Writing in Our Time

Canada's Radical Poetries in English

(1957–2003)

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Pauline Butling and *Susan Rudy*

Wilfrid Laurier University Press

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The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything.

—Gertrude Stein

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Preface

Pauline Butling and *Susan Rudy*

● *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English* provides both historiographic and critical introductions to poetry that has been variously described as radical, experimental, oppositional, avant-garde, open-form, alternative, or interventionist. We chose the adjective "radical" because its general definition—"tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions" (*Webster's*)—encompasses political, social, and aesthetic activities. The radical poetries in this study all enact "extreme changes." In the chapters that follow we discuss aspects of the *Tish* poetics, concrete and sound poetry, deconstructive poetics, and poetry inflected by race, gender, class, and sexuality. Such poetries have in common a compositional process that emphasizes the construction rather than the reflection of self and world—the production of meaning over its consumption. We also note that the social meaning of radicality has changed dramatically in response to identity politics and the global imperatives of the 1980s and '90s. We chose our title to emphasize that shift: *Writing in Our Time* refers to both an event held in 1979 and to *our* time (the turn of the twenty-first century). In 1979, the series of seven benefit readings for West Coast literary presses referred to as "Writing in Our Time" featured a predominantly white and male group of poets linked through three interconnected tracks. One started in western Canada with the *Tish* poets and extended into other sites of experimental poetics in locations across Canada. (These poets included George Bowering, Fred Wah, Frank Davey, Roy Kiyooka, Lionel Kearns, Brian Fawcett, Eli Mandel, Daphne Marlatt, Steven Scobie, Douglas Barbour, Victor Coleman, Dennis Lee, D.G. Jones, and Robert Kroetsch). The sound and concrete poets from Vancouver and Toronto formed a second track, associated with *Blew-Ointment* magazine in Vancouver and *grOnk/Ganglia* publications in Toronto (Victor Coleman, Steve McCaffery, bpNichol, Gerry Gilbert, and bill bissett). A third group included American poets associated with Beat and Black Mountain poetics, all of whom had influenced the Canadian scene. They were Robert Creeley, Diane di Prima, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, Edward Dorn, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Ann Waldman, and Michael McClure. At the edge of this relatively homogeneous group, however, disturbances were brewing. Feminist initiatives were well underway with *Fireweed*, CV2, *Room of One's Own*, Women's Press, and Press Gang; and Japanese Canadian redress, Black power movements, and First Nations

activism in Canada and the USA were successfully foregrounding social justice issues. So despite the celebratory, even self-congratulatory atmosphere of "Writing in Our Time," it proved to be the last time that such a homogenous gathering would go unquestioned.A major concern of this book is to note that shift and to redefine the social meaning of the radical accordingly.

The book is divided into two parts that follow this shift, with a chronology of nodes in an alternatives poetics network at the start of each section. Each chronology provides historical grounding for the discussions of poetics while also emphasizing that radical poetries are always intertwined with material and social contexts. Part 1 covers 1957–1979; Part 2 covers 1980–2003. Chapter 1, "(Re)Defining Radical Poetics," offers a historiography of the radical; critiques the linearity, implicit elitism,and gender bias in the discourses of avant-gardism; and posits an expanded discourse of radicality where innovation refers to the introduction of new subjects as well as new forms. Chapter 2 locates radical poetics within rhizomatic formations that are sustained by community-based poetry readings, grassroots publishers, "working ground magazines" (Duncan "Letter" 63), cultural nationalism, and even the commodification of dissent. The remaining five chapters cover aspects of *Tish*, bpNichol, Nicole Brossard (in English), George Bowering, Fred Wah, and Robert Kroetsch in that order. For the 1980–2003 period, we discuss later work by poets from the 1960s in chapters on Daphne Marlatt's *Salvage*, Robert Kroetsch's *The Hornbooks of Rita K*, and Robin Blaser's later "Image Nations" poems. Work by the younger generation is discussed in chapters on Erin Mouré, Claire Harris, Lisa Robertson, Jeff Derksen,and a section on Rita Wong in chapter 16. Chapter 16 also returns to the topic of historical/social contexts with a discussion of the crucial role of editorial activism in expanding discursive and material sites for marginalized subjects.

We make no claim to comprehensiveness in the selection of poets,nor in the topics discussed:there are too many of both to be addressed in a single book. Nor do we offer a definitive periodization of radical poetics. Our choice of specific texts developed in response to events, such as conferences that caught our interest, or to contingencies, such as a reading that excited us, or a book that peaked our curiosity. Also, in discussing the texts, we responded to the urgencies in the text, rather than following a predetermined agenda. That is, we were also writing in *our* time.

In the critical essays, we discuss both formal and social radicality. Micro-compositional strategies that destabilize semantic,syntactic, phonic,

spatial,social, and ideological systems and open the poem to social critique and intervention are discussed in detail. Writing practices such as unconventional punctuation,interrupted syntax, variable subject positions, repetition, fragmentation, and disjunction, we suggest, make the poem a kinetic site for interventions in and rearticulations of "meaning." At the macro level, we examine the poets' explorations of the intersections of self and history, ideology, language, and the social text. These writers show us once again, like so many before them, the cultural utility of radical poetries: they offer habitation for difference.

More than ten years in the making, the book went through many changes: we stumbled frequently as we grappled with the shifting political/literary ground of the 1990s and the challenges of collaborative work. Practical matters proved to be the most difficult: to find time when we were both free, for instance. We managed weekly meetings for only a couple of months during the whole project; we had sabbaticals in different years; we both had other projects at various (and usually different) times. It helped that we had decided to write separately from the start, believing that the book would have greater range if we wrote from our different generational and professional experiences. Susan Rudy went to graduate school in the 1980s, Pauline Butling in the 1960s; we both lived in Calgary: Susan is a professor at the University of Calgary, Pauline has recently retired from the Alberta College of Art and Design. Pauline's interest in radical poetics started with personal friendships and later extended into her professional life; Susan's developed in reverse order. Susan's formation as a feminist took place in the late 1980s; Pauline's a decade earlier. However, we found common ground in our shared feminist politics, a love of poetry, and a desire to share those interests with others in print form (and we wear the same size of shoes!). Our different backgrounds meant that we could respond to each other's work as an outside reader more than as a co-writer. In fact,our interaction as readers was the most gratifying aspect of working together. We learned a tremendous amount from each other as we talked endlessly about who, when, where, what, why, how, and so what? We went through at least three titles,several epigraphs, and many rearrangements of the material. When we decided to include a chronology, the book began to come together. Here was a material grid that could structure the parts without collapsing the book's necessary disjunctions, without becoming reductive or invoking closure. Now, finally, we pass this writing in *our* time to you. Let the reading begin.

Chronology 1 (1957-1979)

From the Canada Council to Writing in Our Time

● The little magazines, small presses, conferences, festivals, and other discursive/material sites that supported poetic experimentation in Canada between 1957 and 1979 are documented here. A second chronology for the period 1979–2003 follows in Part 2. Small presses and magazines that have not published poetry and/or have existed for less than two years are not included. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations of magazine editorial positions are taken from the first issue of the magazine. Descriptions of small presses are from the presses' publicity materials, usually on their websites. A brief list of contributors, titles,and/or participants is given with most entries in order to suggest the range of writers and the community interconnections at a given site, with particular attention to the poets who are associated with radical writing communities.

A note on accuracy: exact dates and precise information are often difficult to come by in the ephemeral world of little magazines and small presses. Whenever possible, we took our information from the physical objects rather than from the Internet (which proved to be inaccurate more often than not). Our main sources were the Special Collections at the University of Calgary Library, the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University, and the personal library of Pauline Butling and Fred Wah. We also consulted present and past editors of presses and magazines whenever possible. We thank them for their help. General references that we consulted were A.A. Bronson, *From Sea to Shining Sea*; Holly Melanson, *Literary Presses in Canada, 1975–1985*; Barry McKinnon, *BC Poets and Print*; David McKnight, *New Wave Canada*; Ken Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada*; *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (2nd ed.); and Grace Tratt, *Checklist of Canadian Small Presses*. Internet sources include the Canadian Magazine Publishers' Association <http://www.cmpa.ca> (July 2000) and the Literary Press Group <http://www.lpg.ca> (December 2000).

1957 **The Canada Council** was established to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in the arts, humanities, and social sciences" (Bronson 24).

Combustion (Toronto, last issue, 1960). "A review of modern poetry." Edited by Raymond Souster. Featured both Canadian and American writers. The latter included Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan,Gary Snyder, and Louis Zukofsky.

The Contact Poetry Readings (Toronto, ended in 1962). Organized by Raymond Souster. Sponsored by Contact Press (1952–66), which was founded by Raymond Souster and Louis Dudek and published books by many of the experimental young poets including Eli Mandel, Milton Acorn, George Bowering, and Margaret Atwood. The Contact Poetry Readings provided a public forum for many young poets in the Toronto area.

Delta (Montreal, last issue 1966). Edited, printed, and published by Louis Dudek. "Delta is primarily a local affair: it is a poetry magazine for Canada with a job to do here." Featured young poets from central Canada, together with Dudek's own poems, essays, and reviews. *Delta* 19 (October 1962) focused on the *TISH* writers and other Vancouver poets.

1960 ***Alphabet*** (London, ON, last issue 1971). Edited by James Reaney. "A semi-annual devoted to the Iconography of the Imagination." Each issue was devoted to a particular myth or archetypal image. Contributors included many experimental young writers and artists including James Reaney, bpNichol, Jack Chambers, Margaret Atwood, Colleen Thibadeau, Greg Curnoe, George Bowering, and bill bissett.

Bohemian Embassy (Toronto). Opened June 1960 as a non-profit literary coffeehouse devoted to the development of literature and music. In 1963 Victor Coleman and Don Black began to host a Tuesday evening reading series. Coleman broadened the scope to include multimedia happenings. Poets who read included Gwendolyn MacEwen, Al Purdy, Margaret Atwood, Fred Wah, and bpNichol.

Evidence (Toronto, last issue 1967). Editors Alan Bevan, Kenneth Wells, Kenneth Craig. "The title of this magazine suggests its purpose. It is hoped its contents will reveal evidence of a search for new ideas and their expression." Published poets from central Canada (Al Purdy, Seymour Mayne, James Reaney, etc.) together with West Coast poets George Bowering, Daphne Buckle [Marlatt], Frank Davey, and Lionel Kearns.

The New American Poetry, 1945–1960 (New York: Grove, 1960). Edited by Donald M. Allen. Made available the work of many of the innovative American poets, including the beats, the Black Mountain poets, and the New York School. Also included important statements on poetics by Charles Olson ("Projective Verse") and Allen Ginsberg ("Notes for *Howl*"). Reprinted 1999.

1961 ***TISH: A Poetry Newsletter*** (Vancouver, last issue 1969). "*TISH* is the result of and proof of a movement which we … feel is shared by other people as well as ourselves. Its poets are always obsessed with the possibilities of sound, and anxious to explore it meaningfully in relation to their position in the world: their 'stance in circumstance.'" (Davey, "Editorial," *TISH* 1). Editors for the first phase (*TISH* 1–19, 1961–63) were Frank Davey, George Bow-

Figure 1. Front cover of *Imago* 17 (1970).

sequence,swathes from giant work in progress,long life pains eased into print." Every third issue is a book-length collection. Contributors included Victor Coleman, Gladys Hindmarch, Daphne Marlatt, Stan Persky, Fred Wah, Michael McClure,and Ian Hamilton Finlay. Also published a chapbook series, Beaver Cosmos Folios.

Island (Toronto, last issue 1966).Edited by Victor Coleman. Contributors include Ron English,Gerry Gilbert, bpNichol, and Phyllis Webb. Continued as *IS*. in 1966. (See 1966).

1965 **Coach House Press** (Toronto, dissolved in 1996). Founded by Stan Bevington (printer) and Dennis Reid (art historian/designer), with editorial direction from Wayne Clifford and Victor Coleman (1966 to 1975). After 1975 an editorial board ran the press. Board members included Frank Davey, bpNichol, David Young, David McFadden, Michael Ondaatje,

Linda Davey, Christopher Dewdney, and Sarah Sheard. In 1967, with the publication of bpNichol's *Journeying & the Returns* (the fourth book published by CHP), the characteristic CHP combination of imaginative book design and innovative content was achieved (Dennis Reid 25). Coach House Press was arguably the single most important publisher of experimental poetics during the 1970s and '80s. Their twenty-year catalogue (1965–85) lists 385 titles, 134 of which were poetry books. CHP also published a Quebec translation series, which introduced the work of Nicole Brossard and others to English-Canadian readers.

Ganglia Press (Toronto 1965–80). Founded by David Aylward and bpNichol. Produced *Ganglia* magazine (1965–67) and grOnk publications (see 1967). Invited "manuscripts concerned with concrete sound kinetic and related borderblur poetry." Contributors included bill bissett, Victor Coleman, d.a. levy, and Ian Hamilton Finlay.

The Open Letter (Victoria).Edited by Frank Davey. "*The Open Letter* is an attempt to combine within the pages of a periodical the features of both a symposium and a debate. The subject will be poetry and its medium,language." Associate editors at its inception were George Bowering, David Dawson,and Fred Wah. Title changed to *Open Letter* as of Second Series, no. 1 (1971–72). The subtitle "A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory" was added beginning with the Seventh Series,no. 1 (Spring 1988). Recent contributing editors include bpNichol, Fred Wah, Barbara Godard, Terry Goldie,Steve McCaffery, Lola Lemire Tostevin, and Smaro Kamboureli. Has also had numerous guest editors. Focuses on current poetics and cultural critique. Has published numerous conference proceedings and special topic issues (on Warren Tallman, Louis Dudek,Steve McCaffery, Bronwen Wallace, and others).

Weed/Flower Press (Kitchener and Toronto, 1965–73).Edited by Nelson Ball with graphics by Barbara Caruso. Moved to Toronto in 1967. Titles included books by bill bissett, George Bowering, bpNichol (*The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*), Victor Coleman, Nelson Ball, and David McFadden. Also published two periodicals, *Weed* nos. 1–12 (see 1966) and *Hyphid* nos. 1–4.

1966 ***Iron*** (Simon Fraser University, Burnaby [1966]–78). Series 1 (to May 1973), edited by Brian Fawcett and Hank Suijs; subsequent contributing and guest editors include Colin Stewart, Neap Hoover, Alben Gouldan, and Brett Enemark. "*Iron* will try to run a narrow course between the pedantic, the artsy-craftsy and cultural therapy, that is, between premature or artificial ejaculation." *Iron* II (1975–78) co-edited by Sharon Fawcett [Thesen] and Brett Enemark: "this series promises to continue playing with form … *Iron*'s function we believe,as core,metal of earth, of this age—is to com-

Audrey Thomas; the second in 1980 featured Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy; the third in 1981 featured Adrienne Rich and Nicole Brossard.

1979 **Writing in Our Time.** (Vancouver, 1979). A series of seven readings and panel discussions organized by Warren Tallman, Annette Hurtig, Jenny Boshier, and others under the auspices of the Vancouver Poetry Centre as a benefit for West Coast literary presses, particularly bill bissett's Blew Ointment Press. Featured Canada's pre-eminent avant-garde writers,including Steve McCaffery, bpNichol, bill bissett, Gerry Gilbert, Victor Coleman, George Bowering, Frank Davey, Fred Wah,Daphne Marlatt,Stephen Scobie, Douglas Barbour, Colleen Thibadeau, Dennis Lee, D.G. Jones, Eli Mandel,and Robert Kroetsch. Also included USA writers Robert Creeley, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Duncan, Diane di Prima, Allen Ginsberg, Ann Waldman, and Michael McClure.

6 Poetry and Landscape, More Than Meets the Eye

Roy Kiyooka, Frank Davey, Daphne Marlatt, and George Bowering

Pauline Butling

> The word that we used all the time was "locus," which we liked partly because it came out of [Charles] Olson, partly because it didn't say setting, it didn't say place, it didn't say landscape, it didn't say all those things that are literary devices. Every time you use one of those terms you posit a person who is saying, OK, now how can I organize all this into a literary work. But if you said locus, it implies trying to find out where you are. It implies, I'm trying to locate myself.
>
> George Bowering, interview with Caroline Bayard and Jack David

● In 1960s Vancouver, several young poets began writing about place, landscape, the local, the city, the region, and the nation in an attempt to locate the I/eye of the poet within its social, discursive, and historical constructions. George Bowering puts it simply as "trying to find out where you are," echoing Northrop Frye's famous question some twenty years earlier, "where is here?" (Frye 68). However, for 1960s poets, "here" extends beyond geographic location; it includes the "linguistic landscape" of the place and of the poem.[1] As Bowering suggests in the epigraph above, language becomes not simply a source of literary devices that enhance the aesthetics of a poem. It is a "locus" that plays a crucial role in organizing identity and defining place.

The importance of this shift to language-centred poetics has often been noted as part of the radical shift to open-form and locally based poetics in English Canadian poetry in the 1960s.[2] Some forty years later, the notion of language as locus seems equally important as a shift away from the colonizing tropes of landscape poetry, or what Mary Louise Pratt aptly names an "imperial stylistics" (Pratt 199). In reaction to the domination of the Canadian cultural scene by a British/central Canada aesthetics, the young poets of the West refused the writing strategies of both the colonized—who view their world through the imported lenses of the imperial masters—or the colonizer—whose "imperial eyes" enact mastery and domination of the local (Pratt). Instead these poets explored the constitutive nature of language. In the process, they scuttled the dominant poetic I/eye in favour of a dispersed and interactive subjectivity. Viewed in its social/historical context, a poetics of the local is also an anti-imperialist poetics.

Mary Louise Pratt's analysis of the "imperial stylistics" (199) together with her critique of the colonizing mechanisms of travel writing provide some useful tools for my analysis of an anti-imperialist poetics. Pratt links modes of seeing to acts of domination in her title (*Imperial Eyes*). She then explicates an "imperial stylistics" in detail. First, she defines a "monarch-of-all-I-survey genre" (201), a genre in which the I/eye of the viewer occupies the centre of the scene (and the centre of the text). The writer's domination, however, is effectively concealed by the supposedly objective,painterly descriptions. Referring to Richard Burton's account of his "discovery" of Lake Tanganyika, published in 1860, for instance, Pratt shows how domination is enacted via descriptive techniques: "First, and most obvious,the landscape is *estheticized.* The sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground,symmetries between foam-flecked water and mist-flecked hills and so forth" (204).

But such aesthetic depictions of the landscape, Pratt argues, are by no means neutral.First,they establish the viewer's cultural superiority over the indigenous peoples in the sense that the foreign viewer alone has the ability to transform the landscape into an aesthetic experience. The link between aesthetic and imperial practices is that "the esthetic qualities of the landscape constitute the social and material value of the discovery to the explorers' home culture,at the same time as its aesthetic deficiencies suggest a need for social and material intervention by the home culture" (205). Pratt further notes that this strategy of "depicting the civilizing mission as an esthetic project is a strategy the west has often used for defining others as available for and in need of its benign and beautifying intervention" (205). Second, Pratt notes how the descriptive adjectives subtly privilege the imperial centre.

> Of particular interest in this respect are a series of nominal color expressions: "*emerald* green," "*snowy* foam," "*steel*-coloured mountain," "*pearly* mist," "*plum*-colour." Unlike plain color adjectives,these terms add material referents into the landscape, referents which all,from steel to snow, tie the landscape explicitly to the explorer's home culture, sprinkling it with some little bits of England. (204)

Such writing practices, Pratt argues, constitute an "imperial stylistics": they privilege the I/eye of a single (and foreign) viewer, the descriptive terms colour the landscape with a European palette,and the local is devalued in the face of the viewer's ability to aestheticize (read "civilize") the scene (204).

When the poets in 1960s Vancouver started to write about place, an imperial stylistics of civilizing via aestheticizing was still operative. In mid-twentieth-century Canada, the poet was valued for his/her ability to create an aesthetic landscape and/or to demonstrate the mastery of the seer over the seen. The imperialism in this paradigm derives both from the poet's position as a "monarch-of-all-I-survey"(disguised as aesthetics, not domination) and from the devaluing of the local that is the effect of that position. It is *against* this aesthetics that an anti-lyric poetics of the "local" began to emerge in 1960s Canada.[3]

A handful of poetry books written in response to place published in the 1960s and early 1970s demonstrate this emerging poetics: *Kyoto Airs* by Roy Kiyooka (1964), *City of the Gulls and Sea* (1964) by Frank Davey, *Lardeau* (1965) by Fred Wah, *Vancouver Poems* (1972) by Daphne Marlatt, and *Rocky Mountain Foot* (1968) by George Bowering. While their travel experiences and writing practices vary substantially, these poets share a resistance to the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" position implicit in the personalism of the lyric. They all work toward an articulation of place within a polysemic linguistic field.

For example, Roy Kiyooka's *Kyoto Airs*, a collection of poems written during his first trip to Japan in 1963, articulates a complex insider/outsider position in relation to both place and language, a relationship complicated by Kiyooka's Japanese/Canadian cultural hybridity.[4] Kiyooka was born in Japan and Japanese was his mother tongue, but he found himself to be a "tongue-twisted alien" when he travelled to Japan in 1963. His foreigness renders him silent; the speaking "I" all but disappears from the poems, except to note its alien location:

> I am among
> them a tongue-
> twisted alien.
> ("The Street" *Pacific Windows* 12)

Yet the perceiving eye of these poems is intensely aware,intensely engaged. While the pronoun "I" remains silent, the perceiving "eye" activates a semiotic field of colour, shapes, lines, and movements:

> green
>   green
>   green
>   green

on the road
to Yase
    everything
    is green   multitudinously
    green

    green trees on
    green mountains
    green fields &
    a green stream

    all things green

including
the shadows
between boulders
along the edge of the stream.
  ("Road to Yase," *Pacific Windows* 11)

The absence of the pronoun "I" loosens the words from their grammatical moorings. By the fourth repetition of "green," the semantic context has all but evaporated; green becomes a sound, a shape, a word on the page. Dereferencing is also partly achieved by the absence of any adjectives except for green. There is none of Burton's "nominal colour expressions," no "emerald" green, or any other kind of green that would remind the reader of "home." The word itself becomes a thing; *the eye* [is] *in the landscape*, to take a title from a later Kiyooka publication.

Frank Davey's *City of the Gulls and Sea*, also published in 1964, likewise attempts to shift away from the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" genre in part by de-emphasizing the "I." The book is written from the point of view of a newcomer to the city of Victoria, BC (Davey had recently moved there to teach at Royal Roads College). While the "I" dominates in Davey's poem more so than in Kiyooka's, Davey does question that dominance. In "Victoria IV," for instance, he questions the notion of "discovery":

Much of this place
has come to me.
I might have said "I"
actively (a lie)
and "discovered"
or "uncovered"
but coverings are the way of people

not land
or cities. (16)

A decade later, in *The Clallam*, Davey more fully articulates and enacts this decentring:

This is not a documentary of the *Clallam's*
sinking. There are documents
but no objective witnesses
of the *Clallam's* sinking. The survivors
were not objective. I
am not objective. Only
the objects we survive in.
(rpt. in *Selected Poems* 77)

Davey also offers a decidedly anti-romantic view of the city of Victoria in a poem published just one year after *City of the Gulls and Sea*:

city of the dull
and seedy, she would call it,
where, if you pay attention,
the hot rod
outnumbers the sea-gull
and beer
outsells tea.
(*The Scarred Hull*, n.p.)

Fred Wah's *Lardeau* and Daphne Marlatt's *Vancouver Poems*, as their titles suggest, were also written in response to place, but their books trace their *rediscovery* of familiar places. Fred Wah rediscovered the West Kootenay region of BC where he had grown up, while working as a timber cruiser in the Lardeau area in the summer of 1964. Like Davey and Kiyooka, Wah resists the impulse to aestheticize the landscape:

About the Lardeau?
There is little to say.
It is green, it rains
often, the mountains
are very beautiful,
[. . .]
the rivers and creeks
flow south to the lake,

> there are mosquitoes, the name
> is Marblehead.
> ("Lardeau/Summer 1964," rpt. in *Loki is Buried* 36)

He names, but refuses to describe, the place; adjectives are conspicuously absent; and there is certainly no dominating I/eye.

Daphne Marlatt also resists the "monarch of all I survey" position, but she does so by diminishing the cognitive function of the "I" through immersion in an expanded field of sensory awareness. Based partially on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, which Marlatt had studied in the 1960s, Marlatt's poems are shaped by "those aspects of the world that 'call our attention'" as much as by her own consciousness.[5] In preparation for writing the book, for instance, she read dozens of old newspapers and books about Vancouver and the poems themselves are filled with details from these sources.[6] At the same time,the poet actively works in and with the material. Merleau-Ponty's notions of a "to-and-fro relationship" between consciousness and the world could well be applied to Marlatt's compositional method in *Vancouver Poems*: "On the one hand, the speaking subject is rooted in the natural expressivity of the body situated in its perceptual field. On the other hand, the lived experience of the body as motor subject transcends itself through language and enters a linguistic field beyond its immediate perceptual one." There is thus a "two way relationship mediating language and perceptual life"; "through the body, consciousness is free to reach out to and intermingle with our environment, giving it meaning and form" (Chamberlain, "Merleau-Ponty" 424). Marlatt by no means simply or naively records this interaction. Even as she recognizes how received linguistic and semantic structures mediate experience, giving it meaning and form, she also deconstructs the received structures of self and place.

One of her main deconstructive strategies is to shake up the "I/you" structure, as in the following excerpt:

> mute. mute. You ask me what news.
> How far do 'I' go & where do 'you' begin.   To haul it
> all in—the moon we knew, know. radioactive dust & dusty
> voices calling, into the wilds of air waves the boats
> ride, their message to be home at, someone's relative's
> birthday, or someone's broken neck.
> An ear.   an eye.

> The moon. A tree by a room no one knows, & only horizon
> to tell it by.
> (*Vancouver Poems* [32])

As a syntactic relationship, I/you establishes a one-to-one exchange in which the "I" dominates and/or controls the exchange. But Marlatt questions the potential for domination in that construct ("how far do 'I' go and where do 'you' begin") and then deflects to a broader linguistic field. In response to the question "what news?" the "I" does not answer directly but instead weaves together a mélange of unidentified voices overheard on the short-wave radio networks. "I" and "you" become elements among the list of *things* in the poem, not the dominating construction. The poet's I/eye is receptive ("An ear, an eye") and active (the one who "haul[s] it all in") but not controlling or dominating.

Another poem begins with "I" immediately disclaiming control—"But I don't drive." At the end of the poem, the "I" is aligned with the Hamats'a from Kwakwaka'wakw legend, a figure signified by an open mouth that sometimes suggests a flesh-eating monster but also simply a receptive figure. Like the Hamats'a, the poet can also be receptive rather than dominating or devouring. In this poem, they both open their mouths to the light; they wait for things to "walk in":

> Ideas, eye, I, deus .... let go & let the
> tide take. A stream of perpetual grassgreen. Light.
> Hamats'as open their gullets to, & walk in.
> ("But I don't drive" *Vancouver Poems* [42], Marlatt's ellipses)

Refusing to drive, going with the tide, opening the mouth to a "stream of perpetual grassgreen" are metaphors for an interactive rather than devouring relationship of person to place. Indeed throughout *Vancouver Poems*, the self becomes almost transparent: "I'm much more transparent in this book," Marlatt comments. "I had the sense of my self being used as a voice, as a channel for the city. I'm literally voicing the city" ("Given this Body" 71). The poet does not disappear altogether. Here, as in all her writing, one senses Marlatt's characteristically attentive consciousness. The poet is alert, embodied, responsive, precise, processual, but not controlling or dominating.

"... books and magazines are stenched
with the smell of filth"
[...]
"... pollute the minds of youth ... "
(35–37)

Again, the personalism of the lyric is undermined by this polysemic linguistic landscape. Any claim to a "monarch-of-all-I-survey" position for the poet dissolves in the intertextual collage. The variety of perspectives and voices in the book points to the positionality of all discourse,including the poet's.

The polysemic linguistic landscape is also reinforced visually with most pages of the book having at least two different type styles and/or more than one margin. Double tracked,they offer a visual reminder of multiple discursive sites.Each text in some way questions or challenges other texts: the Native stories conflict with the settlers' views, the settlers' views conflict with the poet's lyric voice, and so on. Each version of place becomes culturally and/or geo-politically specific. Bowering's *Rocky Mountain Foot* reconfigures Alberta as a site of diverse discourses. The personal lyric becomes one discursive construction among many discourses of place.

While Bowering and Davey are writing about new places, Marlatt, Kiyooka, and Wah are rediscovering somewhat familiar ones. But they all actively work to develop alternatives to the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" genre of travel writing by exploring how place is as much mediated as represented by language. They do this by focusing on how both poet and place are constituted by and within language and by opening the poem to discourses other than the poet's. By re-locating the self within a "linguistic landscape" these writers decentre the poetic I/eye, re-value the "local," and disrupt imperial hierarchies of value that define the local as culturally deficient.[9]

In titling this chapter "more than meets the eye," I am underlining the duplicitous acts of cultural inscription enacted in the supposedly "objective" descriptions or "poetic" representations of place by poets and travel writers alike. My title implies the hidden, political agenda in such writing—definitely more than meets the eye. My title also suggests that a poetry of place can present more than what the eye sees insofar as it foregrounds a discursive landscape, which includes historical, mythic, and ideological discourses of place. By drawing attention to language as "part of where you are,'" poets such as Bowering, Marlatt, Kiyooka,Davey, and Wah not only show that place is as much mediated as represented by language (definitely more than meets the eye), but they also find a way out of the

"monarch-of-all-I-survey genre" and the imperial baggage that goes with it. To the extent that they achieved this, theirs is a radical intervention indeed.

Notes

1 Carolyn Bayard introduces this term in an interview with Bowering. She notes: "While Souster and Purdy both have a very rooted sense of place, young Canadian poets, such as bpNichol or bill bissett, seem more concerned with the linguistic landscape." Bowering replies: "To me … in the early sixties, those things seemed … to be co-determinant, that if you're a poet the only way you can find out about the place, the configurations of the place in which you live, is with language" (Bayard and David 89).

2 See, for instance, Douglas Barbour's excellent essay, "Lyric, Anti-lyric." The anti-lyric poet, Barbour explains, foregrounds "the poet's speaking self" (55) rather than the poet's "fixed and transcendental ego" (46). Also, "in their retrieval of the poet's self as poetic speaker, such poems attack the idea of a modernist lyric" (55).

3 Note that the localism of these writers should not be equated with regionalism. George Bowering for instance, argues that "regionalism" reproduces the imperialist paradigm: "The word 'region' implies rulers, as regents, regimes, even rajahs, all those regal authorities who reign over Reich" (38). "It is significant," he continues, "that we had to find a new (for us) term. We could have said 'place,' I suppose, or more likely 'here.' But we at *Tish* did want to sound like theorists. Locus gives us lieu, a place to start, gives us the verb-clinging noun, location" ("Reaney's Region" 39).

4 Kiyooka was born in Japan and had returned once with his father as a very young boy, but he was too young to remember much (see note 5, to Roy Miki's afterword to *Pacific Windows* 318).

5 Chamberlain, "Merleau-Ponty," 424. Marlatt studied phenomenology in relation to poetics as part of her Master's program at Indiana University. Her master's thesis "consisted of translations of Francis Ponge's *Le Part pris des choses* and a critical essay comparing his work with that of William Carlos Williams" (Barbour, *Daphne Marlatt and Her Works* 1).

6 Marlatt explains that she looked through "hundreds of newspaper clippings" and a "whole shelf of books on Vancouver" (Bowering interview 70).

7 Since *Rocky Mountain Foot* is out of print and none of the poems have been reprinted in subsequent collections, I have quoted extensively from the book. Thanks to George Bowering for kindly granting permission.

8 For further discussion of the connections between *Rocky Mountain Foot* and Williams's *Paterson*, see Eva-Marie Kröller, *George Bowering* 42–43.

9 Not all the poets of the 1960s took this approach to place. Al Purdy's *Caribou Horses* (1965) or Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), for instance, have a more unified lyric self, and use language to reflect or aestheticize rather than focus on how language constructs and/or mediates the experience of place.

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