it? Who doesn't hazard a guess?  
There are more ways to fall than to left or to right –  
into cataract or void –  
at least three hundred and fifty-eight.  
In 1932 the Falls froze solid; anyone with cleated boots  
could pick their way across.

— Arleen Paré

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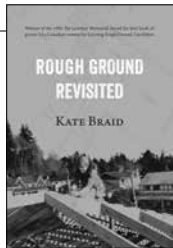


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*Rough Ground Revisited* by Kate Braid,  
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## GREAT MOMENTS IN CONSTRUCTION: THE PLUMBER

The plumber gives excellent service.  
We're all impressed by how early he gets to work,  
how late he stays. We tell him to ease off  
but he insists he doesn't mind working Saturday—again.

Later we find the note with flowers  
for the nanny in the basement suite  
signed *Love, The Plumber*.

— Kate Braid

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from WET'SINKWHA

We are passing  
canneries of the past.

North Pacific Canning Company.  
Anglo-British Columbian Packing Company.

Women packed side by side by side slicing salmon slick in blood  
boots sloshing in sleet rain and salmon guts.

Freezing hands shoving flanks  
of salted sockeye into tins.

Seals barking begging  
for the sluice dripping from Port Edward's slippery boardwalks.

— Sarah de Leeuw

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from ONE BY ONE

Years ago, when a patient died,  
I went down to the river at night,  
my husky howling into the wind  
with me. Now, sometimes I cry,  
sometimes I don't.

Nobody told me I would  
remember the face of  
each of my patients who died.  
I wish I could remember every face  
in detail, every voice, and listen  
to their words. So  
that I could read each name,  
bring them to me.

— Karen Shklanka

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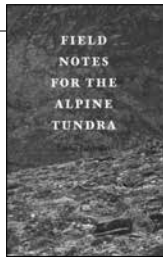
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## WEATHER

Rain patters the 'roof' this morning;  
I don't despair. The afternoon  
could be a vestibule of sun or snow.

The weather a cup over the valley. The creek  
carries the sound of rain even in sunshine.

From inside the cook-tent, always rain  
or not-rain, stream or not-stream.

When the coffee is boiling we don't hear the sky.

— Elena Johnson

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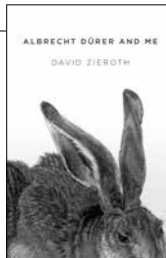


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from TOUR GUIDE...

holds high a wand or staff  
tufted with yellow ribbon  
so followers can spy her flag  
each group an ectoplasm  
that forms and bubbles around  
nuclear leader who directs all  
to see what cannot be seen:  
underlay of history burnt off  
by sun and sea breeze, her  
rapid-fire iteration of details  
they can't find on their own  
eyes blurred by overload

— David Zieroth

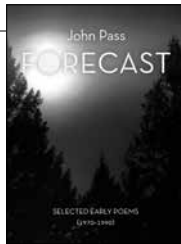
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## THE LIGHTS

The first time I tried  
to write, needing to,  
  
it was about the lights.  
They were my lights, coming on  
  
in shadow lengthening along the flank  
of the high ridge across  
  
the river.  
I remember looking up  
  
the word *caress*  
for its spelling.

—John Pass

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from 85

I am becoming old  
becoming something or other  
funny how old is always ahead  
even though it's been  
passing through the gateway  
with its hunger  
but sometimes  
there's no going further  
the gate groping  
on its hinge

— Patrick Friesen

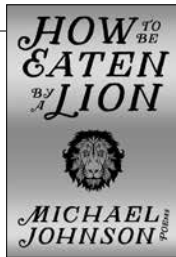
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*How to Be Eaten by a Lion* by Michael Johnson,  
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## THE CHURCH OF MY MOTHER'S HANDS

Let those brightest bits of fluff  
not be from the little bird broken by the window,  
not the one we buried with due sorrow,  
but the last one, little nectarivore glanced off  
the glass by my mother's flowers. Let them be  
his brush with grace, breastplumes lost  
before she held him in her calloused  
palms, and when he was revived and ready,  
opened the church of her hands.

— Michael Johnson

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**POOLS IN  
FLORIDA**  
(after *Ginger Shore*,  
*Causeway Inn*,  
*Tampa, Florida*,  
*November 17, 1977*  
by *Stephen Shore*)

Nevermind that it's November and there's a woman to her waist in it. We can't see the woman's face or maybe it's a girl. Her aquamarine suit ties at the shoulders. Miniature wet bows. The lines make a triangle of the pool, railing. She's looking past the sun chairs reclining toward the natural bay. The pool water is cheerful, no one's arguing against that. The auburn of the girl's hair and skin makes for great proximity effect. Does she feel lonely? Dusty rose of the bay in the distance, bright sunburst pattern on the surface of the pool. Yes, she's longing to be elsewhere. Just past the sun deck there's something invisible worth having.

— Sheryda Warrener

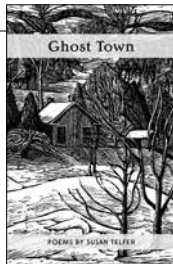
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## RAIN

Sometimes I thirst to be the rain I curse  
and fall into my beloved's cup  
fill it up so he will be quenched

settle like mist or a kiss  
on my daughter's face  
dampen my sons' heads  
like baptism wherever they travel

and seep down into the ground  
to my parents' graves  
to touch them, once again, as rain.

— Susan Telfer

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from **BEACH BABY**

Everything will be here when you wake  
Purple starfish  
The goose waddling up from the bay  
Sand dollars  
A seal peering out of the waves  
A sandpiper whose peep startles your dreams  
The castle waits for you with its turrets and shells  
while the moon snail is a mystery  
At sunset, the pelicans soar into the waves  
The dolphins hear music  
The beat of the ocean is a steady thrum.

— Laurie Elmquist

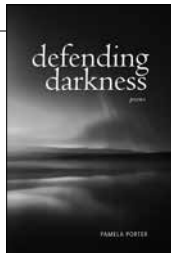
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## WOMAN AT THE PIANO

So much goes unpraised: thorns, rust, the burned house  
vacant but for a piano out of tune. She sits down,  
spreads her fingers and begins to play,  
the music made giant by the floors and walls  
until she lifts her hands and folds them in her lap  
the way the spirit does when it has given up,  
and asks only for quiet, and for the windows,  
dusk without a moon. In the orchard, two deer  
stand at attention, their skin quivering  
in small, quick ripples, the only music they'd known  
until this moment having been a choir of bees  
carving cathedrals into the fallen pears.

— Pamela Porter

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from **OUR CITY  
IS ASHES**

in the curve of all that water, False  
Creek, Burrard Inlet, detonating bombs on cleared lots, gun  
powderers out for 'Timberrr! Wood shacks, two-by-fours,  
plank sidewalks incendiary, a, crematorium, in

which  
*there was a man, driving horse and wagon, caught on  
Carrall Street between Water and Cordova . . . two iron tires  
and some ashes was all that was left . . .*

— Daphne Marlatt

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## THE SCAFFOLDING

The scaffolding  
is a caging in  
of the nearly finished building

it is a pipe-and-board jungle  
gawping cubes of space  
streaked with wet cement droppings

and the workmen strut and shout  
erect assurance  
of the solidity  
of early-morning air

— Fred Wah

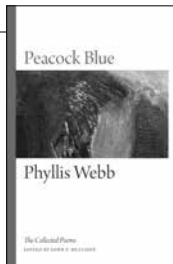
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**SITTING** The degree of nothingness  
is important:  
to sit empty  
in the sun  
receiving fire  
that is the way  
to mend  
an extraordinary world,  
sitting perfectly  
still  
and only  
remotely human.

— Phyllis Webb

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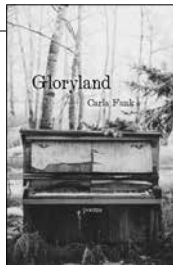
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## MEMO TO THE YOUNG

One day you too will be  
pleated jeans in the berry patch,

black socks and sandals  
beneath a stall door,

a newspaper clipping  
tucked inside an overdue book,

the paper frail and yellow  
and the ink so smudged,

it's difficult to tell the day or year.

— Carla Funk

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