

Creative writing

angela rawlings

FIRE IF YOU NEED / A CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Elee Kraljii Gardiner and Andrew McEwan

Excerpt from their in-progress collaborative manuscript *Nature Building*

Jónína Kirton

Two poems

Sachiko Murakami

Excerpt from in-progress manuscript *Render*

Jamie Popowich

Excerpt from in-progress manuscript *Sex World (is Definitely for Adults!)*

Gerry Shikatani

Excerpts from work in progress

Angela Szczepaniak

Excerpt from in-progress manuscript *Lifeforce Klepto*



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Fire if you need

A curatorial statement

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angela rawlings is a Canadian-Icelandic interdisciplinary artist using languages as dominant exploratory material. rawlings' books include *Wide slumber for lepidopterists* (Coach House Books, 2006), *o w n* (CUE BOOKS, 2015), and *si tu* (MaMa, 2017). Her libretti include *Bodiless* (for composer Gabrielle Herbst, 2014) and *Longitude* (for Davíð Brynjar Franzson, 2014). rawlings' *Áfall / Trauma* was shortlisted for the Leslie Scalapino Award for Innovative Women Playwrights (2013). She is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Glasgow on performing geochronology in the Anthropocene. rawlings loves in Iceland. More: <http://arawlings.is>

This selection of *Canada and Beyond's* "Creative Writing" amassed as a near-spontaneous request-and-response for unpublished work. The publication's quick turnaround time (under a month to deliver the section) aligned neatly with the ethos of an impromptu reading series I used to run, arranging a last-minute reading for a visiting author, held in a living room or at a picnic table with bring-to-share snacks and drinks. Every invited participant who attended was encouraged to share writing as a way to provide the visiting author with intimate encounters of work *du jour* composed by the local assemblage. Impromptus occurred from 2006 through 2012 and popped up in cities I inhabited (Toronto, Ghent, and Reykjavik).

Expedited curation of Impromptu or *Canada and Beyond* is a puzzle of inclusion within a semi-public or semi-private forum. The time limit constrains both invitation and participation. Geography excludes in-person event attendance, while selecting participants for print publication becomes a challenge of who to invite, and why.

For *Canada and Beyond*, I think first of the *Beyond*. "In what is currently Canada¹." What Canada means as a government entity and the strictures attached to its past and present racism—how is 'Canada' Canada beyond the nationalist inscription assigned through residency or citizenship? Canada as chosen home, Canada as former home, as home out of necessity, as identity when living abroad. The name 'Canada' itself stolen and colonized. *Kanata*. Unsettle, unrest. What was before Canada, and what grows after it.

As a 'Canadian living abroad', the past months have been heart-wrenching and engaging to witness and think-with as public and private events unfurl across geographies and time-scapes. Justice denied for Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine. The #metoo movement. CanLit's important reckonings with abuses of privilege and power and complicities through cultural appropriation and sexual predation. There's a mass call to acknowledge the distresses on individual and societal levels, and to stand with those PTSDs and PASDs². There are calls to gather, to listen, to nurse, to witness—and these calls are central to a poetics of nurturance unfolding in Canada's literary output. Beyond Canada, Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology sends me a print of the Yerbamala Collective's spell reading "HERE: SPACE IF YOU NEED ALONENESS ARMS IF YOU NEED HOLDING FIRE IF YOU NEED TO BURN SHIT DOWN." This resonates.

¹ Indigenous studies professor Damien Lee recently tweeted his advocacy for using "in what is currently Canada" in lieu of the more common historical framework of "in what is now Canada."

² Heather Davis and Zoe Todd's recent article "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene" introduced me to the term post-apocalyptic stress disorder (PASD), which springs from societies who have collectively experienced an end of their worlds through large-scale events like genocide or natural catastrophe.

"Once a fire climbs, it's virtually unstoppable," write Elee Kraljii Gardiner and Andrew McEwan in their in-progress collaboration *Nature Building*. For *Canada and Beyond*, their excerpted manuscript rallies for allies in the fluctuating face of climate change and societal incongruity. The selection opens with the poem "Debating Foundations", where they list: "It comes down to the fiction of neutrality. It comes down to birds of a feather."

"But then can one just be take greed and again without a return reaching out such hand it is, what begin to tremble, anxious for words, so much, it is the loss, the silent stammer of continuous desire." Gerry Shikatani's texts from Skeena River country, Prince Rupert, B.C. and from his *Manual* excerpt written in Granada, Spain in 1997 emplaces the reading experience in familiar/unfamiliar and relatable/foreign sites and times simultaneously. These stanzas become salves.

Jónína Kirton honours the impromptu by sharing new poems, one spawned from her recent trip to ancestral land of Iceland, where we met to exchange poetry and share ritual. An in-person connection with Kirton rebalances a sense of distant-home as we find Reykjavik's westernmost point for her ritual. In "I'm in Iceland darling," Kirton writes, "the land is filled with silence yet it never stops talking."

Sachiko Murakami's selection is excerpted from her new in-progress manuscript *Render*. It elicits through what's illicit. Murmoir. "what does trauma do / it insists / what does it insist / a vague sentence" Pangs, pains, plans. Murakami's poetry is as instructive as it is interrogative of self, of community, of commodity, of society: "Now tell me how that felt." The intersection of Murakami's selection with Angela Szczepaniak's *Lifeforce Klepto* enacts a poignant dialogue on vulnerabilities. "Maybe more electrolytes would help, she thought. Antioxidants. / Anti-inflammatories. Adrenal support." Szczepaniak's taut poetry is earnest and humorous, astounding with her trademark genre-hybridization so stylistically distinct in her previous books. "The lifeforce klepto hires pigeons for / faecal revenge / but you can never prove it."

Jamie Popowich grapples with sexual commoditisation in his *Sex World (is Definitely for Adults!)*. Brash and bombastic, Popowich cycles his style through prose poems and open-field verse, soaked in simultaneous casual/causal tonality. "But if we're talking wood, right, so dig that that wood can get so wooden, rigid wooden, that there was a time you could catch the wood resting against the belly no problem. But get realistic. That wood's more like a symbol, like a lifecycle sun dial, slowly moving down the boner tracks, marking age and mortality."

Canada and Beyond is not a picnic table by bpNichol Lane³, nor a Flemish *oeverloze eiland*⁴, nor an eyrie in Reykjavík—all sites of past in-person Impromptus. But the digital commons offered via *Canada and Beyond* acts as a gathering space where the texts of participating writers may commingle, refract forms and meanings, and interrelate. All write towards how to nurture (ideas of) the collective and individuated body through their generosity as cultural workers, as colleagues, and as friends.

If you and I joined a picnic where these texts were shared, what conversations would unspool through the embodiment of these works and words?

I invited the participants thusly: “imagine showing up to an impromptu picnic with fresh text. What unpublished morsel would you share that might unsettle, estrange, attune, and/or nourish us as readers this day?”

Here: in the commons: these texts.

3 Engraved in the concrete of bpNichol Lane is his poem, reading: “A / LAKE / A / LANE / A / LINE / A / LONE.”

4 The Flemish words *oeverloze eiland* translate to English as ‘endless island.’ This is also the name of the café in Ghent where Larissa Lai and Jacob Wren featured at an impromptu reading event in 2009.

