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SECCIÓ D'ANGLÈS

THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH POETRY

VOLUM I



TESI DOCTORAL DIRIGIDA PER LA DOCTORA SUSAN BALLYN.  
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N E L A    B U R E U    i    R A M O S

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STEVENS

A few speculative images  
shyly define our place  
trying to embrace our world  
the necessarily outrageous flats  
pitted against the huge sky.

ANDREW SUKNASKI

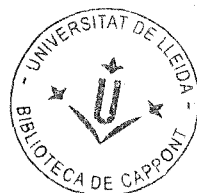
INDIAN SITE ON THE EDGE OF TONITA PASTURE

1

the meadow lark's song  
heralding spring  
waters lazily flowing from wood mountain's peat moss springs  
to become twelve mile creek running north  
through this coulee where i caught fish  
and swam in boyhood unaware  
of three rings of stones that nearly vanished  
beneath dust from a field  
lee soparlo's father worked trying to feed his family  
in the thirties  
and this great centre ring and something  
holding me around my heart the way  
a wired stone anchors  
the cornerpost of the nearby fence running north  
and west to the village  
where i grew up- i claim these things  
and this ancestral space to move through and beyond  
stapled to the four cardinals directions  
this my right  
to chronicle the meaning of these vast plains  
in a geography of blood  
and failure  
making them live

2

vasile tonita 70 now  
and once again riding the spirited stallion  
his sons have never ridden  
counts his spring calves  
and searches for a missing cow south in the coulee  
where a hawk slowly circles under the high sun  
while i stand here listening for the possible  
ancestral voices  
as the wind passes rustling  
the rosebushes and taller grasses



by the creek  
and i try to imagine those who passed here so long ago  
possibly becoming this dust  
i breathe  
try to imagine how prairie could once become a brown sea  
following a sound greater than thunder  
a sea shaking the earth  
beneath an indian's feet  
and how his daily breath became a prayer shaping all thought  
toward food for a family- but that time has passed  
the marks of those who saw it few  
and seldom found  
except by the rare eye  
spotting a stone  
here  
and a stone there  
following a hunch and using imagination  
and the good sense of one's feet  
till the circle is completed  
as lee soparlo did one spring  
placing a wired anchor stone beneath the cornerpost  
then straightened his back with pain  
his eyes suddenly blurring  
and then focusing on the first stone he walked toward  
studying the place  
till all three circles where the tepees once stood  
were discovered

and who were the ancestors  
that camped here?  
only the wind knows for certain  
though maybe they were the gros ventre the ashkee  
some of whom died from hunger  
along with assiniboine middlemen  
journeying down from york factory that summer of 1716  
when the english ships carrying provisions  
did not arrive early enough...  
or maybe they were some of the assiniboine  
met here by their brothers  
who traded on the missouri  
contracting smallpox for the second time  
at fort union in 1837  
doing the same as others before them  
fleeing northward  
believing they could thus escape the dreaded disease  
the whiteman gave them- but the assiniboine failed  
their 1200 lodges were reduced to some 400  
less than 3000 people surviving

they were only one of many tribes  
thus diminished...

or perhaps here  
a few santee families gathered  
around an evening campfire  
to listen to a grandmother's story forty years later  
a story telling how a whiteman  
named isaac cowie  
working at fort qu'appelle  
found himself without cowpox vaccine  
when the great smallpox epidemic of 1838  
began to spread  
and how remembering the old way of doing it  
he went to old breland a metis  
whose grandchild had been vaccinated  
and begged him for a lymph from the child's arm  
was granted enough healthy vaccine  
on windowpane fragments  
to protect everyone at the fort  
the people becoming the next source  
supplying sufficient vaccine to protect all people  
about surrounding lakes  
and visiting indians at the fort  
who became the third source journeying to the southern plain  
and remote places like touchwood hills  
and wood mountain  
these people doing their work so well  
that not a single case of smallpox  
occurred among them-  
the northern plain  
was another story...  
and maybe the santee grandmother knew  
the story of the christ child  
and was able to give it still  
another meaning  
making it live

MIRIAM WADDINGTON

GREEN WORLD ONE

When I step out and feel the green world  
its concave walls must cup my summer coming  
and curving hold me  
beyond all geography in a transparent place  
where water images cling to the inside sphere  
move and distend as rainbows in a mirror  
cast out of focus.

This crystal chrysalis  
shapes to green rhythms to long ocean flowings  
rolls toward the sun with sure and spinning speed  
and under the intensely golden point  
it warms expands  
until walls crack suddenly  
uncup me into large and windy space.

GREEN WORLD TWO

Locked in a glassy iceland lake  
I was a child chinning myself  
on reflected treetops.  
Into my green world  
winter shone and splashed  
me real with light.

My summer gone,  
the knob of light still turns  
in that locked lake;  
under the seal of ice  
the cabined light still burns,  
and the yellow haystacks flare  
on underwater beaches.  
Far above the snow  
fills the falling world  
to its topmost branches

ICONS

Suddenly  
in middle age  
instead of withering  
into blindness  
and burying myself  
underground  
I grow delicate  
and fragile  
superstitious,  
I carry icons  
I have begun  
to worship  
images.

I take them out  
and prop them up  
on bureau tops  
in hotel rooms  
in Spain  
I study them  
in locked libraries  
in Leningrad  
I untie them  
from tourist packages  
in Italy  
they warm me  
in the heatless winters  
of London in the  
hurry-up buses  
of Picadilly.

My icons are not  
angels or holy  
babies they have  
nothing to do  
with saints or  
madonnas, they  
are mostly of  
seashores summer  
and love which I no  
longer believe in  
but I still believe  
in the images,  
I still preserve  
the icons:

a Spanish factory  
worker talks to me  
in a street behind  
the cathedral he  
offers me *un poco*  
*amor*, the scars on  
his hand, his wounded  
country and the black-  
jacketed police; he  
touches me on the  
arm and other places,  
and the alcoholic  
in the blazing square  
drinks brandy, confides  
that fortunes can still  
be made in Birmingham  
but he has a bad  
lung is hard of  
hearing and owns  
an apartment in Palma.

### INVESTIGATOR

I who am street-known am also street knowing:  
Just ask me-  
I know the tangle of hot streets behind the poorhouse  
Pouring from the city like coiled intestines,  
The smell of the brewery as it splays long fumes in the alleys,  
And the streets pushed against the zoo  
With litter of peanut shells and empty candy boxes.  
Also the streets climbing crazily up the river bank  
Between bridge and jail.

My hand knows the familiar gesture  
Of measuring a child's height in passing.  
Even if I were blind I would see the gray figure  
Hear the thin high call of the city's authorized salvage collector.  
I could tell you and no exaggeration  
Of the in and out of houses twenty times a day,  
Of the lace antimacassars, the pictures of kings and queens,  
The pious mottoes, the printed blessings, the dust piling up on  
bureaus  
The velour interiors, the Niagara souvenirs,  
The faded needlepoint, the hair pulled tight  
And the blinds drawn against day and the feel of sun.



Then down between lake and railway tracks  
The old houses running to seed, the grass grown tall,  
The once mansion made into quaint apartments  
Where a foul granny with warts all over her face  
Sits counting last year's newspapers lost in a timeless litter  
And her hunchback son runs nimble messages with covetous eyes.

Out on the street again into the fainting heat  
Where bloom the rank garbage cans to the jazz of trolleys,  
Past the garden where the old man drooling senile decay  
Lets the sun slip ceaselessly through his fingers,  
And for humour  
A long lean lap-eared dog sitting on a roof  
Blinks wet eyes at me.

THE LAND WHERE HE DWELLS IN'

I wake to think about  
your lost and broken beauty  
and my speechless love.  
Of your embraces I remember  
only my own whisperings  
and your silence,  
and the dead centres  
when I arrived at those quiet  
terrifying balances where  
you never spoke my name.

I ask myself, what  
was my hope of us and  
what was my intention?  
I would have liked simply  
to hang by my teeth  
from your teeth  
on those high wires  
that criss-cross the striped  
circus of the world.

Or to have swum with you  
under the water  
among the coloured fish  
silent and narrow  
where hands and fins  
brush under darkness  
and where medals of light  
decorate champion swimmers.

My sleep in your arms  
did never awaken you,  
my staring at the noble  
mask of your face  
did never make it live,  
and I thought to myself:  
what magnificence,  
carved and ancient.

This and the shape  
of your ear is what  
stays in my mind pictures  
that tremble and change,  
like what is left over  
after a visit to a  
breathtaking exhibition  
in the museum of a foreign country.

#### MY LESSONS IN THE JAIL

Walk into the prison, that domed citadel  
that yellow skull of stone and sutured steel,  
walk under their mottoes, show your pass,  
salute their Christ to whom you cannot kneel.

In the white-tiled room arrange the interview  
with the man who took his daughter and learn  
that every man is usual but none are equal  
in the dark rivers that in them burn.

And take this man's longest bleakest year  
between done act and again-done act, and take  
his misery and need, stand against his tears  
and transform them to such a truth as slakes

The very core of thirst and be sure  
the thirst is his and not your own deep need  
to spurt fine fountains; accept accept  
his halting words- since you must learn to read

Between the lines his suffering and doubt.  
Be faithful to your pity, be careworn,  
though all this buffet you and beat and cruelly  
test you- you chose this crown of thorns.

Wear it with grace and when you rise to go  
thank him and don't let yourself forget  
how hard it is to thank and to beholden be  
one to another and to spin your role out yet

For moments in the hallway, compose your face  
to sale good humour, conceal your sex:  
smile at the brute who runs the place  
and memorized the banner *Christus Rex*

### NIGHT OF VOICES

I loved your name I touched  
its ancient deeps and sank  
from desert to dividing waters;  
darkness drowned the dawn and  
your blind touch was a cradle  
that I remembered and your name  
was blessed and garlanded with  
lingering fire and Egyptian snows.

Your mouth tasted of white lilac  
and water plants and outside the  
grass stood high and the wind  
blew down the gravelled roads  
of summer; from far away I heard  
police cars sirening the suburbs  
or was it the watchman calling  
across the dusty building lots?  
We live in murdered cities all  
locked in pyramids but to your

mountain name I came and saw  
anew as through a wall of glass:  
your kisses sang of Polish villages  
destroyed and built again of parents'  
double partings, like one entranced  
I stood and looked across my father's  
rivers and heard my mother's windmills  
in my blood, almost I heard my uncle's cry against  
the burning droughted prairie and

the flooding night was filled with  
voices I heard those secret words  
my hands touched out against your face,  
day held back from coming and the

silence spoke your storied name above  
the droughted prairie and blessed me  
with its wheat touched me with its  
root and fed me grainy light.

But somewhere in darkness  
the windmills still await me, the  
crying rivers call the villages are  
silent the watchman merely dozes:  
and having called them up  
I cannot sleep so lightly or  
having known your touch  
so easily fare well.

#### POPULAR GEOGRAPHY

Miami is one big yellow  
pantsuit where the ocean  
is louder than the sighs  
of old age; Chicago is  
a huge hot gun sending  
smoke into the sky for  
1000 miles to Winnipeg;  
New York is a bright sharp  
hypodermic needle and the  
Metropolitan opera singing  
Wagner on winter afternoons,  
and my own Toronto is an  
Eaton's charge account adding  
to the music in a Henry Moore  
skating rink; Montreal was  
once an Iroquois city huddled  
around a mountain under a cross  
and now is the autoroute to  
an Olympic dream; everything  
has changed, all the cities  
are different, but Manitoba  
oh Manitoba, you are still  
a beautiful green grain  
elevator storing the sunlight  
and growing out of the black  
summer earth.

PROVINCIAL

My childhood  
was full of people  
with Russian accents  
who came from  
Humble Saskatchewan  
or who lived in Regina  
and sometimes  
visited Winnipeg  
to bring regards  
from their frozen  
snowqueen city.

In those days  
all the streetcars  
in the world slept  
in the Elmwood  
car-barns and the  
Indian moundbuilders  
were still wigwammed  
across the river  
with the birds  
who sung in the bushes  
of St. Vital.

Since then I have  
visited Paris  
Moscow London  
and Mexico City  
I saw golden roofs  
onion domes and the  
most marvellous  
canals, I saw people  
sunning themselves  
in Luxembourg Gardens  
and on a London parkbench  
I sat beside a man  
who wore navy blue socks  
and navy blue shoes  
to match.

All kinds of miracles:  
but I would not trade  
any of them for the  
empty spaces, the  
snowblurred geography  
of my childhood.

SOMEONE WHO USED TO HAVE SOMEONE

There used to be someone  
to whom I could say do you  
love me and be sure that the  
answer would always be yes;  
there used to be someone to  
whom I could telephone and  
be sure when the operator  
said do you accept the charges  
the answer would always be yes;  
but now there is no one to ask  
no one to telephone from the  
strangeness of cities in the  
lateness of nightness now there  
is no-one always now no-one  
no someone no never at all.

Can you imagine what it is  
like to live in a world where  
there is no-one now always no  
no-one and never some some-  
one to ask do you love me and  
be sure that the answer would  
always be yes? I live in a world  
where only the billboards are  
always they're twenty feet tall  
and they circle the city they  
coax and caress me they heat  
me and cool me they promise and  
plead me with colour and comfort  
*you can get to sleep with me  
tonight* (the me being ovaltine)  
but who wants to get to sleep  
with a cup of ovaltine what  
kind of sleep is that for some-  
one who used to have someone  
to ask do you love me and  
be sure that the answer  
would always be yes?

THOU DIDST SAY ME

Late as last summer  
thou didst say me, love  
I choose you, you, only you.  
oh the delicate del-  
icate serpent of your lips  
the golden lie bedazzled  
me with wish and flash  
of joy and I was fool.

I was fool, bemused  
bedazed by summer, still  
bewitched and wandering  
in murmur hush in green-  
ly sketched-in fields  
I was, I was so sweet  
I was, so honied with  
your gold of love and love  
and still again more love.

late as last autumn  
thou didst say me, dear,  
my doxy, I choose you and  
always you, thou didst pledge  
me love and through the red-  
plumed weeks and soberly  
I danced upon your words  
and garlanded these  
tender dangers.

year curves to ending now  
and thou dost say me, wife  
I choose another love, and oh  
the delicate del-  
icate serpent of your mouth  
stings deep, and bitter  
iron cuts and shapes  
my death, I was so fool.

TOTEMS

I want to whittle  
a new totem pole  
out of a poor little  
Manitoba maple and  
turn all its faces  
to the sun

I want to plant  
it on the prairie  
staring at the wind  
and snow saying to  
the wind: *do your  
worst* and to the  
snow: *mind your  
mittens, don't fall  
off the world naked  
into the wind you  
might turn to ice  
or what's worse  
nothingness*

I want my totem  
pole to watch over  
the fields against  
the floods droughts and  
the spoilers of space

I want the fields  
and the totem pole  
still to be here  
when I come back a  
whispering sung-ghost  
or the flickering  
shadow on the  
hands of lovers  
a thousand years  
from now.



TRANSFORMATIONS

The blood of my ancestors  
has died in me  
I have forsaken the steppes  
of Russia for the prairies  
of Winnipeg, I have turned  
my back on Minneapolis  
and the Detroit lakes  
I love only St. Boniface  
its grey wooden churches  
I want to spend my life  
in Gimli listening to the  
roar of emptiness in the  
wild snow, scanning the lake  
for the music of rainbow-  
skinned fishes, I will compose  
my songs to gold-eye tunes  
send them across the land  
in smoke-spaces, ice-signals  
and concentrate all winter  
on Henry Hudson adrift  
in a boat, when he comes home  
I will come home too and  
the blood of my ancestors  
will flower on Mennonite bushes

DALE ZIEROTH

FATHER

Twice he took me in his hands and shook me like a sheaf of wheat, the way a dog shakes a snake, as if he meant to knock out my tongue and grind it under his heel right there on the kitchen floor. I never remembered what he said or the warnings he gave; she always told me afterwards, when he had left and I had stopped my crying. I was eleven that year and for seven more years I watched his friends laughing and him with his great hands rising and falling with every laugh, smashing down on his knees and making the noise of a tree when it cracks in winter. Together they drank chokecherry wine and talked of the dead friends and the old times when they were young, and because I never thought of getting old, their youth was the first I knew of dying.

Sunday before church he would trim his fingernails with the hunting knife his East German cousins had sent, the same knife he used for castrating pigs and skinning deer: things that had nothing to do with Sunday. Communion once a month, a shave every third day, a good chew of snuff, these were the things that helped a man to stand in the sun for eight hours a day, to sweat through each cold hail storm without a word, to freeze fingers and feet to cut wood in winter, to do the work that bent his back a little more each day down toward the ground.

Last Christmas, for the first time, he gave presents, unwrapped and bought with pension money. He drinks mostly coffee now, sleeping late and shaving every day.

Even the hands have changed: white, soft,  
unused hands. Still he seems content  
to be this old, to be sleeping in the middle  
of the afternoon with his mouth open as if there  
is no further need for secrets, as if he is  
no longer afraid to call his children fools  
for finding different answers, different lives.

### MANITOBA POEM

In Manitoba, a farmer will prepare  
for spring and contrary to popular notion  
women are not foremost in men's  
minds: the new warmth has made them  
aware of trains and hills, of things  
that would make them leave women completely:  
something else keeps them. And the women  
are just as glad for the rest.

Summer comes in from Saskatchewan on  
a hot and rolling wind. Faces  
burnt and forearms burnt, the men seed  
their separate earths and listen to the CBC  
for any new report of rain. Each day now  
the sun is bigger and from the kitchen  
window, it sets a mere hundred feet behind  
the barn, where a rainbow once came down.

Four months later this is over, men  
are finished. Children return  
to school and catch colds in their  
open jackets. Women prepare  
for long nights under 6-inch goosedown  
quilts. Outside, the trees shake off  
their leaves as if angered by the new  
colours. And without any more warning than  
this, winter falls on the world,  
taking no one by surprise. No one.

120 MILES NORTH OF WINNIPEG

My grandfather came here years ago,  
family of eight. In the village,  
nine miles away, they knew him as  
the German and they were suspicious, being  
already settled. Later he was  
somewhat liked; still later  
forgotten. In winter everything  
went white as buffalo bones and  
the underwear froze on the line  
like corpses. Often the youngest  
was sick. Still he never thought  
of leaving. Spring was always greener  
than he'd known and summer had  
kid-high grass with sunsets big  
as God. The wheat was thick,  
the log house chinked and warm.  
The little English he spoke  
he learned from the thin grey lady  
in the one-room school, an hour away  
by foot. The oldest could hunt, the youngest  
could read. They knew nothing of  
the world he'd left, and forgotten,  
until 1914 made him an alien and  
he left them on the land he'd come to,  
120 miles north of Winnipeg.

