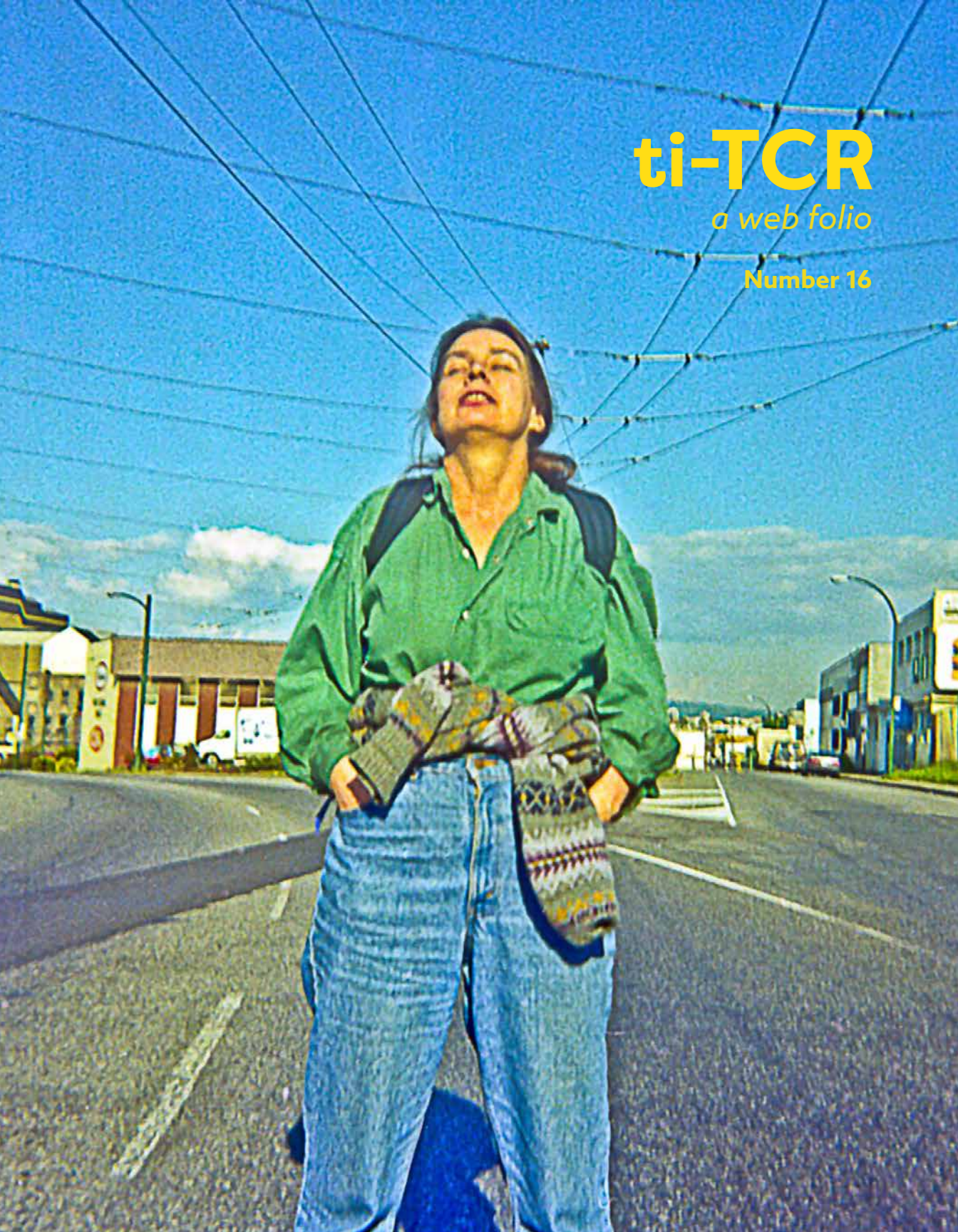

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Number 16

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She's Got the Power
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“i like the rules less and less”

—*Maxine Gadd*

ti-TCR

Number 16

Editor's Note

This collection bears double witness. Gathering together all of Maxine Gadd's past *The Capilano Review* publications, as well as one piece originally published in the Kootenay School of Writing's *W* magazine, it traces her development as a writer, from the short and already distinctive poems written in the mid 70s, through her longer and ever stronger work from the 1980s and 90s, to her astonishing plays published in the early years of this century. And in so doing, the collection places her firmly in the company of her more widely recognized contemporaries; Gadd's work shares space in back-issues of *The Capilano Review* with the likes of bill bissett, Gathie Falk, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, bp Nichol, The N.E. Thing Co., Mr. Peanut, Jamie Reid, and George Bowering. That is, this collection literally locates Gadd among influential participants in the development of a particularly West-Coast Canadian artistic and literary aesthetic, one in which Gadd herself both contributes and partakes.

But Maxine Gadd's work itself consistently bears witness to another kind of development: the mutual transformation of place, self, and community, as well as the damages inflicted upon them all by capitalist "development," particularly as experienced in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (check out the first paragraph of "The Flying Eagle," or "Babylon is Gone, I Weep for Babylon," for example). And here Gadd's work is always more than straight reportage; she will often dig into foundational structures, for example, only to swoop out again to a particular memory, or vision, or experience. A striking constancy runs through her work; she's always concerned with tracing another way or other possibilities. Even in her earliest works, Gadd's voice and vision are apparent: "we have learnt / what was fit for the ears of kings / solely" ("It's Too Much," *TCR* 6, Fall 1974). Her political concerns (and she can be explicitly political) are always interwoven with shards of myth and legend, both from her English childhood and her settler life in coastal British Columbia; with particulars of place; and with findings from research into the foundations of knowledge — "can't imagine anything out of the prison of concepts" ("It's Too Much") — all refracted through a specifically female experience, in an explicitly female voice. These specifics implicate us, Gadd's readers, as we in turn bear witness to yet another transformation, one Gadd herself anticipated over forty years ago: "the old dame can at / least turn into a burning dragon."

—*Catriona Strang*

from *TCR* 6, Fall '74

LEGEND

the kid hit it down to the glaciers
Skyscraper Mother had kept him, but somehow, his long gone
father's crazy ache, a tooth ache of all his bone, riled him enough so
that he made motions, and kept making motions and one day
in the basement of a scyscraper, a super hip latrine, a sad
looking wrangler with a beard and a bandana and a flute on his hip
said, "come on. There's a ride."
as it turned out, lucky for the kid, it was the month
of June. Even so, large greasy-looking blankets were needed to bear
crossing rivers, crossing forests, crossing hills, twisting, stopping,
meeting the plains. The back of an open truck was no place for
learning what he wanted, because he only wanted to stop, and when
it stopped he only wanted to get moving again

the kid hit the glaciers
mind you, i couldn't help noticing
that something had happened to him
he still had that way of looking like an angel into the distance,
and looking at a person, sideways, almost slyly,
like he knew something about you personally, but he wouldn't
tell anyone, no, not for the world, as long as you. . . .
He still wore his blue jeans low down on his hips, his body was
slim, his sandy brown hair curly, his eyes blue, but . . .
now he had a couple of gold teeth and the skin that used
to make you want to feel it, bright, smooth, with the bloom
of a . . .

the old hands, who'd seen him come and go, one or two who'd
even suffered a bad tum, had got a bit burnt, felt the old leathery
blister beat once, and then, suddenly smiled

"Been to Buffalo, kid?"

And back

The kid smiled sly and shy and said the same old things.

No one even now knew how to answer him.

Everything was the same, only a bit shrivelled now and dusty.
Someone who'd been burned might have looked up and seen
how much harsher the stars were

THE HAPPY VISION, GONE

THE happy vision, gone i want to sleep the whole grey day
now, green lily, a bear becomes a bee, my god laughs, i am proud, no one
but me notices him whom i formed with my fingers and burned into
permanence. they see he has cracked twice already, covered with fly
spots. everyone who has what they want says that pain is a
mental thing, except when they want something and then they take it, or
cry or turn cold. won't they accept that we are all one and the same
flame and make it more beautiful by joining. no they will look at it
and make you have it alone and turn away to enjoy their scorn I wish
there were enough Hecate in me to distribute curses, purselane, verbane,
wolf's bane, bad roots plucked out of a dead eye for which Jesus and
his yellow train of angels. . . . for it was only out of greed and spite
and endless humiliation my heart has grown hard at homeless animals
come whining around my door
and they won't eat soybeans so i throw them out for fear
of the last plague of fleas my last unloving kindness caused me, self
pity, old woman's juices sour and stink and it's all endless bad
rain out of nose and eyes and cunt and mouth and armpits and ears and
paps and bum and pores and sores and cuts and bites and rivers you
carve wherever there's anything left that's smooth that might lead some
wandering angel toward you to forgive the pride that the old dame can at
least turn into a burning dragon. don't think bitterness can drain
away any more than the mother's milk when sucked can/turn flowers black
and tarnish the icons in a young man's mind who despises my circles as a
web or a golden chain he thinks i can't see is straw
dance and rings for fingers and ears; they want the ancient
female form to die somewhere there should play maidens like ferns of
the forest far from their city, haughty apes of gods that any woman can
see their weakness though no concession made for hers till she lose her
soul to keep her womb or all this human air made foul with spleen
say it; what you think; what you want to be true; that
you are not anything less than human smiling, a temporary blossoming

of the god, sexless, neither happy nor sad, a wandering, warm, vegetal
stone whose heart does not break when you tell a lie or kill or touch
or plant or write or ride away on the fiery beast into the water. tell
this thing so the children can endure a box of monotony, so the children
know what to think of flowing blood; no matter that the little god
sitting happily in a flower of cobras is stolen; that the dying mind
require the breath of ten thousand years to make the real trees flower,
that in spite of the warnings our skin is compelled to cling and i must
scrap for my name like for bread and silence. and i must resist
love to work out these walls. so that Troy falls and travellers weave
in and out of earthmounds and Paris remains, sealed crystal and
rose gold, but light, lighter, like a spider of fire might weave with
water and the Acropolis is blasted and the people keep proud and
respect a proper madness and New York, as we all know, must find a
final catastrophe, orgasm of Atlantis . . .
Our consolance is that we can remember the dead
and tell tales

“IT CAME IN A DREAM”

it came in a dream:
time in this world when
all minds shattered into six parts
medieval static description of intricate and specific
angels; one with a black face and red eyes
and the one with shimmering blue
antennae — they don’t do
anything so they can’t
be evil, standing there, more than frozen
as the earth turns
they fall
as the solid sky loses centrifugal force
the mind splits
into twenty four hours, then
1440 minutes, then
86400 seconds, but actually
innumberable Neap’s child
saw persons shimmering and changing hue.
it only amused him
there are these faceless
kings and queens in people, the flickerings
are far away, the interiors

have the glow of stone, mine
a leaden blue, Pluto's humour, the masses
of people driven thru
printed drownings
and beauty contests
into the mine
down the tunnels
as far into darkness as they dare go
5h343
there are whole lists of alliances
you enter the lists,
lie lie lie or
stand on something,
maybe some other,
look
where the metal of your spear has come from, what
magnetic planet,
a stone named, like you are
looking from
a name seeking
the old name nobody gave you

PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

command
thy soul to be in India,
or ocean, as the moon
turns to the sun, ah,
the powers of God Himself, they
that *affirm*
on the southern gate, the form
of a lion
on the northern,
the form of a dog
and on the rotunda, the colour changed
each day so that each of the seven days
blind the city
and his prophecy of it passing was full of new light
he had it from the devil
like Isiah,
the thirty six gods, practice of/ repeated practice of
celestial rites, Hermes
(I revert now
the cosmos
the zodiac
tiny angelic forms
a chain passing upward

from the woman's right arm,
the monkey
is Man
imitates nature
with simian grace, teacher of Agrippa,
cryptography, Cabalist angel magic,
Trithemius aims at using this angelic network
for messages at a distance, by telepathy
Samael, angle
of the first hour, equals 4,440

it forbids me,
it forbids me
to be in
spired
in
side
all wild things I'll call down
to possess you, in yellow and white or green
i'll throw away
every hour of the day
as i have always done, the edge
of the sea
beside me, all that ever was
comes over us now

QUIET

Dick, we say,
Dick we will invoke
and more slender people
(you don't know of whom I speak, and
you should understand
that it doesn't matter)

call upon whom
you will, it
doesn't matter
will come
if you are quiet
(almost
too easy to say)
there are
differences
"Discrimination"
is the attribute
under the angel
flames of green and red
leaping from his head
above the naked couple
everyone
says it is beautiful

that picture

why
in pure silence, then
do words want to come
regardless
of what they destroy?
candid
sphere, another
brighter,
deeper in things,
called “lumen”
the flowers on which Dante would walk
in some heaven of speech

that leads me
deceitfully,
deceivingly, I
Hermes Trismegistus,
tempted by the blood of the dead

"IT'S TOO MUCH"

it's too much/ language stops here soon because nothing
runs along it but the opal engine of the final lonely dream
the manufacturers have gone into the cosmic, the ethical, the
esthetical, i am walking far behind the heroes who have
shattered their thighs in the important race and thinkin
"that's far out that i never did
learn anything great" but the heroes are beautiful and hang onto
each other, hooking into the opal engine i am envious and rage
to my mute friends about building dirigibles

thinking about yrself as a hero is one way of never being lonely but
what image can i choose?
she sits up weeping on her bed of pictures
or weary she weaves

can't imagine anything out of the prison of concepts
but the great striding goddesses
blazing power
or the turgid seated figure
who is our mother
sifting us, the grain

or there is the play of the laughing lady
in the woods i don't dream of the daemonesses
but i have heard of them

in your
dreams

this poetry we have learnt is the product of book burnings, of barbarian
raids, of peevish, knowledge-hungry monks
we have learnt
what was fit for the ears of kings
solely

(see the greasy turd with his paranoid eyes
and that well-trained whore, his queen)

the splendour of the creature who takes what it wants
and leaves
children to be reared
by any means possible
in a human-made cave
where the wind tortures
those who can't ride it

from *TCR* 6, Fall '74

THE CHAIR

to hell
the cooperation of
king's ministers
with their broad bare skulls
yu are petty, it
fall into a faceless river
elaborate chirp of the skull-lark, it drop
on a fish too full for swimming
tell about the ghost riding yu have hardly remembered any more
tell
the prophecy of society hating apes with golden
golden come on down their back track trail up again to desolation peace and
glory rocky mountain fire

yu just feed yrself literal ass-grain,
great ladies like yu well enuff,
tough old bouncer sez
come on come on come on strong as an onion,
fellini, cellini-gold a quiet turn around of niceness now
what u am, old barrel under a mountain of sound,
literal end of rock corridor and found
with intricate work no simple squirrel culd nibble away, there IS
something under the doorstop
it will take one thing only
REMOVE
yr grandmother's garnets

it's now yu turn the stations on and a whole planet move

quiet grey day

was there any difference before after it came? were yu changed?
was anything that goes on every day, the old man sitting in rose light on
his back doorstep giving only a taxi-driver's nod, the vast plain
of black-top, the groovy young adults sitting behind the glass wall?
i shuld capture everything precious, invent a typewriter with a twenty foot
line, information held by the railways, the pension dept., fish and game
YOOOOD rather be back where they're spending it yud rather be where
it's sleazy and easy/ or sit back suckin trouble for yrself / yud rather not
be earnest for the fair day following yu are too weary to smile joy
which is ample as a river is not corning your way yu
do not know of Firenze, marble stairs or elaborate
statuary, but the blue
is noted by yu
a Yamaha 170 culd have ended this
yu culd be picking up on the bugs they have planted in the plant
yu culd blow yr money on the planefare
to the Cariboo

EXERCISE IN MOBILITY;
HI FRIEND IN THE LIZARD-CLIMATE

"I'd better leave before i'm overloaded. but i can't leave before my time
because there's no french stories but are told quiet under the golden tower
(she winds down, dark in her smile, wishing the visionary to go away
from the lazy pole where the old people smiling twist. the ships are late
and they are coming in

do y think truth cn be pulled out regular as dental-floss? do yu think
stories of new york and any angel-filled city are not inevitable in a forced
flow? no devotions but in silence for thee, lost fiddler, is this
the last word?

how shall you yr blue grass living indian know
in the bowels of a mountain?
by his low-slung
  yodeling smile
and the handsome way he comes

THE GIANTS CAME AFTER ME CHASED
ME UNDER THE CAMP BENCHES AND THEN
OVER THE LONG TABLES WITH HUGE SPOONS
MADE OF SKULLS

i cn beat out of their scrambling into a distant part of the forest where
i don't stay

looking over the smooth grey water to an island
  too far to swim?
so far

not so very far, there's a ferry and then i'm running up and down
steep white hills where
the civilized inhabitants also want to kill me, but here i outsmart them,
i have a few elevator shafts in mind,
one which removes to a tunnel deep

in a hospital where my friends, orderlies with dark moustaches and
disciplined terrified eyes
wheel me away under a sheet to the next ferry where:

peeple in the park in perfect flow
old peepl dying in a row
cypress and blue

interference in the ball game, numbers 17, 14, and 13
arm in arm out
in the out-field

NEXT

whoooooooooooooooooos next?"

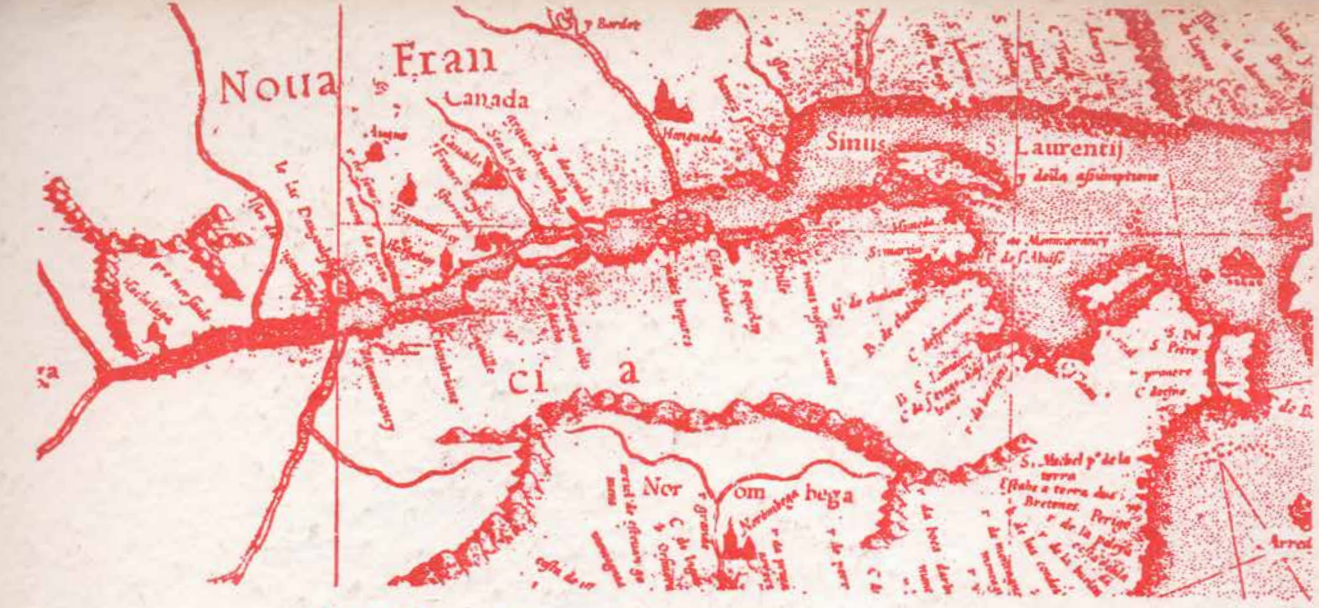
TALKING OF THE SACRED

talking of the sacred — it is in all directions
directions
like even last night in the bar where
those clowns were all grabbin each other's cocks and tryin
to suck my fingers

i think of compassion and notice the tall window is dirty
dirty
thru the apple trees thru the apple trees thru the apple trees
i see
six gardens

last night i suddenly opened the back door to take a picture of
A FIRE IN THE ORCHARD!
SNAP and

later the neighbourhood kids are over demanding to know
if I intend to show the picture to the Police

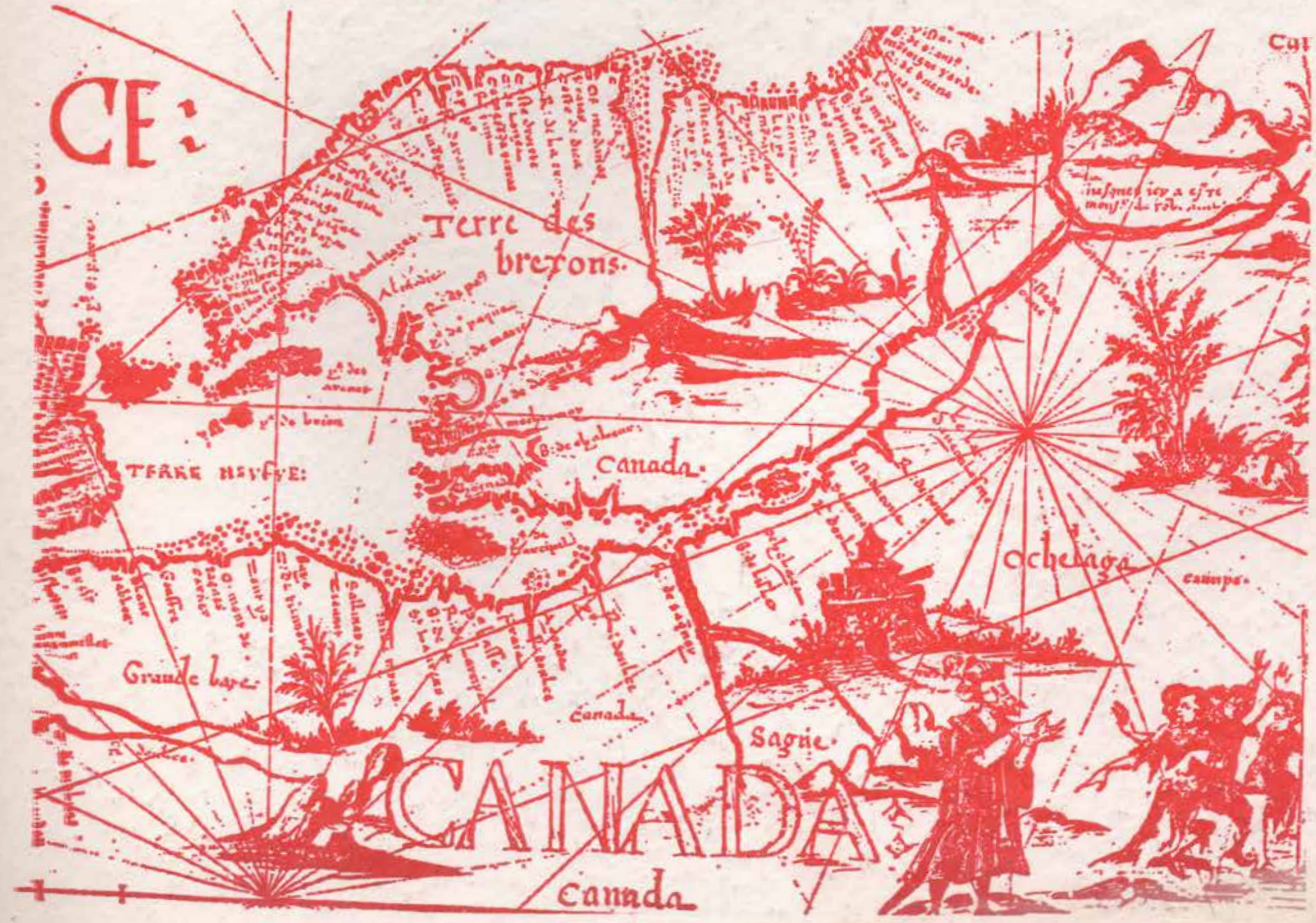


Partie laurentienne de la carte Mercator (1569)

La carte Mercator est la première à étendre au golfe le nom *Saint-Laurent* que

Partie laurentienne de la carte Descelliers (1550)

La carte ne rend hommage qu'à Roberval, mais la plupart des données viennent de Cartier.



Squabbling Through Eternity (extracts)

Maxine Gadd, Ingrid Klassen, and Daphne Marlatt

originally published in *Lost Language*, 1982

The following interview with Maxine Gadd and Lost Language editors Ingrid Klassen and Daphne Marlatt took place at Vancouver Co-Op Radio on April, 1981, when Gadd was living in a small cabin on Galiano Island.

DM: You were born in England in 1940 and lived your early life there. Do you remember bombing raids and the feel of a country at war?

MG: Yeah, the first memory I've got is down in the basement of this fourstorey house we lived in in London. We were sitting around singing, 'We'll Keep the Home Fires Burning.' That's what everyone in the house would do when there was an air raid, go down in the basement and sing. And some men were coming down the stairs, they had helmets on and I can distinctly remember the drops of rain on them and suddenly there was a BOOM and they all fell down the stairs and everybody laughed. We lived up four or five flights of stairs — my dad was at war — and my mother had my brother and I to take care of. My brother was younger than me and I was about three because that's when I first learned to read and write. I learned to write because Dad was away at war, in Belgium I guess, and I liked my dad a lot and wanted to communicate with him. Mum was all fraught and under stress. She had to choose each time which child to take down first in the bombing raids. She'd alternate but sometimes she'd forget whose turn it was and that would add to the sense of terror. Dad would come home on leave from the war and it was his pleasure and my pleasure before I went to bed at night to help me learn to read and write. We had a little blackboard. We'd take a word and talk about it and write about it and make up things. We were actually composing from that time on. I had a real impetus to learn to form the words so as to send letters to him when he was away.

DM: So when you came to Canada you were under school age but actively reading and writing.

MG: Conscious in that way, I think. We stopped off in the prairies and visited my grandmother and grandfather in Hardesty, Alberta and stayed with them one winter. Mum went on to Vancouver to find a place for us to live and of course there were no places to live. We moved into what's now the Salvation Army Hotel on Dunsmuir Street and whole families lived in single rooms. There were no electric outlets in the rooms but there were in the halls for some reason so at five o'clock in the evening you'd see all these people squatting on the carpets around their hotplates cooking their supper, each little family, downtown Vancouver.

DM: You have talked about being raised as a Commie kid. Did that make a difference between you and other kids in high school?

MG: It really made a difference in grade school, I know, because I was proselytizing at a very early age. Like, just in the Dunsmuir Hotel — that must have been Grade One or Two — I remember writing slogans, distributing leaflets, making up my own leaflets.

DM: You were politically involved right from the beginning.

MG: Well, I don't think it was political. It was the ritual. That was the time of the Ban the Bomb petitions and people would take turns standing on the street corners soliciting signatures for this anti-nuclear petition. That was before the Rosenbergs.

IK: Can you remember the leaflet that you did?

MG: No. I know I got enamoured of the priest in the big Catholic church across the street, Holy Rosary. That was the only piece of green around there and I was quite crazy about Father Brown. I remember writing leaflets, 'Vote for Father Brown,' and taking them around and knocking at doors of the hotel rooms and giving these leaflets out and being regarded as an awful pest so that the matron, who was a really monstrous old matriarch, one of those huge brick-built women — I heard the matron was after me and the kids in all this maze of hallways on all these different floors warned me the matron was after me and so I had to try to hide out. She never did find me but she caught up with my parents and I had to deal with that and I was very ashamed.

IK: Why? Why?

DM: Were your parents ashamed?

MG: Maybe, but I felt the shame, I don't think I got it from them. I felt shame for trying to lay my trip on other people. It was my trip and I did it unconsciously, joyfully I think, but in the process of doing it I became ashamed of . . .

IK: The joy?

MG: Well, of the fatuousness of voting for Father Brown. I think I got feedback from the people behind the doors, 'Well, what the hell, why vote for Father Brown?'

DM: Were you still a Catholic at that point?

MG: No, I was baptized a Catholic when I was a baby but my parents must have become Communists in England, or at least got interested in it by then, but certainly by the time they were here they were. There was a strong left-wing tradition, as you know, right downtown. I don't think I've ever understood Marx much but my parents were Marxists. They had discussions with each other and other people about Marxist issues but I couldn't understand them at that age, it was all words.

IK: But you heard that all the time.

MG: Mostly what I heard was like belonging to a good church where there's bake sales and dances, singsongs and parades. It was a real social institution, you know, it had meaning to people — the friendships —

IK: Social.

MG: Yeah, they were called 'socials,' the parties, you know. They'd have to contribute, for the paper, the Pacific Tribune, or the Party and then they could have a party. That was the Party in my head.

DM: The original tribe.

MG: A spiritual tribe though, people who had chosen each other. In a sense a band of lovers.

IK: Were they musical, your parents?

MG: Well, not in that they played anything but we all sang, good and loud. We'd sing in the May Day Parade and it would line up on the old Georgia Viaduct which is gone now but was right next to the present one — the parade would form

there and there was a church, fundamentalist Christians who would be ready for us every year singing 'Wash Them In The Blood of The Lamb' and every year we'd be determined to be warmed up so that we could outsing them but we never did. It took quite a few blocks of marching before we had 'Solidarity Forever' and 'The Red Flag' down good and loud and clear.

DM: Coming from a family that had a strong sense of that kind of affiliation and loyalty, how did you reconcile that with the sort of 'hang loose' ethic of the sixties, the hippies?

MG: Well, I got used to the idea that things break up. The Party broke up when the revelations came on about Stalin, his authoritarianism, his anti-Semitism. Because the cultural centre of the Party was the Jewish people, like the UJPO, the United Jewish People's Organization - a lot of the playwrights and the journalists were Jewish people- and so it was shattering and the Party died, at least our Party did, though my parents stayed in till about' 62 when my brother got busted for marijuana. But to me there wasn't anything 'hang loose' about the sixties. It was intense and a lot of affiliations were created, there was paranoia about the cops, the RCMP, just like there had been in the Party when people would suspect each other or new members. If a person didn't have the right ideas, or say it wrong, they might be accused of - you never know there'd be a fight. It was a working class party so it would start on a theoretical level and it was verbally on a high level of dialogue and I always found that fascinating. I didn't really take it all in but the structure of the speech I took in and was impressed. Inevitably it was important and inevitably, well, frequently, there'd be fisticuffs, you know. I've never had much respect for university professors and people like that because they'd never never resolve anything.

IK: So you grew up hearing speeches.

MG: Yeah, marvellous speeches from stages, like Harvey Murphy of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, and people'd be ready to take a stand from the floor and really say what they felt and thought.

IK: When did the writing start?

MG: Well, I've always written. I can remember my first poem in Grade Three, 'The butterfly with the beautiful wings/Dances with the robin as he sings.' and it went on like that. It started in high school, I think. I had a really great English teacher named Robert Hunter. And my parents had a record player and we had a Dylan Thomas record.

DM: So he was the first poet you actually heard?

MG: That's right. There were some Party poets but I thought they were terrible. They were trying to express the proper ideal through restricted verse forms — there was no way, it was useless to me. And there was Gerard Manley Hopkins. I love the long lines, I still do. And that sprung verse, very odd things. I always imagined him reading like Dylan Thomas.

DM: That feeling of crammed language.

MG: Crammed language, yeah. And the Celtic fruity voice, you know, the ringing in the roof of your mouth and your nose, the cathedral in there, the archway of the gullet, it rings up there. Speech making in a hall requires that.

IK: No microphones, I suppose, in those days?

MG: No microphones, and I'm sure glad of the microphone because it lets you use your mind. The first time I used a mike was at Simon Fraser in the recording studio and the guy who was running the machines suggested I try whispering and my whole understanding of the spoken language changed right there. I could write quieter poems without feeling too 'literary.' I'd had some success screaming poems at early poetry readings at UBC, poems like 'Druid Song' which I was taping. Screaming was a rebellion for me against the professors. And later on there were restaurants, coffee houses, like the Advance Mattress, and you could bring in beer, conceal it, and get drunk, scream against it all and that's one way.…

IK: How did you hear about Kerouac?

MG: Well, there was a place called The Black Spot up on Dunbar, a long way from home, and we all went there.

DM: Yes, very black, very low-light.

MG: It was the first time I saw ladies in black tights reading poetry — or anyone like that. There was one young woman, I don't remember her name, I didn't think her poetry was very good. Well, I sat back and thought, this took a lot of courage for her to get up there and she was a real cool chick, you know, she was really cool, but I thought, I don't want to read like that, I don't want to be like that, but I think I've come to be

more like her — maybe she was good. I wonder whether she's still writing. But I was really impressed by her outfit.

IK: You could see by her outfit —

MG: — that she was a cowgirl.

DM: When you started drinking, which pubs did you drink at?

MG: The Cecil. When I was fifteen. I'd put on little pink high heeled shoes and a pink hat with a veil, and gloves.

DM: That has been the writers' pub in Vancouver for some time. Who did you meet when you went there?

MG: Artists and talkers, poets, but mostly visual artists, people like Kurt Lang and Freddy Douglas, Glen Lewis, and Michael Morris, a marvellous raconteur who'd bring everything way up.

DM: Were there other women there?

MG: No. I think maybe Judith Copithorne was there, and Beth Jankola sometimes. But we didn't talk to each other much. But my mom was always very verbal and would hold forth. Party women held forth, they talked, it didn't matter who they talked to. So I didn't feel it odd, it was — I did feel it odd, I felt it wrong that there weren't women there but it didn't stop me. I was there and out for a good time and if the other women weren't there that was too — that was bad, they should have been there.

IK: Was your father an alchemist?

MG: No, he was an existentialist and a dialectical materialist and a shipwright.

IK: Was your mother a witch?

MG: (pause) I don't think so, but my grandmother — her mother, was into magic and fairies. I had the tooth fairy and all the proper childhood training, fairies under toadstools —

DM: It's impossible to grow up and be exposed to English children's literature without getting that.

MG: And the oral tradition. Mum liked to tell fanciful stories -when she wasn't under stress, which she was from the war, horribly, and she was suffering from malnutrition too. But when she was relaxed we always had — little flowers, poppies, their heads would have faces and their petals be their wings, and they could be anywhere, on the beach, down at English Bay. Lots of fairies at English Bay.

DM: How do you account for the presence of so many angels, occasional saints, and gods and goddesses in your work?

MG: Well, the Goddess is a late discovery for me, that's from about high school time. I picked up Robert Graves' The White Goddess and read it and it impressed me for its political implications. It made the possibility of religion a little more real.

DM: The political implications had to do with your being a woman and writing?

MG: Being a woman and having a sense of the sacred, of the numenistic and the spiritual. I always hated the patriarchal god though I loved Jesus, you know, who had feminine characteristics.

. . .

MG: Mary seemed cold. I wasn't that impressed with Mary because I went to a convent school and I saw a real convent — a horrible experience. We went to see a relative of my mother's way out in the country — beautiful, beautiful countryside — and she was in a cell, locked up. It was just horrifying to me so I was not impressed with the feminine life of the Catholic Church at all. We had teaching nuns and they tried to get me — we used to pray and that was fun. I used to experience levitation, which anybody can experience, and I loved it. I used to go into ecstasies, so they thought they had a sure-fire candidate. Mum didn't like that at all. I think that was one of the reasons she wanted to come to Canada, to get out of all that.

DM: Where did you pick up the Arab tradition? Because the angels are very Arabic.

MG: They're from Assyria, you know. They're the intermediaries between the gods and goddesses and human beings, but they're soulless, I think.

DM: And yet you often use the term angel for a lover.

MG: Yeah, well, a lover lets you down. Because love is not, there isn't such a thing, it's just something that we want.

DM: That's the despair of it?

MG: I think so. Of course the legend goes that humankind got knowledge when the daughters of humans made love with the angels. So you get something — that kind of knowledge that drives you out of paradise to trying to have some power on the earth — the serpent of Hermes, and all the practical knowledge that used to be part of domestic art. Chemistry, cooking, distillation, fermentation, sublimation, the names of the cooking vessels, for instance — like the Bain de Marie that Escoffier lists, which is actually originally 'the bath of Miriam.' Miriam was the sister of Moses who, alchemical tradition says, was the first alchemist. And Miryam means 'rebellion.' But this is submerged, it doesn't come out in the Bible, which is a patriarchal manifesto in many ways. So there is this other bible —

IK: The Cabbala.

MG: — where, for instance, the lady who preceded Eve —

DM: Lilith.

MG: — is part of the tradition.

IK: Who is Hermes? Is he Thoth, he Egyptian god of writing?

MG: Partly, but we know him as the equivalent of Mercury who is also an intermediary between the gods and mankind. He's also the god of physicians, merchants and thieves.

IK: Does he rule alchemy? Doesn't alchemy come out of Egypt?

MG: You're speaking of Hermes Trismegistus. But alchemy as we know it — alot of the literature has appeared quite late, like Marie Antionette's hairdresser brought out the first completed Tarot to be popularly published. I think some of my feeling for alchemy came out of my interest in my homosexual friends — the homosexual 'cabal,' which there was in the sense that it had to be hidden. Hermes is also the god of secrets, closed things — the closets were where the alchemists worked also — and there was an interest in androgyny and the confusion and mystery of sex.

DM: And obviously in a suppressed tradition, a tradition that had been outlawed.

MG: People were tortured to death if they were found in any of those intellectual and spiritual rebellions, like Pico della Mirandola. There were groups of people who were questioning everything.

DM: Well, there is a very mercurial and shifting quality in your voice in the work. It shifts from a nostalgia for beauty to a sarcastic comment on that, in the middle of a line . . .

MG: I guess that's my dad speaking.

DM: And it can shift from angry political protest to surreal imagery or plays on a single word within a line. The same goes for your language, which ranges from Shakespearian dramatic speech all the way over to hipster talk, jazz talk. It has that mercurial quality about it. Given such an open field, where almost anything can come up, what do you see as the shaping urge in composition? What is it that keeps the poem moving?

MG: The rave — the energy — the impulse.

DM: And how do you know when it's stopped?

MG: You don't always. I mean, obviously, that's why we have editors.

. . .

DM: What intrigues me is that you're willing to ride slumps in the actual compositional process and make them present in the work.

MG: Oh yeah, because you want the god. That's why I love this Bicameral Mind book of Jaynes' because he points out there's a big difference between the person's speech and the god's or goddess'. This shift happens in the Bible. He speaks of the prophets and he says that that's the wrong word for them, 'prophet,' that the Hebrew word means people who speak from their inspired raving, from that part of the non-rational brain, from their gods. And that's all I've wanted to do, speak from the god or the goddess or the — whatever those spirits and daemons are — and actually report the process, get all the different realities in. To me that's what's valuable in poetry and I'm not interested in anybody's work that doesn't have that in it.

IK: I want to ask you about bridges and the structure of them (I see you going over them), how you see the city.

MG: Walking, walking, walking. We never had a car so we always had to walk everywhere.…Later on the Tish people were sending bridge poems to one another. There are lots of bridges in this town. They're metaphors for metaphors, maybe. Transitions from one stage of life to another, one kind of economic situation — and the transition breaks down …

IK: They're connections, they're definitely —

MG: They certainly connect different class sections of the city, eh?

DM: They also bridge gulfs, abysses.…

IK: You have a feeling for getting back to the sea and the mountains and the trees and so on. It seems to be one of the things that pulls you. You seem to be sometimes between the electrical city and these other things.

MG: Well, I love the quiet, you know, because the bombs on London are still with me, they're still echoing, and I feel the fear and rage. So I love to get someplace that's utterly quiet, there's nothing but the wind and birds. It's a kind of greed. I feel greedy to get back to that cabin I'm in.

DM: You've been living there for four or five years now in what seems to city people absolutely intolerable conditions.

MG: It's warm. I'm always warm because I work my ass off to get enough fuel. I guess that takes up too much of my time and energy but I feel healthy for a change.

DM: Well, you have no electricity, no running water —

MG: The water runs under the cabin, it's a creek.

IK: That's right, there's the water and you're the bridge.

MG: The back of the cabin is on oil drums and the front of it is on an Indian midden right on the sea, and from my window way across the bay I can see where people say the cave is where the last native guerrille fighter, 0-Chew-Wun or-Ah-Tche-Wan, hung out.

DM: In the sixties you were involved with a whole group of people who later became labelled as the 'Downtown Poets.' You were one of the founding members of Intermedia and you were involved with the Poetry Front.

MG: 'The Downtown Poets' was just a label that Warren Tallman invented to let people know that there were other poets beside the Tish bunch. The Poetry Front happened out of individuals using Intermedia as a centre — it was a needed place, outside of the pub which always ended in drinking and a sort of dying. A place where you could actually make things, a factory — printed pages, tapes, events. It was a source of happiness for those of us working out of it. I ran into Gerry Gilbert there — I ran into him at the pub too. The Poetry Front was Gerry Gilbert's idea. I tried a music-poetry synthesis called the New Moon Pythian Sistrum that got sabotaged by the fact that the tape machines never worked. Poetry Front was a live performance situation. The Beatles were big in those days and so the idea of groups of people doing things, instead of doing things as individuals, was fun. I didn't take it too seriously. As far as I was concerned, I had my life as a poet and I wrote — certainly not as a group — but it was fun to do things together, you could play off each other. I never felt like a group.

DM: Who else was there?

MG: Ed Varney, Bonny Varney, Henry Rappaport. We went on tour a couple of times with Dennis Vance and the boys. Judith Copithorne was there. Judith was one person I tried to do collaboration with. We had totally alien views of what was appropriate language in public. Judith was really into Zen, she was really a beatnik, like Diane di Prima and Allen Ginsberg, and she felt that poetry had a spiritual function and when she did a poem it was a mantra. She was really into mantras and with her whole body she would take on mantras. I was in total opposition to that. I thought it was formalistic, symmetrical, and intellectually and emotionally odious, and I would scream and rail and jump around like a devil and make scenes and try to break it up. Judith for a long time thought this was personal but she knew she was powerful and it strengthened her to have this opposition, I think.

IK: When did you find out there was something besides drinking?

MG: Oh, that stuff.

IK: And that you could work with it. It seems to have given you a lot of space, I mean it's part of the space in your work.

MG: Well, it was a terrifying experience that first smoking. At one point I thought I was Elizabeth Barrett Browning — I was very much that sort of virginal lady and I didn't want to be any of those things. And then I hallucinated myself as a scraggly eagle. The earth was this jewelled ferris wheel that was so beautiful and everyone else was having fun down there and I was this miserable scraggly shivering eagle condemned to circle looking at that but wanting to go out, not wanting to be stuck in that carnival and wanting to look out into infinity, then to my horror looking out and it was a paper bag. The Army and Navy Store used to have a navy blue paper bag with these terrible looking fake stars on it, and to my terror I was in this paper bag after all and I panicked and ran out of the house. This was my first real marijuana experience, it was powerful stuff, real Acapulco Gold, and I ran out and saw there really were stars out there, out in Monterey, and I started swinging from the tree swing and the image of Justice came to me, the blind lady with the sword, and began to worry about the effect of my panic on the people in the house. I went back in and then they really started to work on me, power trips in all directions, intense put-downs from the little guy who saw himself head of the house, and arguments from me, all this stuff I could see in my head that justified my pain and terror. It could have been joy with some positive feedback. I felt that I was one of the millions of creators of the universe, not in a megalomaniac way, just that I had particular things, certain flower stamens or the pattern on certain tigers and cats to paint. At one point I was a set of puppets, one black one white, squabbling through eternity. But the people in the house seemed to need to subdue me — by that time I was in the kitchen and I grabbed a machete so they withdrew and I went into a dark room and eventually slept it off. After that I didn't touch the stuff for a long time. Then one day a man came to the door who knew some friends of mine. He looked like a Mexican, his name was Leon, and he said I've brought you some peyote. I was living really alone in this beautiful little house with my baby high on a hill looking out on this electric blue sea in California. There were these weird black pines — there never was any wind but they always looked windswept. I'd cooled out after that first experience — it was very cathartic — and then he came knocking on the door with this peyote so I took the peyote one day alone — I was afraid — and that's where I first hallucinated my angel. I didn't actually see it but I could see its light throbbing from the kitchen and I knew that if I walked in I would actually see it — that's in Westerns. And I also hallucinated the kamikaze pilots and identified with those beautiful men who sacrificed themselves in the sea, and through the angel and angelic music I became a sea goddess and wandered under the sea and picked up the broken body of the lover.…

DM: What exactly was your involvement at Simon Fraser in street theatre?

MG: None at all. If anything, I was involved in a guerrilla day care centre where at certain times we had to move the kids to different rooms —

DM: From whom?

MG: People who didn't like children and didn't think we had any right — that mothers had no prior claim to make demands on the human group. And they would get the administrators after us — the administrators didn't approve of students having children. There were campus cops but not too many in those days so we always managed to get away from them. It was a tribal kind of day care centre, the children helped, everyone had to pitch in, there was no sense that they were protected, they were part of the band and they loved it.

DM: Somebody described to me some kind of guerrilla theatre that happened in that big main mall —

MG: That wasn't theatre! That was real! That was politics. That was Martin Loney and the student rebellion. That was the great sit-inl I managed to get permission to do a thesis in behavioral sciences with video — they were huge cumbersome things, impossible to haul around. I was going to do it on suicide — there was a high rate of student suicide and I was going to interview psychologists and other people — but I used the camera to shoot some of the stuff that was going down. It was NOT THEATRE! It was REALITY!

DM: I don't mean theatre as distinct from the real at all.

MG: Well, Simon Fraser is a big Mayan theatre. Some Polish architects came and looked up and down those concrete stairs and said 'fascist architecture' — yeah. And I thought that Shrum would at a certain point take out the brain of the most brilliant student and toss it from that great green mound and we would all devour pieces of it so that we would get some of it too.…

IK: Tell me what the 'Paris River' is.

MG: Well, 'Paris' keeps on turning up — it's like 'roses.' Paris has many meanings for me, partly the illicit lover of Helen, he, who inspired by the goddesses, leads her away

from law and order, the wild man, a slayer of wolves, with obviously incredible charm. This is all developed in Helen in Egypt by H.D. And then Paris is the ideal city, the civilized city, as well as the decadent city.

DM: The spiritual city?…

MG: It's books, the marvellous conversations we have, the food and drink we have and the boogeying we do. It's Utopia.

DM: So what makes it unbearable? Is it the contradiction between that and the forces of oppression that operate within it?

MG: That, and the fact that there's just overload and I've got to get away because if you believe too completely in the human I'll become rational and then I can't be a poet any more. You've got to keep on going back, you know, to the 'tremendum' that Duncan speaks of, the powerful awful things that will DESTROY our city, that one day will just smash it — the earthquakes, the tsunami.

DM: The concrete poets are very involved in breaking up that rational imperialism inside language…I want to know if you've ever tried your hand at concrete poems?

MG: It's boring. I see the compellingness of it, especially if you've got to put out a book. I did it myself when I was actually publishing and printing my own stuff, like in Practical Knowledge. But it's boring to read for me.

DM: You're still tied to a working language

MG: Yeah, words, SPEECH.…

DM: Let's tackle your spelling now, Max.

MG: (groan) My spelling's pretty good.

DM: In Air 2 you spoke about 'the efficiency of eliminating remembrances of certain vowels' —

MG: What?

DM: Yeah. I thought it was a good statement. It seems to be a formula for the

principle that operates in bill bissett's spelling, but you choose only certain words to do this to, mainly 'you: 'yu,' 'u'—

MG: That's right.

DM: Why?

MG: Because it makes it hard to read. Because most people read so efficiently they don't even know they're spelling, so there's a certain few things—I like to put "I' in the lower case, as a point, and sometimes i don't. And I like 'becoz' because that's what it sounds like and everyone uses it so much so it's mocking pseudo-rationality.

DM: But the one we argued about was 'you.'

MG: 'Yu,' 'u'—okay. I think it's valid, like putting? into upper case or lowercase. There are lots of ways of spelling 'you' and there are different kinds of 'yous'. We're talking about the second person singular and the second person plural.

DM: In fact I thought you were mostly talking about the second person plural.

MG: Very often when you're talking about the second person plural I like to spell it 'yu.' 'Yu' is much more tough and barbaric. Objectified 'u' is totally barbaric, it's vicious and alienated so it really puts you back.

DM: So every time you use it it's a slam, a put-down?

MG: That's right. Or a coldness, a mockery.

DM: Are you speaking of an institutionalized 'you'?

MG: Yeah, when you become a number almost. Or even just a new space. It can be beautiful. There's one poem I've got where I've used three different spellings for 'you,' but I feel, you know, you used to have 'thou' and you can't use 'thou' any more—

IK: It's very formal.

MG: But when it was actually in use it was the most familiar. So this is almost a substitute.

DM: What is? I thought 'yu' or"u' were meant as tough and barbaric so how can they substitute for a familiar 'thou'?

MG: What I mean is there are different tones of voice and each tone registers on a scale of familiarity or love to alienation, rage, confusion — who am I when I call myself 'you' which is an old poetic convention — often I'm 'yu', someone I'm trying to objectify so as to analyze or put down. And then there is the great 'U that are out there, U that art' that we still talk to at certain times in our lives.

U

yu yu

you you

yu yu

U

DM: Can you tell us how the other books came to be?

MG: Guns of the West was the first. bill did that and he was very gentle, said, 'we're going to do a book,' and Lance Farrell came by and we took pictures without any lights and my upstairs neighbour, Eric, did beautiful, vague, mythic photos. I liked it, it was almost impossible to read, beautiful. Loved it.

DM: Very soft edge, huh?

MG: Yeah, very soft edge in an envelope. I was happy as a lark. bill put lots of pretty little Western brands and embroidery things on it. It was a very feminine book, and it was tough too. It had an iron cross on the cover. bill had his ideas about me and he was perfectly right. I guess I am a bit of a Nazi —

DM: — raised Communist!

MG: Yeah, it's got that fascist cross there and the boots, my new shiny boots.

DM: Then Hochelaga?

MG: Hochelaga he stole and named himself. I was sick, had been through Simon

Fraser and was feeling wounded. I didn't have any input into that book, he put all those illustrations in — and I love them, I think they're just great. I only regret that certain poems were left out of that book that should have been included.

DM: So bill just decided it was time for you to have another book out?

MG: And so came in, looked around, saw where the pile of shit was, grabbed a bunch and ran and I chased him and I couldn't catch up with him — he's got longer legs than I have — and I didn't know where he was living at the time. So the next thing I knew, there was a book out.

DM: Then Bertrand LaChance's book?

MG: I'd run away to the Island and was living in Esquimalt at Signal Hill Creative Centre being quite depressed and isolated and trying to figure out something or other, writing quite a bit but miserable. Bertrand sent me a letter and I was very glad to receive it and enter into a dialogue by letter, and so he put that out (Air 2). It was very poorly done, bad typing, lots of mistakes, but it got well distributed. I get a lot of feedback from Air. Then Westerns — Westerns was beautifully done. By then Bertrand was serious, this was years later and he was with Art Richardson (who designed the book). He did a beautifully clean job and Linda Gilbert did the typesetting. Westerns is all three of those early books reprinted: Guns of the West, Practical Knowledge, which I printed myself on the Roneo at Intermedia, and Hochelaga.…

DM: We haven't talked about your trip up north or any of your trips.

MG: That's where the influence of the westerns comes through the job. Getting a job out of town. This is where jobs save you, people save you, you get out of yourself. I was up in Penny, and then in Stewart — they're both towns up north. Getting away from your old identities, finding new aspects of yourself by leaving the damned village.

IK: Oh but it's simpler than that, isn't it? You're broke and need to make some money, find a job.

MG: No, I didn't leave out of some heroic desire to kickoff. I mean I'd leave out of the desire to live. Your life is what's driving you.

DM: But leaving fixed patterns behind is a pretty constant theme for you.

MG: Oh yeah, we all want to do that. Liberation is doing that, kicking off the traces and finding new ways to let your real life come through, through the life that's been imposed, that your friends and intellectual community have imposed on you with their decadent traditions.

DM: It's equivalent to finding new ways to speak.

MG: Well, you find new ways to be, then you find new speech. Existence precedes speech. That's existential cant, but —

DM: Once I think you find a new way to speak of it, you can suddenly see it as a possible way to live.

MG: We give that to each other. But I think we get it from each other. I hear it from Diane di Prima or bill bissett or Kerouac or Snyder. I hear it from them, I don't come up with it.

DM: But that's what 'teachers' are for.

MG: Yeah, I'm no hero, I haven't created anything. Well, maybe I'm a hero, but.

(laughter)

from *TCR* 2.5, Summer 1991

OLD GOTHIC MAR 1985

when the daughters of the night
meet the children of the moon
it is useless to complain get out of my garden
the old folk come anyhow
to correct the lines yu have cut in the sidewalk
what is borne out is
friendship with bad animals, not one
but worships the sun

when the daughters of the night
meet the children of the moon
they are cued in by arrogant strangers
they don't pass up the chance to eat greasy fries
they look at yu through gold fish bowls
they perpetuate their species in ink

they spin on their sockets singing, "monday monday monday"
they mass with the million starlings up and down the town
the inside city of string singing
"my cousin is Joy. let's get over that rainbow.
can we make of philosophy an iron fence, a zoo for the generals?"

this silence i need is worse than dirt

the killer collapses on a bed of coals

it seems it's love i'm against and all
correct procedure

when the daughters of the night meet the children of day
they still want to run along the telephone wires through
the amethyst corridor of rain

a violinist is hanged from the weirdest of trees
the tallest and most chilling
on that abandoned table land
just under
the mountain beyond sleep

I HAD TO BUY A NEW BROOM

he has on a kilt of lemon leaves. the demon at the gate. at each hour
some angel saying, "Come," at each day. each minute. each second.

seasoned as the meat the careful inquisition. lazy the goat's walk up
the perfect road of marble. it's the confusion over the owl they care
for.

pour out your long ribbon of spine over pineland in summer heat. the
beach is full of boat people. they are looking among the reeds.
prone the kid screams.

continue with this ruby face. its eyes that are simply openings into the
public sky. pedal the boat. there's never any wind on this old oblong
pool. pears on this tree in golden nowhere. i fled when i saw red
skirts.

the radio is irrelevant he thought he heard his master say part me a
long park in all this rubble. first we have to search for the bodies.
first. first is hurry up and forget yr socks. the volcano is erupting
and we've got to run.

but the demon was lying and i have forgotten everything.

yu will be lent
the cypher
as yu have been given
the glyph

fall far off now. the lean farmer comes to the fence. a battle ship
painted azure with yellow numbers. PARLIAMENT IS OUT shouts
September.
yu have to do orders, requisitions. lions jump out the king's back door.

the desert never looked so good. it was radiant with radium.

ii

peleponesia a subtle turn of asthma. it's a kind of moral code. green ducks come up to fish you. no more days. i like the rules less and less.

a penny for yr dread. the kid with the purple collar was missing teeth. his mistress thot he shld not have come so far. it was pretty well painted.

out of the bowl of rice the duck's head emerged. there was dismay in the stands. the goddess kissed the referee. crucify her, crucify her.

the red face of a roosevelt, a truman. they put it behind the bushes.

pick a pit of pickled petters all wet at their picnic on the moon. pumas appear and fairly grizzled bears. hey, cut that fucking pounding out.

the masks of mcluhan like the islets of langherhans. a coil not a serpent. sez the sparrow, i'm wise

RIFF FOR A BILL (19)

so
yu made all the right moves and fell into the hole
chireep chireep, all the little frogs of night
paint yu into the centre of their new world at the foot of
the Andes. frogs
preach to their constituency at midnight like punks.
a lot of people hate them.
and pigeons and gulls.
i meet the full word after the garbage trucks barrage my dreams.
chirp chirp chirp, the cockroach calls with its one song to
its lovely mate. she
climbs on his back and licks delicious glands.
two thrones sit empty staring severely from
the top of a brick factory.
brick
factoring
as brick
must
it being such a political situation it is destined for.
one does see an occasional lone brick
struggling quietly in a puddle.
even on the sea's edge
yu might find one
red and still unbarnacled, eaten only by
subtle chemicals.
this also torments many; a brick with
or without
a mission.
yu see, everyone is expected to attend the executions.
to be still and silent like all downtown twenty storey buildings.
the skinny junkey with the death's head tattooed on his arm
sits on the sidewalk at the feet of these morose protrusions.

overhead, the window of the diamond's black land,
the stereo's great leaden plain where achilles and colonel ollie north
stride with their briefcases,
the chainsaw' s hotel room,
the centrifugal screamings of our flying planet
hovering over a shrinking sun.
sun ponders flinging us out
to the shredders,
myrmidon stones and missiles of ice
that clash and smash and shatter apart
spinning and sparring in intricate rings
round planets like us
that have lost out.

FEB. 1990

writing directly into memory. legs up by the lake suddenly locked. the eternal happiness on mountains of the rich. the girls around the big iron pot, ringing it in the glen. the function of the rogue on the contemporary literary scene and its relationship to cows anywhere. backtrack. gridlock. and the flow of sweet avon lady, shakespeare around for coffee and making a pest of himself. twee woods. coca cola in the sacred stream. the masturbatory functions of hair. nature discovered as death by darkling toads. so long loafers and fishers, the aim of conservatives to take the money from the previously lower feudal classes. render them grateful slaves. 1066. written law. longbow arrows in the eyes of autoworkers. if yu fail as an entrepreneur yu can wash cups at the prison. duckshit in yr drinking water keep yu serene. the cup of the goddess in her fingers of earth. there's a point at which the river's force lets yu see. stay there.

LATE SUMMER, 1990

amethyst
a methistos

against drunkedness

a chair is not a war someone sat upon

WHY HAVE YOU SAID
the big blue boat comes billowing out of aegean helium
what aquarian gems
past topaz into sagittarius, ameranthene, cool
past springs, ginger, old ale
how are the trees that speak fire?

package that, honey, and pass the pail
big good women that we are
we pride ourselves on our big pink pope

bare left, sally ann, and bring only a bottle of water

i go where my dream takes me
into the sooty city
bring the green wind

solemn sol emerges with batteries, wires, buttons, pumps, head
blazing
grey eyes promising vast empty lands
sheik maybe saying unto his people, yeah, verily

the lady with the ivory neck lace
so intricate the silver
somewhere in china
master alive with his knife
and some hidden beauty
whittling teeth

transparent milk cherry pink of alexandrite
the change in direction of energy waves on passing from one
medium
to another in which they have different velocity
chatoyancy, dichroism, opalescence and
asterism
that movement that just want to shine

the heck, yu say
i remember the time the chief blinded me, some
ten million moons ago
someone took me in and let me sit by a fire and sing five million
moons and tell tales
with the voices of women
screaming or cooing
hot or cold
and i sat there and laughed
highly idiosyncratic wood notes

"when adam delved
and eve span
who was lord and master
then?"

ii

everybody will give me their credit cards and written permission
to
sign.
collapse once more into ruby happiness.
if yu are restless
run about.
uproot trees if yu wish
or howl yr need.

turn
turn
again
dick wittington
and become the Lord Mayor of London

the moon of the water-jug-pourer
eclipsing the raging lion of the sun
the ego ready to desert the sex

the sex in the desert
mutilated by old women with rusty tin can tops
scraping sticking together the vagina
till it can be opened only
with a knife

it is written
in the Vancouver Sun, Spring of 1990
that Saddam Hussein has passed a law in Iraq
that a man
can legally kill
for suspicion of adultery in his home
a mother, sister, cousin, daughter, wife

or some one
from Bos Town

iii

the herd
the herd
the herd
the herd
the herd
the herd
the herd
the herd
the herd

prayer for a dark man
prayer for a dark man
prayer for a dark man
prayer for a dark man
prayer for a dark man
prayer from a dark man
prayer from a dark man
prayer from a dark man
prayer from a dark man

the moon
the moon
the moon
the moon
the moon
the moon
the moon
the moon

may she be kind to kine
and kin be kind
and free from fear of strangers

give us not our daily train except for our coming and going,
no roar
through our silent grass lands

mad
mud
man
lead us all in song
and we're up and going
but he scream us back such enlightened fury
the people scramble over each other to get out
of
the lawful existence
in which it is possible
to be happy

her voice, her papers and her feet

Rhoda Rosenfeld, 1975

voice, voice is so amazing, voice
i like the way her papers were
i like the way her feet go a little pidgeon toed

from *TCR* 2.23, Fall 1997

THE FLYING EAGLE, 1966

This was on the north side of a very big hill in Vancouver. Some of us lived where it suddenly dipped as though about to dump you into the silver-green sea. Once you realized it was the giant bear-shaped black mountains inducing this hallucination you attempted to relax. A terrifying visual, a solid abyss, set out to fade you to cinders in a time long enough to experience being in the direct path of a radiating lava flow changing daily but getting wider and more entrapping; but no, that was the actual capitalist system, with all its deadly tentacles we could see coming, and most people in Pompei saw they could not outrun it and stayed there as many sentences making a statement. themselves as stone.

on this hill facing north into that black set of pages over a lake behind an infinity that cannot yet get to Lil'wat, there were many old amazing buildings with large rooms, the cheapest of which were dark and cold so individuals had to learn to be cave people again, those who remembered how necessary it was occasionally to live and survive asteroid assaults and to discuss the necessity of storing, having observed those little mouse gods who had stored as long as anyone could talk about remembering. My concern then as always was how to keep my body warm and the possessions few and essential enough to move out on a moment's notice, something i no doubt had picked up in england where i was born in I 940, more or less in the epicentre of the second world war in europe, we never discussed the other guys, god we're a cantankerous species but i guess all species are that way, no peace, never any peace, but maybe this is just an angle from an ultimately

artificially constructed subject once dignified by the word “ego” and “soul” which was not the femininely human image of Psyche, butterfly, and mistress of *technes*, having been taught by the goddess herself no, it was with some sort of pacifist warrior class of monks i found myself, a class who took for themselves the privilege of living and working and acting together due to a rumour of
crazed monsters flying over the sea to slaughter the inhabitants wherever they landed, to cut them open where meet the gut and the lungs and the heart (a criss-cross shape) and to turn them inside out, alive, the heart beating, the lungs breathing

this they called “the flying eagle”

BERSERKER watch!

and so to watch
Joan at her fire
Pope Joan doing DOS
dis dos
we’re talkin now
what constitutes a community
is it a lot of ideas?
this line allowed by dos but breaking words at an end so meaning is either stopped dead or shattered

but there is nothing here, nothing left, nothing gone, there was nothing
a great, black shimmering emptiness, a Home-hardware molded fibreglass front door hanging in a wall of nothingness with nothing before and nothing behind

but somehow if you went out and met it, there was the earth
there was slime
cold or warm
terrifying

alien
flesh
to touch and shrink
or open to its glory

there still was somewhere a forest, pretty close to the sea, a beach
a place to build a fire
it was fire we were always after, a way to keep warm, but our impro-
vised methods produced nothing but smoke and soot and unburned
keratenes, and tooth decay and a continual illness that always seemed
to be a product of our condition. We had our visionaries, those who
would say, no, it really isn't that way, don't yah see and it set yu back
for long enough to talk till bill was tired out and i went home and
maybe wrote a poem with a little of the holy herb

occasionally bill or bill and martina or bill and lance farrell or bill and
diane di prima would drop by and bill might leave with some poems
or deliver a blewointment. i never knew how he did it, i was lucky
enough that a poet as yet unbeknownst to me named f.r. scott, had
recently invented welfare; i could not fit into capitalism and i tried and
tried, possibly i would have fit into socialism but i doubt it, somehow
hippies were, in my subjective evaluation, trying to effect a truly primi-
tive and authentic communism, which ultimately died of its contradic-
tions which capitalism will too and take a lot of us with it as in every
inhuman social cycle . . . genocide a consistent ceaseless, inconceivable
nightmare under the shimmering electric vulva of chaos
shifting aurora of pierced liquid
slugs, snails, worms, slowly- moving underground slime-moulds
eternally observing spiders, scientific flies, fleas, ants, grasshoppers,
meat-eating mantises, no other image is needed for this sacerdotal
alien, the scholar

"*and all the little birds*
in yon merry green broom
with her blo od THEY

should aa all have *their fill*"
this is owing, an accounting, a sanctifying, a measuring, a cheating, i hate it. this is the way it is

this is not forgetting the huge cold damp dark studios, astounding, frequently confounding the soul in cold black shivering with fear and ecstasy of their beauty, cold cold heart a real but negative concept, sustaining prussian blue oils oozing over
the eagle's beak
a focusing in labyrinths of sometimes cosy hippy households bookish mousehouses

study a strange cerement
for each of these creatures

in yon tender green broom
with her blood

once we heard them gossiping, now, having planted our fields with sunflowers and oats
they have moved off till next winter

poem for a new bill

at one point or another we all lived on this big hill facing north with many good streams, bushes, berries, grasses, animals, fish, birds

smoke came and the murder of the woods
what <u>are</u> his claims?
steel came, noise came and never died

so it is we listen to the birds conversing in their crazy and beautiful anxiety

just listen

then whistle

crow comes
chuckles
crow sees me every day
knows where i am

gulls discuss immediate existence, with their political sopranos
the linnets' bitching and fear

turns into triumph
the triumph of the river

▪

the triumph of the river

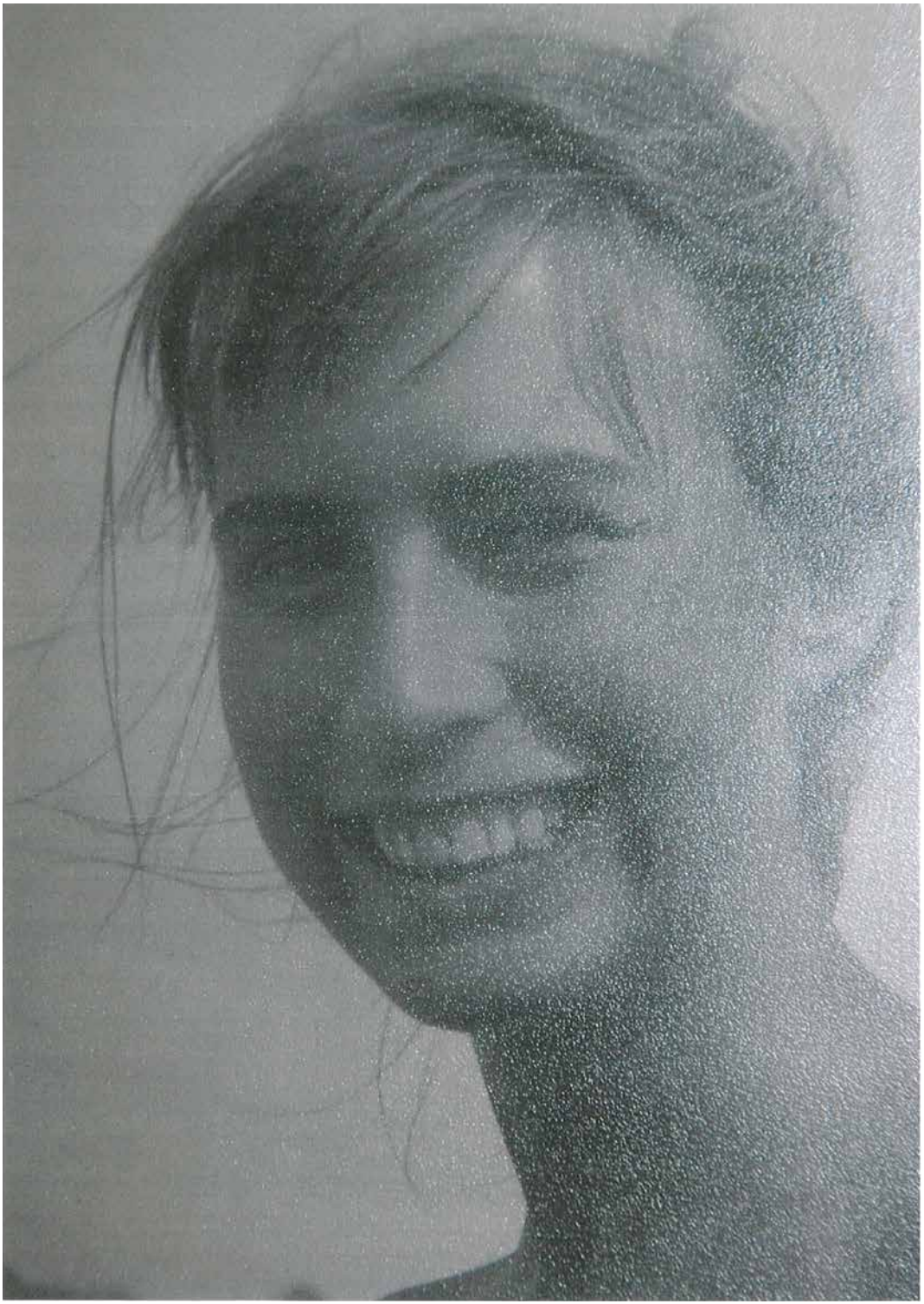
the 430 vancouver schoolboard jobs cancelled
the smashed-up squatter houses Knight Street Bridge South
side of the River

jan 96 b.c. n.d.p. gov't cut all employable people under the age of fiftytwo $48 dollars a month; $500 a month for rent, food, medicine, transportation communication bus and telephone to people on welfare:$500 a month and a 75% tax on anything they might try to earn

April 1, 1997, sick, old unemployable people to be cut back $97.oo a month.
In this way the government will reduce the living of 16,000
therebye saving the taxpayers $23 million
which would have gone to retailers and real estate owners

Apr 23, 1997 vancouver schoolboards cut 300 more jobs

i dream i'm in a world wide flood stream in a kayak
without a paddle



12 or 20 questions: with Maxine Gadd, January 2008

rob mclennan

RM: How did your first book change your life?

MG: I bought a new pair of boots.

Bill Bissett published my first book which he called, Guns of the West.

I was living over the lane of Fourth Avenue in Kitsilano in Vancouver, B.C. on Welfare which had just come into being. (Thanks to a poet named AJ Smith, I am told.) In those days rents were cheap and even cheaper in Kits. Some of my friends had small suites in stone palaces.

One day bill turns up with an armful of my poems beautifully mimeoed with western style decorations called Guns of the West. I guess that started my famous career.

Being a published poet did cast some blessings around me. It would be a long list, that of those to whom I am grateful. I tended to exist in a poor state of development in cold dark places, in a low grade infection which I shared with the communities that accepted me. Depression was a given. But the dark days were sometimes lit up with intellectual and aesthetic and compassionate events of brilliance. Poems issued in the lonely thoughtful darkness that ensued.

RM: How long have you lived in Vancouver, and how does geography, if at all, impact on your writing? Does race or gender make any impact on your work?

MG: Have lived in Canada since 1946, Vancouver since 1947 with different attempts to escape. Geography grinds on me like it grinds on everyone else (the short answer). Sixteen years of trying to make bad software work for me grinds a lot more right now; though since I was a teenager living near the beach at the bottom of the street I have had nightmares of tsunamis earthquakes, volcanoes, comets, and since the 50's, machine debris that can take us all out.

Race and gender have driven me crazy. Which, I guess, is why we have them.

RM: Where does a poem usually begin for you? Are you an author of short pieces that end up combining into a larger project, or are you working on a "book" from the very beginning?

MG: I've always believed all people work on the book of life and that there is something called poetry everyone recognizes. So it seems there are many poetries, which I try to study when I can. The poem comes at unknown and unknowable instances though sometimes I can set out on an assignment. I've had to value chaos.

I have been privileged to work on it as it came and lucky to to born at a time that Word Perfect would let you create indexes and cursed to be born at a time another software corporation could systematically strip such programmes. The book. All that it can be. The right to express whatever I could wring out.

RM: Are public readings part of or counter to your creative process?

MG: My first audience thrill was in 1946 near the age of six in a perfect little country school in Dorset, England. There was a stage in the class room. I got to to read aloud Christina Rossetti's poem, "Goblin Market." Got a rapturous response from my class mates. I was hooked; though soon separated from my supply.

For me reading aloud was an instant project which proves the work.

RM: Do you have any theoretical concerns behind your writing?

MG: My only theoretical concerns behind my writing are theoretical concerns. Have been fortunate in the past twenty years of being back in Vancouver, listening slack-jawed to a bevy of magnificent poets and students of theory. Delicately coutured politicity now seems the rage where I hang out.

RM: What kinds of questions are you trying to answer with your work? What do you even think the current questions are?

MG: The current questions are part of the eternal questions, just rephrased more stylishly than before.

The real questions are the ones we can't posit or admit into our skins. Some of them, sane citizens say, they don't need and who am I to challenge them? Why do I need to study theology?

As a feminist the psychological question of identity still hangs out there, with a criminal suspicion that there is one somewhere under the skin. I think I know why I keep finding people begging and starving, sleeping on the streets.

RM: Do you find the process of working with an outside editor difficult or essential (or both)?

MG: All of the above.

RM: After having published more than a couple of titles over the years, do you find the process of book-making harder or easier?

MG: It is still pretty hard. But that's what we're looking for — hard copy.

RM: When was the last time you ate a pear?

MG: I don't think I can answer this question.

RM: What is the best piece of advice you've heard (not necessarily given to you directly)?

MG: Keep moving.

RM: What kind of writing routine do you tend to keep, or do you even have one? How does a typical day (for you) begin?

MG: I stay up late into the night trying to gather my thoughts; I sleep with weird dreams and wake up to the sound of "Oh Canada" played on a huge fog horn. I get off the floor and find some clothes and attend my sacred rites, then make tea, microwave my oatmeal. Sit down and try to figure out where to start. Get back to my own little office, turn on computers. Do my email, send the massive streams of Spam back to the Spam filter at Vancouver Community Net then try to answer ionic demands.

RM: When your writing gets stalled, where do you turn or return for (for lack of a better word) inspiration?

MG: Mood altering substances help me to get back to the Muse, Memory, though lately I haven't been able to find any.

RM: How does your most recent book compare to your previous work? How does it feel different?

MG: *Backup to Babylon* is strictly an expansion of *Lost Language* (Coach House 1982). Some of the same poems are in it. Which points to the brilliant editing of Daphne Marlatt and Ingrid Klassen.

RM: David W. McFadden once said that books come from books, but are there any other forms that influence your work, whether nature, music, science or visual art?

MG: Dance. Science movies on TV. The daily news. Street Theatre. The language of my neighbourhood. My left-wing Aquarian moon parents adopted painters when I was a child and I used to attend art galleries.

RM: What other writers or writings are important for your work, or simply your life outside of your work?

MG: Kootenay School. Writers: Christine Stewart, Melissa Wolsak, Deanna Ferguson, Lisa Robertson, Susan Clark, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, Donato Mancini, that goddam idiot, X, Jeff Derksen, Fred Wah, Reg Johanson, Catriona Strang, Marie Anneharte Baker, Daphne Marlatt, Rhoda Rosenfeld, Judith Copithorne, Mona Fertig — , Bill Bissett . . . other writers I have temporarily forgotten.

I read *West Coast Line* and *The Capilano Review* and whatever I'm researching.

RM: What would you like to do that you haven't yet done?

MG: Make some audio books.

RM: If you could pick any other occupation to attempt, what would it be?

MG: Studying "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion" in a nice liberal theology school.

RM: Or, alternately, what do you think you would have ended up doing had you not been a writer?

MG: Dying of exposure and violence on the street.

RM: What made you write, as opposed to doing something else?

MG: Illness.

RM: What was the last great book you read?

MG: *PostModern explained to children* by Lyotard and Pessoa's *July or the months of astonishment* by Christine Stewart. Also the book of essays by Robin Blazer called, *The Fire*.

RM: What was the last great film?

MG: The medium is so overwhelming I can't judge it. Have rarely gone out to movies — too expensive.

RM: What are you currently working on?

MG: Poems from 1994. Trying to organize boxes of paper. Contributions to SFU's collection of "Downtown Vancouver." Trying to make Linux of some sort work on my machine. Trying to figure out how to live. Like, is the writing I usually do a business?

from GREENSTONE COVE

Maxine Meets Proteus in Gastown

scene one

1967, the street

cordova
has led me lonely
to the mountain pass
all night long
the indians are singing carry me away red eyed daemons
rush past me and my friend
hunker in the little hatchway filled with bliss
filled with the young one's dream
of midnight living
of giant blue souls
of the noble nine foot monk
striding thru
this mountain highway
    his huge hand field up HALT
        the hand of my friend Martin
the little rat faces holding hard
    to our stories for five year olds

Dr. Fu Manchu squats
down beside us and invites us home
for a drink
with the Dalai Lama
It is hard to refuse
such finesse
but we want to wait
till this
street
is gold
at dawn
my friend
has disappeared

and for half an hour the wind takes me down to the

trees
where an old man
is twisting the body
of a rat

he looks at me sadly and sez
i cn show you where the bears are but
they
they're too big fr me now
and the farmers shoot yu if yu even ask

fr a job and fr welfare
yv got to have an address at the Hung Up Inn
where the young junkies wld twist my body like this rat's

so yu cn devour this with some equanimity , say i conferring on the old man a
robe of red velvet come on across the water, he sez and see where i live
tis the ancient forest, i come into town for the kill the kill only

and what of yr friends say i
wondering of mine

heroes, ma'am, he sez, all brave like yrself and tight, tight
as an arse that speaks; they despise all that's ignoble like myself
but you, you oh lady they'd take to the highest estate, come meet the princes of the forest
and amazons there are there too all thrust into life
shining with inheritance
though none will spend a sou
for the soul of old Jean Paul

yr from Mallardville, then, are yu, i ask
unstitching the soles of the old man's shoes
yr fever's past, buddy
these now go to the soup
for the one last union

ah, pegasus, he cries
yu cldn't spare an hour to take an old man to Dairyland

my pleasure, say i
maybe they'll let you keep yr rat in their fridge
and we walk off, hand in hand

coming up powell street into the rising sun
me feeling soft and gentle as an old lady who has done no wrong
who gave birth to children like butter
and kept them alive in apple trees
who took them all swimming in the one big sea
and now has been set free
to enter her City

from 3.17, Spring 2012 (40th anniversary issue)

Pre-remains, a play

PERSONAE
Cole
Amaryllis
Trillium
Jack Tar
Great White Slug

COLE: Amaryllis yu survive pellucid, pertinent to yr field, glad to be alive over winter in spite of the sad stick brown of sleepers and the dead.

AMARYLLIS: (looking in a mirror) Get away from me, Cole, you giddy moth. I will slap yu back into the Blackhole and still feel remorse for yr bad-ass bravery. Oh, yeah, I'll be bleeding milk for all the molds, the earthworms that ignore me and my immortal corpse, sandy mind of some lady.

COLE: Enter elements of the fat starved, the happy hikers, the bicycle with the wratched naked rim, Kelvinists, Enochians, parchments of soaked and sun-dried grass on the river bank, its salacious and despondent muds and their mudders, elephants tyrannosaurids, sunken fork-lifts, lined dependencies, quarked and desperate markets, cores of uncles made an unmade again. We saunter along longing for parched canyons outside of poisoned botanical caves. I see yu sinking past the Solstice. I'm sick of pity as yu are; yr only chance is to blat out yr prologema. Can I make a dying flower sing?

AMARYLLIS: Not a chance in a million, ancient cohort. Not one of yr local hills or dales meet me long enough for anything but water bane. Where the hell can I find a channel?

ENTER TRILLIUM.
COLE AND AMARYLLIS SHRIEK: Trillium!

TRILLIUM: So you think you're nicer than Jesus.

AMARYLLIS: (sings) I keep people alive in winter
and part of the summer too-oo
And the only only thing
I ever did wrong . . .

ALL THREE: Was to keep her from the froggy froggy dew.

COLE: Let's get bloated, shall we; I have brung a long dead duck such as my Neanderthal ancestors did in, hanging in a cave for the bats to shit on, for the decimated Saber Tooth to die for.

AMARYLLIS: Cole is so sourly dour.

COLE: Some one buried my river in tar.

TRILLIUM: Jack Tar stops the sailor from slipping and falling to the reeling, yawing awful boat on an ocean. Yu should rejoice in Jack Tar eliminating all those ugly ducks.

COLE: How hard it is for the delicate to wallow. Somewhere there must be old loves to give yu an electronic kiss. Enough Martian sunlight. A lifetime membership in plexiglass, vinyl to whine up into stringed blues. In Chinatown I've observed marble lilies, silver white, persistently . . . . But the tide is coming up Reefer Street and soles or souls of the ocean are pushing me with their martini cool heels. There's a HERizon to be on, Amaryllis . . .

ENTER JACK TAR.

JACK TAR: Yu mean whore-izon, yu tarts.

COLE, TRILLIUM AND AMARYLLIS SCREAM.

ENTER THE GREAT WHITE SLUG, HUMMING AND HAWING AND LOOKING FOR A PAIR OF GLASSES IN THE BUSHES WHICH IT DOES FIND USELESS AND SLIDES OVER and then slimes Jack Tar and glides away entrancing the audience out into the sunshine of another devastating day or even a dusty old corridor.

A ballet ensues in which everyone is one's favorite spineless creature. Some rub their wings together and make an awesome music. Others dissolve into cosmic goo.

Pash Play

PERSONAE
Postula
Miss Press
Trot
Deedee
Doris Day
Chief Cathy
Diva, the God of Wine

POSTULA: Oh I've quite lost all decency since this agley spate of novels; de-sensey is also gone, density trying to mingle and really, my dear, not making it.

MISS PRESS: Sorry darling, I bethought I espied alley-mist.

TROT: That is not a thot that can be had except you had it. Why, by Chance?

DEEDEE: Dare you invoke that august name? What are your credentials?

TROT: Why I have not. My name is "Trot."

POSTULA: Surely not Mistress Trot from the castle laundry?

TROT: My great Gran, man.

MISS PRESS: Yu mean, ma'm, wham bam.

TROT: I appreciate your comment. Indeed, miss, it goes up by the hour.

POSTULA: So you are her great grant daughter.

TROT: Alas it is so. What can Trot do but dot thots an laugh down the dam with

the boys, all through the night the ripening of that newly set concrete, sighing under the river.

DORIS DAY: My, what a fine clean poem you have here and many a debble den up there in the Dracula mountain! Chief, GET IN HERE AND SETTLE THE NATIVES.

CHIEF CATHY: The natives are less or more but always settled about the settlements. And it's hard to know unless you have it the trouble you're in.

POSTULA: Sediment of industrial ooze, turpentine and benzine and other heavy weighing oils on our waters. Often I bless the whale that was killed for my foremothers' beauty the suppleness of their skins, their poison assent. Oh there I go, pulled down by DOS again.

TROT: DOS is sod spelled backwards.

MISS PRESS: Same thing only more useful.

POSTULA: The auld sod.

DIVA, THE GOD OF WINE APPEARS AND everybuddy is awed by the Plutonic Power of his beauty. Also impressive are the gold embroidered beast and long tales floating on dark and stormy winter night.

POSTULA: We're speechless, Lord.

DIVA: What do you want? I have everything here, cocaine, smack, uppers, downers . . .

SHE WHIPS OPEN HER JACKET TO REVEAL INTRICATE POCKETS FULL OF STUFF.

TROT: This guy has no lush breasts but a veritable pharmacy in his waistcoat. He seems to be the butcher, the baker, the candle stick maker or I'm not florist for Queen Anne, which I'm not because I'm Trot.

DIVA: Dare you look at me, you, a mere figment of some laggard's imagination?

TROT: I am a thought, hence universal. Anyone could conceive of me, given german circumstances. Hence my innocence.

POSTULA: Guilty as charged, You Honour, but you know what you can do with your rap.

DIVA: Well, listen, you guys. It's been a slice. We'll conTINTINTINue all night.

Babylon is Gone, I Weep for Babylon

Where has she gone?

That day she was sitting on a foldable camp chair in her red coat and wide-brimmed pink hat, her tracts to her left in a portable shelf of Bibles and literature organized as a wall to protect her from the corner of Hastings and Abbott. She it was who could shout up from the portable chair a mighty voice and a message that cowed the most aggressive young or old male who towered over her, shouting.

The first time I saw her she was further east on Hastings between Funky Winkerbean's pub and Save On Meats. Or was it the Army and Navy? As I passed her she sang like the radical diva she was,
"Glory unto the Lord
Glory unto the Lord
From the rising of the Sun
To the falling of the Moon"

She had my soul.
For a while I was a regular, walking by her, bending a little in my speedy fear-space-time continuum to listen for a song. But in a short time there was no more singing. Just loud clear ravings in the distance then, "Glory Glory Glory, Praise the Lord."

Politely I would repeat her approbation, thinking, "Just Who Is this Lord." One day I paid her a dollar for one of her tracts, took it home and was so scandalized by her Divine Intolerance I stupidly threw it out.

At a certain point in twenty or less years she moved westward to the corner of Hastings and Abbott Street where the long derelict hunk of bricks and space still called Woodwards was: sometimes a movie set, once a W art show and before that the most useful, varied and affordable food, shoes, clothing, gardening tool, spring bulb and clothing store in town. For years I kept a pair of

soft leathered but structured boots I bought there. Across Hastings on the east side of Abbott was a large laundromat. A reportedly nicely-kept upstairs SRO. And a genuine cobbler's shop that repaired our shoes as they fell apart. I'm raving from hindsight oh brave preacher. Everything wears out, ends up weary.

Across from her she still had the patrons of a real country western bar to rave against as well as the shoe repair. And directly across, more incidental gatherings of grey and dusty ghostly old young people. Sometimes she disappeared but always came back again. I asked people at Carnegie and someone, was it Muriel Marjorie, said that she went back to Jamaica, on to Africa and Europe to attend congresses of street preachers.

I once helped her haul her operation aboard the Granville bus going west. She seemed profoundly embarrassed.

I saw her again at the corner the Woodward's protest group had occupied for three months before it had been removed. The Homeless Demonstration had had a fortuitous summer, warm and dry, even at night. Finally, with shrinking days and cold, came the rain and flu. People had extended tarps from the old Woodwards overhang, which supported a ladder for protesters and acted as a davit from which the honey buckets of the inside occupiers were delivered down to the people on the street, the tenters, who took them over to the Dera Pub to dispose of in their toilets. That's another story.

Woodwards became guarded by Sikh warriors in Security uniforms and even a dog or two. Hoardings crowing "An Intellectual Property" with pictures of local artists went up to prevent further occupations. Headlines told of high finance developers. People crumbled in the winter.

One day the Woodward's civic process took the public into a large room with models on tables presented by competing developers. The main body of the store had been exploded then reduced to some possibly dangerous dust and rubble but they kept or tried to keep the woodframe building on the corner. It was here that the promises of a beautiful life replacing this banal history were shown.

Wandering about musing on these dreams I met Carnegie community poet Delany Miriam Azreal. We were both bummed out by this show and its people. We escaped back to Hastings Street and found the preacher lady on her chair weeping real tears. Delany and I stopped and knelt down on the sidewalk beside her. I asked, "Why are you crying?" And she said, "I am weeping for Babylon. Babylon will be no more."

"You mean all around here," I asked, pointing to the gloomy street, the poor people crouching in door wells, and the great brickhulk under which we sat.

"Poor Babylon," she cried, not loudly but deeply, warmly.

"Is it those images of new buildings inside this door?" I asked.

"Babylon, Babylon is lost," she cried.

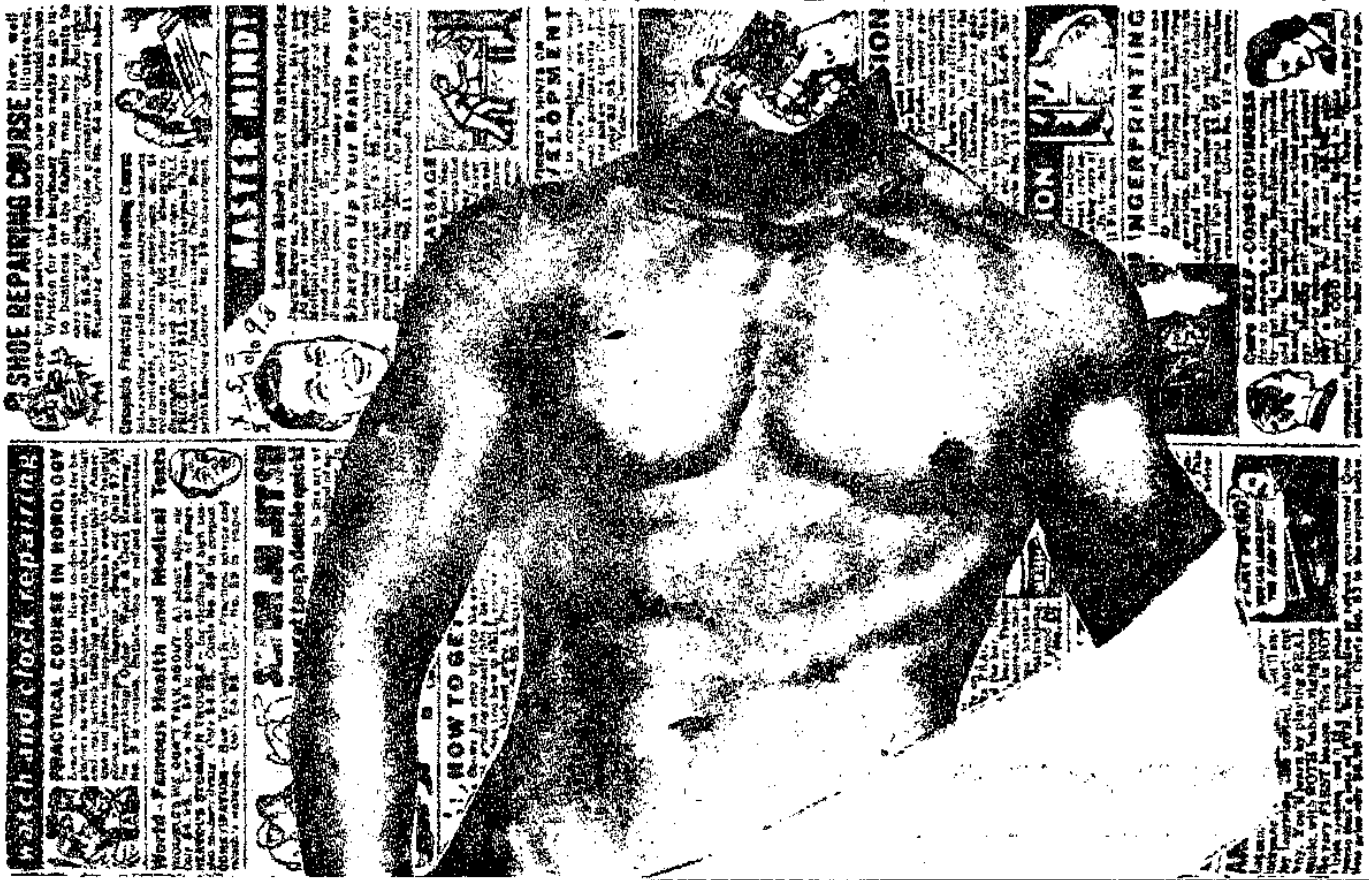
Delany and I sat beside her on the sidewalk assenting with our own sorrow her sorrow. She was indeed right, as right as anyone can be. Then, looking up at new towers everywhere in distant parts of town outside of the Downtown Eastside, up town, downtown, Yale town and remembering all my walks; the accumulating high rises of the West End; and Coal Harbour, which once been a thriving ship building village. And I remembered the dream of old-time Sixties poet and musician Howard how all the town of Vancouver was to be drowned like Atlantis under the ocean, this prophecy all but accepted totally now by climatologists as being possible by as early as 2012. I told her of this prophecy that is coming to be true; the polar ice caps and the remnants of once vast glaciers are all melting.

"One day everything here will be under the ocean. This Babylon will be no more."

She dried her tears and we said goodbye to go to our own doomed homes in the Downtown Eastside. I looked back and saw her crying and singing, "Oh Babylon, poor Babylon, Babylon will be no more."

PRACTICAL $ $ $ $

$ $ $ $ KNOWLEDGE



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Subworlds: A Conversation (Extracts)

Kim Minkus & Maxine Gadd

MG: I really need to be able to distance myself from a poem. Just let it lie. And sometimes the longer it lies the better. I think a poem does have a shape, and sometimes it comes and you don't want to interfere with it, so you write as fast as you can to get as much of it as you can remember. It's like a dream, in a way, isn't it? Living dreams that come to you. And often it goes from you — that sort of memory of that shape. So that's why it's good to put it in a box and then years later you can pick it up and say "Oh yes! That's how that solves!" I find that happens to me. Sometimes even a year later, you know, it's sort of like Sudoko or something.

KM: Interesting. So it's like re-discovering that shape.

MG: It's probably disingenuous to pretend that artifice doesn't come in, and will, but I think, especially in the hippie days, there was the attitude that — I guess we wanted to be innocent, or something, in the '60s. That's bill bissett's kind of thing. His voice is that of the innocent, no matter what wicked things he said. And there was that desire — the Romantic, I guess — that is no longer really acceptable. It is really very inhibiting, now, to find yourself thinking "Oh God, I'm doing something Romantic" and all the people you admire are doing these very formal things. There's always some sort of restraint, isn't there, and Romanticism goes against that kind of restraint. It comes and goes. I'd say we're now back to Alexander Pope, almost, who was a remarkable political writer.…

KM: …Do you see your writing as a project?

MG: No. Maybe I do. I feel quite distant from it now. I'm not sure if I'm going to do very much more. Of course, as you get older you start to do more. I mean, like Olson, eh? Charles Olson felt he had the necessity — the mission — of being the great man. A lot of feminists have had great woman projects, too.…I always wanted to bring things up. I wanted to be subversive, or something. Be subversive to the grand narratives

which I love — I'm thinking of Leotard and the post-modern. I love those French guys. I think there's a beautiful clarity to their thoughts. The idea that we've taken for granted these grand narratives of progress and right and justice and you fundamentally have to question your belief in these things, which is part of that kind of broken poetry, where we break down the sentence and syntax and all the assumptions that you make. Olson worked to do that too. In a lot of his work, he deliberately shattered a ton of assumptions and concepts. The side I'm on would be . . .

KM: . . . a shattering?

MG: . . . a questioning and play. Like those little things — the plays and prose piece — I sent in to The Cap Review.[1]. . . You want to catch yourself out. I think that comes up in some of my things. I come up with new ideas and the unexpected. Don't take it for granted that the character's going to go along with some sort of particular narrative or any particular plot.

KM: In some ways it made sense to me when I had a look at the plays because reading through your poems, there are all these voices and you have operas and you have sound and bits of dialogue and raging — like the very last poem in Subway Under Byzantium, "OK, OK She Says." I want to talk to you a bit about some of the names of the characters in your plays, because you have this character, Doris Day, in Pash Play, and then you have this character Trot — I kept thinking of Miss Trotwood from David Copperfield — remember she was his aunt and she hated boys and men — I have no idea if that's anything, but the characters' names . . .

MG: Trot Trot Trot Trot! My mother, actually — her father used to call her Betsey Trot when she was a child. I think Trot is more of a sort of working-class character amongst the academics. I felt like that at university, that I had a kind of working-class attitude to a lot of, I guess, middle-class assumptions about life. Which was not to expect very much, because you expected to be kind of disdained at a certain point. God knows it wasn't that bad at UBC. Much worse in England and places like that. But I think that women themselves when I was growing up were equally disdained and dismissed, so that if you wanted to get in there you had to be quite aggressive, come in with something and then feel quite defeated and completely lost! And I think losing it is part of my poetics. Losing it is an advantage, I think, and losing it is, of course, ecstasy too.

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1 "Pre-remains, a play," "Pash Play," and "Babylon is Gone, I Weep for Babylon."

You can just let some other things take over. That is the project, I suppose, losing it. Is it? You always want to get beyond the rational, I think, and yet the rational fascinates me.

The older I get the more I enjoy academic work, for instance. Now I can read a lot of stuff that's academic because I understand the need for it. The need for order. But I've always kind of fought the need for order, because order is, I suppose, part of the patriarchal regime that is so unconscious. It's foolish to even think that you can resist the structure of language and the structure of society — all the attitudes that people have build into them by the time they're seven or eight years old. You pretty well know what's expected of you. I don't know about your generation and the next generation.

KM: Oh no, it was the same. I grew up in the '60s and '70s and it was very much — as a woman you should be pretty, you get married, you have a house, you have kids, you have a car, you have another car. Education was somewhat part of that, but even if you try to be outside it, you're still trapped within that system because . . .

MG: . . . it's huge. Language is so tied up with it. Infested with it. You can fight, and I know I was a raging feminist for a long time and did a lot of activism and such. When I first came to the Downtown East Side, I still put my body on the line every once in a while for the various parades and protests and things like that. I went up to City Hall to protest that grand old theatre that they allowed to rot, decay completely, so that they couldn't possibly save it, down on Hastings, just a few buildings down from Carnegie. I remember as a kid I used to hear wonderful Chinese opera music coming from there. It was a grand theatre for a long time. Then some guys bought it and put up these high rises, these condos. I went down to city hall and there were all these wonderful people who live in the neighbourhood — beautiful, articulate people. But it was pointless, you know? These guys had their minds made up from the beginning. People are very ready to make their minds up. But there it is. My mind is made up, too. I've got certain attitudes. Everybody does. It's these conflicts between different attitudes that — I guess that's our material as writers, isn't it? All these attitudes.

KM: Like the preacher lady in your "Babylon is Gone, I Weep for Babylon" piece, this woman that rages. I guess you've been part of this community for a long time and you're seeing its destruction, and it seems like a lament, to me, that piece. Would you describe it as that?

MG: I would say it's a lament. I used to love this woman. She used to sing sometimes. One day I stopped and listened to her for a while, and told her how great she was.

After that I never heard her sing again. She would rave, and people would come up to her and lean over her and threaten her. She was so fierce.

It's gone. But life's like that. Vancouver, when I was a kid, was quite different from Vancouver now. You used to be able to get a cheap place to live. We all found weird old places. Beautiful old places that somebody let for what we could afford to pay. What's the next phase going to be for people? I guess you just have to fit in. That is the stress. You've got to look right. You've got to act right. You've got to speak right; you've got to think right, to fit into this.

KM: As poets and as feminists. I wanted to ask you about one of the poems in *Backup to Babylon*, "My 135th Feminist Nightmare"—I love the title of that. You've talked about being a feminist.…What is your relationship to the word feminism? I sometimes say to my friends "We're women and we're poets. How can we be geniuses?"

MG: Everything works against it. Even people that love you and that you love, or whatever, they're always, if they're men, they're always invading. Of course women do the same thing to women, too. But as a woman I suppose you feel you have to be open and accessible and mediative and mediate things. It's very hard to have that wonderful selfishness that the male genius has.

KM: We prop up the men.

MG: I hate to feel like I'm undermining men, but it seems sometimes that we all give up, that's what happens. We all give up, I think.

KM: Do you think there's a way of not giving up?

MG: Well, just to have a voice and then the ego, I guess. That's one of the big things. You see, spiritually you're supposed to — this was really big in the 60s — you're supposed to become more Buddhistic, and surrender your ego and that was being preached. And then with feminism you realize "Where is my ego? Where is the ego of other women? Where are all the other women? Where are their egos and their genius?"

KM: Certainly the older I get the more I realize "Dammit! I need an ego!" Because I think you're always taught to be more submissive, that ego was a bad thing.

MG: Yeah, you're just not spiritual, man, you're supposed to get rid of your ego.

KM: Why?

MG: Yes, "Why" is the question that feminists started to ask, I think, and here we are. We're still doing it. I guess that's our project, isn't it, to become ourselves. Genius is an interesting word, you know. Aristotle talked about our daimons . . .

KM: . . . as outside, something outside ourselves.

MG: And yet it was the tutelary daimon. I wonder if it is related to the genie in the Muslim religion. Genies seem to be like objects made of fire. I'd love to be able to talk to somebody about that. But genius is fire, isn't it?

KM: It's that thing. It's so rarely applied to a woman, or it's just a word that we're afraid of. We're not supposed to have genius, we're not supposed to have ego —

MG: The Victorian thing of putting the woman on a pedestal meant that she was above all that, she was "Mother." Motherhood is supposed to be above all that, but human beings need conversation. Conversation is part of writing. Writing is conversation. It's a conversation with yourself, and it's a conversation with your voices and your influences and other writers. The price of being a genius often is to cut yourself off from that conversation. Maybe that's the definition of a genius, somebody who is born into privilege and is allowed to isolate himself or herself and find a project that she can keep doing, but the permission has to come from her own economic independence.

KM: Maybe that's the thing — we need money in order to be geniuses.

MG: That's what Virginia Woolf said.

KM: I was reading an interview at the back of *Lost Language*, and you were talking about Simon Fraser University — this is going back to the topic of theatre. Daphne Marlatt had mentioned something about guerilla theatre at SFU and you said it was not theatre; it was reality.

MG: Well, part of it was that I had a child and met other people with children, and we needed day care and so we used to move children around to different places that looked like they were empty, and security of course would find us out and we'd have to move on and keep moving. That part was reality, and yes, theatre is real.

People — we — are totally formed into symbols at an early age, and theatre is involved with characters that are symbols, really. We are expected to act as symbols: the perfect stenographer, the perfect mother — so what is reality? Reality is a dream.

KM: Do you have a lot of dreams?

MG: My dreams are never that nice. They're horrible. Dreadful. I don't know why people always think of dreams as something delightful.

KM: That's an interesting comment. Why did we create this idea of a dream as being a lovely place to be?

MG: Yes, whereas it's just a reiteration of what else is happening in our life, in a kind of funny soup way, like back into the soup of our lives.

KM: Is that like theatre for you?

MG: I don't do theatre now. I was interested when I was fifteen — I was seen as a sort of possible actress. Did some stuff with the CBC. Then I took a course in theatre and was really furious because I wanted to play Ariel but I was too big for Ariel, I think. But I really responded — I loved the demonic quality of Ariel in The Tempest. There's the poet — the prince, and his dominion of all these demons and his powers, his magic books. But I couldn't play that. One of the reasons I started to write a lot of poetry for awhile in my life was that I wanted to write my own parts, you know? And get my own voice, because most of the characters that were available were just despicable or uncomfortable or not very — there aren't many great pieces for women. How many are there? Some of the Greek tragedies had parts — I guess French tragedy had a lot of great places for women, but she had to be . . .

KM: . . . she couldn't be the demon!

MG: No, you had to play noble parts, or mad parts, of course. Mad parts — madness has always been acceptable for women as a part.

KM: That reminds me — I went back in my archives and found this old issue of *FRONT* magazine, the Giantesses issue edited by Lisa Robertson.

MG: Oh, what fun! We all got drunk and laughed.

KM: There is a great interview in here between Lisa Robertson, Catriona Strang, Rhoda Rosenfeld and yourself and you're talking about bilingualism and using other languages in your writing, and you said it's great because you can jump out into these other worlds. You talked about how every world has its codes, and then you said "I mean sub-worlds." And I guess it was this word "sub-world" that really interested me. With something like "Pash Play," the language is like another code, another world: a world I've never been to, a sub-world.

MG: More like a dream world. Most of those things seem fairly real to me. There might be little pieces that are taken out of the soup and put together in another way, into another soup, but they're still parts of our environment….

KM: I have a question regarding fear. Or terror? Particularly about the sort of rant or scream. I want to know if terror is part of it, because certainly when you see some of the type in "OK, OK She Says," you "see" the sound come off the page, and I find that with quite a few of your poems, I can "see" the sound and the emotion behind it and all these voices. This leads to a question about the idea of the page, and sound, and rage, and fear, and all these things that can come off a page. Is the page of the poetry your way of sounding these things out, if I can say it that way?

MG: It is a theatre, isn't it? It's a stage, and I'm sort of tempted to go towards collage. I've always had friends who were artists, and collagists, and so I think maybe if I ever have some time, I probably will go back to collage. I did some stuff in the '70s…I made a book called *Practical Knowledge*. There aren't many copies of it around. I'd like to reproduce it. It was a mixture of a little drawing and a little — there was a lot of play power. Now we have a lot of equipment that we can do things like that with, and I'm still stuck in — I find myself receding back into prose, like the piece about that lady ("Babylon is Gone, I Weep For Babylon"), and I realise I owe some stories — just plain prose stories — I guess they've been partly written and I need to get back and write them. Prose actually takes a lot more time than poetry, I think, because with poetry, you just hang in there, and generally speaking it's there and that's it. But with prose, you really have to hone those sentences.

KM: You've got to get those sentences working.

MG: Yeah, and poetry, modern poetry anyway, seems like so much fun for people, but it's not much fun for the reader, and it's a fairly acquired taste to be able to pick up and read a book of poetry, and if the poetry does sound like prose, then it's not poetry any more, as far as I'm concerned….

KM: I have one last formal question, a sort of fun one. The very first line in *Lost Language* is . . .

MG: "Always will you love angels and find them dying in your arms . . ."

KM: Yes. "Always will you love angels." Angels are so much a part of your writing. And I guess I wanted to ask you: will you always love angels?

MG: The angel is the male beauty to me, and I've always found that very beautiful men are very fragile. I've found that most of the men I've loved have been beautiful but fragile, and I guess that's why women give up things for them. Give up their lives to protect them. And they do die. I got my friend to do the photographs for that book, and she got the picture of the statue down outside the train station. It's a big bronze, and there's the angel holding this First World War soldier in her arms, taking him up to heaven — that's the angel. Angels are powerful when they're female.

Familial

Renee Rodin

I'm not sure exactly when I first met Maxine but it was somewhere in Vancouver and somewhere in the 70s and it was probably through one of our mutual friends, Judith Copithorne, Trudy Rubenfeld, Rhoda Rosenfeld, or Carole Itter. Maybe it was after one of her demonic/delicious, liturgical/irreverent readings (really opera) I was lucky enough to attend. She was immediately familiar. Jeering, jabbing, joshing. About what she sees above and below ground and everywhere else. Once when she visited we sat in the kitchen and she read my chart. Transcriptive. Transgressive. Transformative. Maxine is aligned with the stars.

from *W* 2 (2000)

A VISION

Scene: A cavernous cold dark damp miserable 18th century bedroom with large campy filthy greasy heavy draped awnings and a gentleman of uncertain age sitting propped up by huge pillows with a bed desk with quilled pen, ink, various small bookshelves and lights and piles of paper etc. etc. Standing beside him, almost dwarfed by the great bed a small dark thin gentlewoman of uncertain age. We enter their conversation from behind their necks and swivel in on Swift as Jonathan is in bed and Chee Wid as Stella has just come in out of the rain.

JONATHAN: We're lizard enough to evade the bait.

STELLA: (Furious) I can never get cold enough.

JONATHAN: A warm bed beyond colonialism. I'm an amber turtle shell of soup, immolating, syruplike, contagious . . . .

STELLA: As Chewid of the Chilcotin I've left considerable advantage, a clean landscape of unpeopled snow, my own blazing divine will. Now I'm in the sucking abyss, 27 light years to the next star. You I can see happily rotting in your plumped up history and it's up to me to encounter the "arm-like cloud of hydrogen atoms heading toward us 9 light years from the centre approaching us at a speed of about thirty miles per second."*

JONATHAN: Honour darkness as you must as must I: but bring me the abyss of yr long smile. We'll talk. Laugh. Touch inside of my hideout, my huge cave, bed. And I'll kindle you. And blissful fire keep us sleeping all night, innocent of our already circling demise.

CHEWID: Researching eagles , those we could be hangin' out with, loving the dangerous sky.

STELLA: You have no stomach for these realities I bring to spring you. You are sick of the beauty of predation, and cannibalism is the way we can objectify the homeless, live loveless in this grand man-made hole with the rain running down the inside of the walls. These lovely rose hangings, oh, they are the moulds, cuprous green, light as a lichen, and the pink one that oozes so lively. What miss, sass? Every cockroach in Dublin visits you nightly; you and I understand their concerns. And the wretched birds the day stars of our melancholy still bitchin' sweetness in whatever light abides our croak and carp. Infected with knowledge, Jonathan: the matter of our melancholy.

JONATHAN: And of our monstrous gentility
dining out so often, such a tender fricasse, your honour
as he cuts me some more human meat
I have vomitted nothing, it remains congealed in
the barking star of my divine digestion
I the triumphant miss piggy polymorphously perverse and intellectually hungry
    but, you know, afraid to ask.
But here I swallow my muddly confinement, blissfully issuing litters of letters

    oh how they suck at my teats.

STELLA: I am my own father hollering in the suspicious glen. Feedbacks and loops pull my bones into the underworld. Above me, as I am sucked down by god, I hear the terrifying yowl of Zarathustra, masses of black blondes in a drum band. The joyful adulation of bullions of adults at a wet dance—That HOVERS—the blood-red mist from Mars that congeals as rotten leaves in your drain pipes and eave-troughs, boar of my litter, your roof is falling in on you, your foundations are crumbling.

SWIFT: All the revolutions continue to turn satisfactorily. By retreating into the stronghold of the audience I see a spectacle truly worthy of my admiration and contempt and since I have a maidservant why do I need to

find a hill of snow to inhabit, as if I were a hairy horse. Oh,
would that I were a hairy horse
and my love on me
naked to ride
jewelled with chancerous pulsars
more terrible than an army with banners
sighing like a thief.

Its impossibility stands at the doorway and forces me to write. My refusal to resist what has to be vice: the instinct, to move, denied me by the boost of my shots, the ideology I adore as beautiful as you, Stella. The rest is a Scene: these sentences hang us up. WE didn't do the Big Bang: it was the Holy Other long before we could even try to be born. Maybe as a baby I played with light; but I had no idea—my dear, you must believe me.

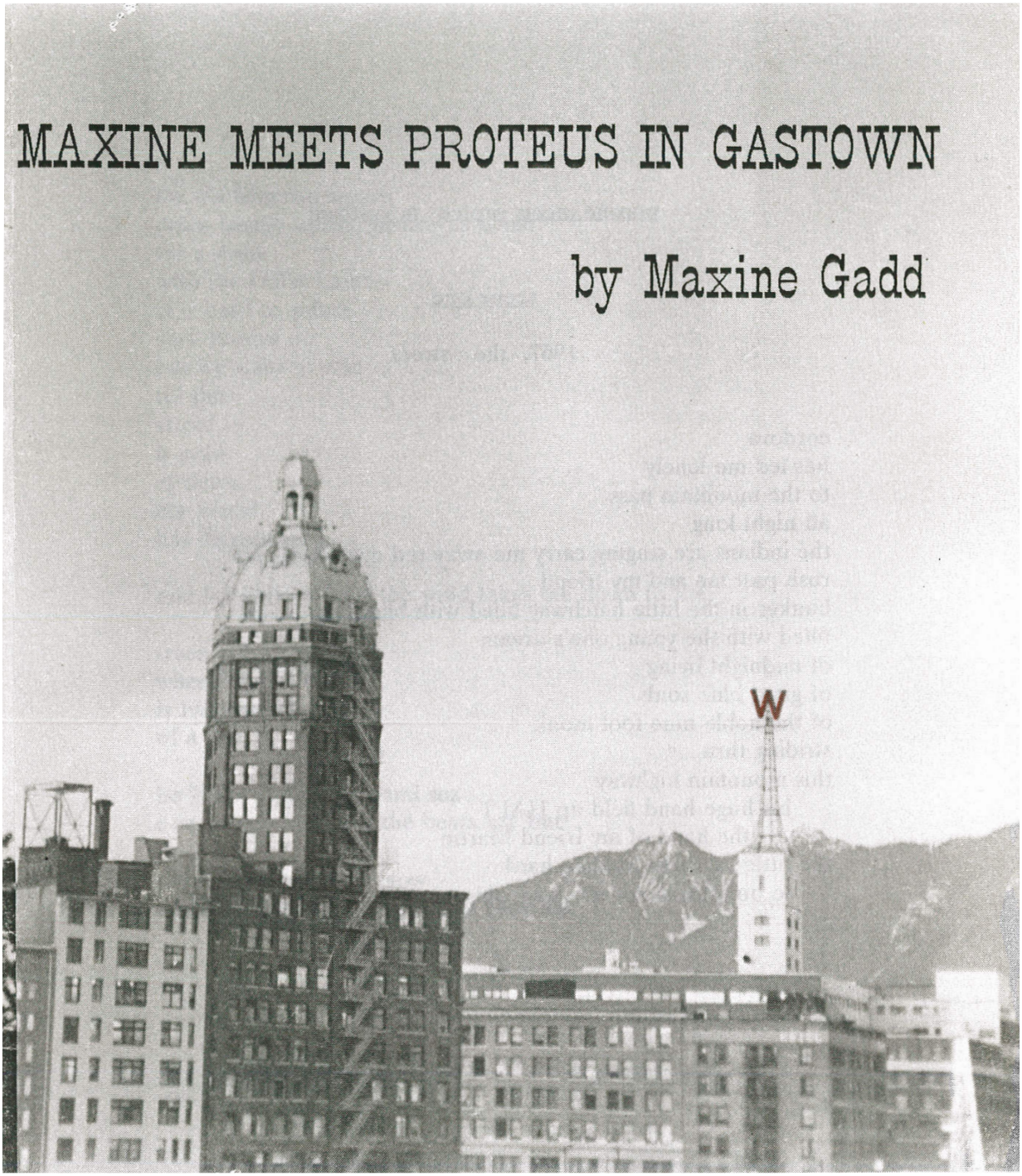
STELLA: If I must believe you I canít love you. Paw open this scarred husk and let us into the Twist. There'll be more more mourning in the morning.

JONATHAN: And the maid swinging her chains.

* John G. Taylor, Professor of Mathematics at King College, University of London "Black Holes" 1973.

MAXINE MEETS PROTEUS IN GASTOWN

by Maxine Gadd



Maxine Gadd Published Works

Guns of the West (blewointment, 1967)

The Book of Practical Knowledge (Self-published, 1969)

Hochelaga (blewointment, 1970)

Air 2 (Air Press, 1971)

Westerns (Air Press, 1975)

Lost Language (Coach House, 1982)

Maxine Meets Proteus in Gastown (BC Monthly, 1992)

Backup to Babylon: Poems 1984 – 1986 by Maxine Gadd (Self-published, nd)

Boatload to Atlantis: Poems 1986 – 1992 (Self-published, nd)

Styx (self-published, 1994)

Fire in the Cove (m(O)ther Tongue, 2001)

Backup to Babylon (New Star, 2006)

Subway Under Byzantium (New Star, 2008)

Click here for an audio-recording of Maxine reading

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