

## News from the Feminist Caucus, by Anne Burke, Chair

This month A Review of *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women and a proposal for Canadian Women and the Vote*. Also This month we welcome new members Doris Fiszer, Sonja Arntzen, and Barbara Black, with news from other members. You can email me at: femcaucusburke@yahoo.ca.

**Thank you to Carol Casey who has undertaken the organizing of our 2018 panel, Remembering Forward: Generations of Feminism.**

1. What has changed in the past 30 years of feminism/women's advocacy?
2. What has remained the same?
3. Why do you think things have changed or stayed the same?
4. How do you feel about this?
5. Do you think it's necessary to reflect on the past in order to affect the present and the future?
6. Do you think it's necessary to dialogue with those who are part of a different generation – why? What can we learn or not?
7. How can the League learn from this dialogue today? What can we take away as 'action' for members/poets/people from this dialogue?

Some more Information and Guidelines for the 2018 LCP Feminist Caucus Panelists follow.

- **Date of Panel:** Friday, June 15, 9:00 to 10:15
- **Location:** Toronto: Harbourfront Centre
- **Publication:** Essays, responses and poetry submissions will be published in the Feminist Caucus annual chapbook. Contributors will receive one free copy of the chapbook. Writers reserve all rights. The publication will be long enough to qualify for PLR.
- **Requirements:**
  - **Essay,** c1500 words.
  - **Responses to partners' essay**
  - **Dialogue between partners**
  - **Report on the dialogue,** 500-1000 words, joint or individual submission. This will also form the basis for your presentation
  - **Panel presentation:** 10 minutes each, 20 minutes joint.
  - **Poetry:** up to 3 pages, relevant to topic
  - **Images/visual art:** up to 3 images (please include a verbal description that puts the image in context to the topic)
  - **Bio and Photo.** For both the chapbook and the panel introduction (please include a thumbnail version (10-20 words-what you most want the audience to hear about you-as time will be short)
  - Send documents in Word. High resolution images in jpg format only
- **Deadlines:**
  - **Feb 15:** Essay done. Sent to your partner, cc Carol.

- **March 30:** Responses to essays. Dialogue between partners. Contact Carol if you need assistance.
- **May 15:** Written report on dialogue between partners done. Sent to Carol
- **June 1:** Bios (thumbnail and official), poetry and presentation outlines. Sent to Carol
- **June 15: Panel !!!!!**
- If you want to revise or add to your contributions after the panel experience, you can submit till **August 1, 2018**.

**Thank you to Vanessa Shields and Charlie Petch for preparing the 2017 panel papers for publication.** The Living Archives chapbook will be titled the same name as the panel: *Feminism: Revisit, Revise, Revolutionize - A Two-Part Harmony*. It will also include the original and revised Feminist Caucus Mission Statements (which was voted on!) The chapbook will be available for sale at the next LCP AGM, which will take place in Toronto at Harbourfront as part of the Canadian Writers Summit - a monster of a conference! You will each get one free copy (I believe!)! The recording of our panel was successful!

**Thank you to Nicole Brewer for editing Lit Feminist and keeping members informed about the FEMINIST CAUCUS:** Feminist Caucus publications are available for purchase through our website! Check out our three 2016 publications [here](#). You can find monthly Feminist Caucus reports [on our website](#) as well. You can now also sign up to receive more regular correspondence on Feminist Caucus goings-on, as well as general femme lit news, [here](#)!

*Local Heroes* by Penn Kemp Insomniac Press Launch, April 2018 Museum London Theatre London ON

Here is our promo video of *Local Heroes*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-edwKodu0s> (2/12 minutes)

Enjoy!  
Penn

<http://pennkemp.weebly.com/>  
[www.pennkemp.wordpress.com](http://www.pennkemp.wordpress.com)  
[www.soundcloud.com.pennkemp](http://www.soundcloud.com/pennkemp)

**CHRISTINE LOWTHER** (returning member) has been a lifelong activist and a resident of Clayoquot Sound since 1992. She is the co-editor of two collections of essays, *Living Artfully: Reflections from the Far West Coast* (The Key Publishing House, 2012) and *Writing the West Coast: In Love with Place* (Ronsdale Press, 2008), and the author of three books of poetry, *My Nature* (Leaf Press, 2010), *Half-Blood Poems* (Zossima Press, 2011) and *New Power* (Broken Jaw Press, 1999). She contributed "In Celebration of Pat Lowther: A Daughter's Collage" to

*A Tribute to Pat Lowther* on what would have been her 75th birthday, Living Archives of The Feminist Caucus, The League of Canadian Poets 2010 Feminist Caucus Panel. Other contributors are Toby Brooks, "Femicide After Pat Lowther" and "The Poetic Influence of Pat Lowther: Her Poetry, Her Life, Her Murder; Or How I Became a Feminist", by Carolyn Zonailo.

**MAGIE DOMINIC:** In a new article in honour of Canada's 150th anniversary of confederation, on the site "Canadian Writers Abroad," an excerpt of Mordecai Richler's 1967 essay refers to Newfoundland writer Magie Dominic.

**CONCETTA PRINCIPE's** latest book of poems, *This Real*, is now out with Pedlar Press. It is a meditation on motherhood in the end times, referencing messiah, miracle, milk, psychosis, creation, and 9/11.

**Doris Fiszer** is an Ottawa poet whose poems have appeared in a variety of publications including *Bywords Quarterly Journal*, *bywords.ca* and the *Voice*. She has a poem forthcoming (April 2018) in the anthology *When All Else Fails: Motherhood in Precarious Times*, (Demeter Press). Her chapbook, *The Binders*, was the 2016 winner of Tree Press's chapbook contest. Her poem, "Zen Garden," won the 2017 John Newlove Poetry Award. As the recipient of this award, she has been offered the opportunity to publish a chapbook in 2018 through *Bywords*. *The Binders* was also shortlisted for the 2017 bpNichol Chapbook Award. As well, she is an associate member of The League of Canadian Poets. Doris has recently completed a full-length poetry collection and is currently writing poems about her mother. **She has permission to reprint her poem, "Zen Garden" from Bywords.**

### **I Never Tire of Waves**

on the edge of sleep  
I feel my mother's breath  
on the back of my neck  
a light touch on the shoulder  
she and I walk on sand  
under a limitless sky

we breathe salt spray  
as she points out the curves  
of distant islands  
I hold her when we say good-bye  
after she leaves, I stay on shore  
watch waves shift shapes, catch  
glimpses of her face in the water

## **Foraging**

**i**

From mid May to late October  
especially after heavy rain  
we head to the Gatineau woods  
carrying baskets, paring knives,  
whistles around our necks--  
to scare off bears  
or blow hard if we get lost.  
Father in the lead, my mother, brother  
and I struggling to keeping pace.  
*Slow down*, my mother yells  
but he keeps running,  
only stopping briefly to look  
under and around each tree  
for gold in the forest.  
Sometimes we hike for hours without luck  
on rare occasions, rewarded  
with a never-ending sea  
of yellow chanterelles or elusive morels.  
We set each gem carefully in our basket.  
At home we devour some sautéed boletes  
in butter with onions and scrambled eggs  
for a late lunch.

**ii**

My mother and I work fast  
to dehydrate the rest while they are fresh.  
We clean each one gently  
with a small soft brush, separate  
stem from cap, place them on foil-lined racks  
in a slow oven,  
turn them after an hour,  
let them slowly dry for another.  
The scent of drying fungi  
lingers in the kitchen for days.  
We fill air tight glass jars  
with shrivelled pieces,  
store the jars on basement shelves beside mushrooms pickled  
in white vinegar, black peppercorns and onions.  
Rehydrated, they make their way  
into Mother's goulash, chicken and dumpling soup,  
sauerkraut and mushroom pierogi.

My father told us to downplay  
our bounty's size  
to their Polish friends if they inquired  
to never reveal our prime sites.  
We could disclose our gutted locations  
or ones where no mushrooms grew.  
*Isn't that lying?* I ask.  
*Mushroom hunting is a competitive sport*  
my mother says.  
*All Polish parents train their children*  
*in the same way.*

### iii

I've lost the certainty  
of identifying edible mushrooms.  
No one in my family is left who can help me.  
My dried mushrooms come from Costco  
a tall plastic container—  
yellow boletes, oysters, porcinis and portobellos.  
Infused in hot water, then added  
to turkey soup, slow-cooking stew  
and spaghetti sauce.  
Each time I open the jar  
I see my mother sitting at her kitchen table  
an overflowing bushel of chanterelles before her.

### Footbridge

As usual, my mother gestures, *come*,  
and I follow through a meadow  
of butterfly weed and daisies.  
Tall grasses tickle my knees. I finger  
their gold silk threads while we walk.

A circle of children sings:  
*ring around the rosy, pocket full of posies,*  
husha, husha, louder, faster.

She finds a log over a stream.  
After we cross, the footbridge disappears.  
*This is where I live.*  
She offers tea and honey cake,  
conversation by the water.

My mother hands me her book  
on autumn landscapes,  
shows me charcoal sketches of the children.

At the forest's edge, we watch  
the wavelike dance of a leaf  
until it touches ground.

I open my eyes, inhale  
this other world before it disperses  
in the light.

### **In the Year Before She Died**

Two dreams over and over.  
First she left my brother and me  
in front of the mall, waved,  
drove off.

In the other she and I stood  
in front of my childhood cottage  
— its orange shutters, tire swing,  
stork statue in the front yard —  
everything the same.

By the water Mother warned  
*don't swim out too far,*  
walked away, didn't look.

In hospital she stared  
at her frozen arm and leg,  
mouth and tongue  
twisted familiar words,  
refused the ice chips I offered.

During the day I know she's dead,  
but night blurs.  
In sleep she's here,  
opens her arms to me.

## Zen Garden

*Nature does not hurry, and yet everything is accomplished.*

— Taoist proverb

Comb smooth stones into still spaces, rake  
ripples into a curving river, follow its seasons

through spring splurges of daffodils and azaleas,  
jack-in-the-pulpits and pink lady slippers,

sweetened islands of midsummer roses clustering  
honey bees in their orange heads.

Remember when water lilies—rose-coloured teacups on emerald  
saucers—bobbed up and down in the pond. Then

in winter, deer wobbled over icy mounds, nibbling  
loose corn in the bare-bones yard.

Now purple New England asters, native grasses, and nasturtiums  
linger into chill.

Sit on the stone bench. A rake  
rests against the maple.

Let your breath become  
unhurried,  
as the trees that surround the garden.

Nod inwardly at each thought as if  
it were a withering leaf.

Breathe in morning silence.  
Exhale morning silence.

A sugar-swollen monarch  
will shiver its way  
to warmth.

## Father and Daughter

*mother would still be alive if she hadn't gone  
to that new doctor you recommended*

A tempest always brewed  
under the veneer of your charm  
and repertoire of jokes,  
your laughter tumbling  
into brooding silence.

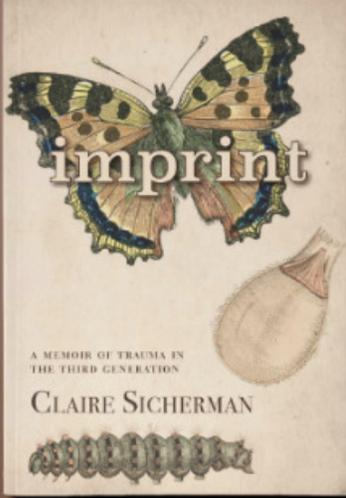
You disapproved  
of my boyfriends, enforced curfews,  
had me followed after I moved out,  
blamed me  
when Mother died.

We didn't speak for months,  
sometimes for years.

Still, I remember  
you and me cutting a single of a Polish song,  
you held my hand while we sang,  
your deep baritone in harmony  
with my four-year old soprano—  
you patted my head when we finished.

## **Imprint: A Memoir of Trauma in the Third Generation // Claire Sicherman**

*Imprint* is a profound and courageous exploration of trauma, family, and the importance of breaking silence and telling stories. This book is a fresh and startling combination of history and personal revelation. When her son almost died at birth and her grandmother passed away, something inside of Claire Sicherman snapped. Her body, which had always felt weighed down by unknown hurt, suddenly suffered from chronic health conditions, and her heart felt cleaved in two. Her grief was so large it seemed to encompass more than her own lifetime, and she became determined to find out why.

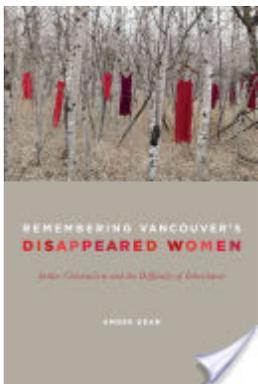


"A braided narrative, a testimony of the psychic journey Sicherman underwent to integrate all aspects of herself: a woman, a wife, a mother, the daughter and granddaughter of those who survived and *did not* survive the Holocaust ... There is no way *Imprint* will not imprint itself upon you ..."

— Sarah Elizabeth Schantz,  
author of *Fig*

Available in-stores and online

Full details at:  
[www.caitlin-press.com](http://www.caitlin-press.com)



### **Review of *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance*, by Amber Dean (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015) 188 pp. paper Notes Bibliography Indexed.**

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, between the late 1970s and early 2000s, may seem comparable to Whitechapel in London, between 1888 and 1891; or Washington State during the 1980s and 1990s; and the infamous Port Coquitlam, B.C. farm, 1983 to 2002. Appearances can be deceiving, unless or until one estimates that at least five hundred and eighty-two Indigenous women were murdered or remain missing across Canada. This is in addition to the larger issue of violence against women worldwide.

The Missing Women Task Force Poster, *Remember Their Names* and *The Named and the Unnamed* video-installations, The Montréal Living Monument Mural, the Annual Valentine Women's Memorial March, and more recently *Flowers We Will Never Know the Names Of*, a long poem by Cathy Ford about the L'École Polytechnique murders, are all commitments to never forget the dead. Names of the fourteen Montréal women are entered alphabetically by last name through the opening thirteen sections of the long poem; with respect, only their first names are used within the body of the poem.

In the Preface Dean observes that the media appear more interested in white, middle class missing or murdered, specifically the case of grandparents and grandchild in Calgary. The subtitle references vulnerable Indigenous, poor sex workers struggling with addictions in the context of unjust social conditions as ongoing settler colonialism.

The author contributed to *Torn from our Midst: Voices of Grief, Healing, and Action from the Missing Indigenous Women Conference*; *Reconciling Canada: Historical Injustices and the Contemporary Culture of Redress*; *Public: Art, Culture, Ideas; Not Drowning but Waving: Women, Feminism, and the Liberal Arts*; and *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*. She co-edited a special issue of *West Coast Line* on "Representations of Murdered and Missing Women".

Dean draws on police posters, documentary films, photography, news stories, life-writing, poetry, performance and visual art, and memorials (marches, murals, benches, and monuments). She taught at Capilano College in Vancouver, in 2004; then in 2008, in Hamilton, Ontario, and at McMaster University, in 2014.

"Disappearance" and "missing" (otherwise unaccounted for) are relative and politically-charged terms, gender-based, and state-supported. *The Forgotten* project exhibition in the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, in 2011, was cancelled due to a lack of consultation but a conference on "Missing Women: Decolonization, Third Wave Feminism, and Indigenous People of Canada and Mexico" was held at the University of Regina, in 2008.

Frontier mythology and the trope of the missing Indian in Western Canada are replaced by an analysis of "squaw men", "whores", the "queer(ed)" instead of sensationalizing stories about "a lone man on trial". A memoir or journalistic *Missing Sister* evokes being haunted in the academy, and the "Following Ghosts", a practice of inheritance, albeit comprised of "Different Knowings, Knowing Differently" (p. 59) a problem raised in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*.

The Downtown Eastside signifies poverty, drug use, disease, degeneracy, on the 100 block of West Hastings Street. A map of the Planning Area, a photographic panorama, and anthology *V6A: Writing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* are all graphic representations. There are others too numerous to name here, including images of re-settlement, the urban pioneer, the urban working class. Indeed, "all of us who inherit what lives on from Vancouver's disappeared women". (p. 57)

Thirty-one women were designated as missing from the neighbourhood, in 1999; a later version contains sixty-nine photos of disappeared women. Some images resemble prisoner processing photos known as “mug shots” as though wanted criminals for sex and drugs not missing victims (thirty-one names in 2004, then sixty-five in 2007). (See: *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest*). The poster photos have since been re-imagined not only in *The Forgotten* project but by the EDAN (Everybody Deserves a Name) team. Sketches are said to express “the softer side” of missing women (p. 91), the ideal innocent child victim for age-progression techniques with recognition politics (See: *Bound by Recognition*).

The Indian Act was used to control Indigenous women who married (“out”) a non-Indigenous man. “Squaw men” were white who had relations with Indigenous women, a departure in nineteenth-century social and sexual norms. There was a reluctance to punish them. “Queer” is a way of describing what is “oblique” or “off line” rather than lesbian, bisexual, or homosexual. (See: *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*) White gay men “queered” (or celebrated sexuality) “against” prostitutes. Racism and colonization shape Indigenous women’s participation in sex work. The past remains unsettled.

Dean recalls a documentary about the dedication of *Marker of Change/ À L’Aube du Changement* a permanent memorial to the fourteen “privileged” white women murdered in Montreal on 6 December, 1989. She explores the ironies of various texts, naming the dead, in *Remember Their Names* a 2009 video-art installation and *Vigil* a 2002 performance commissioned for the Talking Stick Aboriginal Art Festival. Among others, all associated with “Memory’s Difficult Returns: Memorializing Vancouver’s Disappeared Women”.

Reckoning can be a collective process of uncovering, connecting, and working to address the injustices we inherit, depending on how we define the “we”. Dean describes her encounters with social activists, police, neighbourhood, and significant others. Settler colonialism has led to present violence. Dean is steeped in Western theory and criticism, although she does turn to Indigenous scholars, writers, and activists. In “Oratory on Oratory” in *Trans.Canada.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2007) Lee Maracle wrote:

We are called upon to pay attention to our relationship with others, to engage the world and all its beings in a responsive and responsible manner that is cognizant of the perfect right of other beings to be in relationship to us. (cited p. 150 )

Dean is Assistant Professor in the Gender Studies and Feminist Research Program and the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University.

In July there was a Call for Submissions: Canadian Women and the Vote 1918-2018: *Prairie Fire* (39.1) Special Issue:

*Prairie Fire* magazine is calling for original, unpublished creative work that commemorates or castigates, honours or howls about the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Act to Confer the Electoral Franchise upon Women.” Send us poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, memoir, drama—or another genre, as you see fit—that celebrates, reflects on, or engages with women’s issues in Canada in the last 100 years, such as the suffrage movement, women’s rights, gendered political issues, etc. We welcome submissions in all sorts of styles from writers who live anywhere on the gender spectrum.

However, the magazine has since postponed the proposed project. Norma Kerby, one of our new members, brought this to my attention and asked if the Feminist Caucus would consider the poetry component (either online or a possible printed chapbook). I have since contacted another new member Sue Sorensen, the Guest Editor, if she would be willing to bring the project to the League. If approved, the theme could be a future panel, but that would come to the 2018 Business Meeting. She replies below:

It's very good to hear from you. I'll copy the *Prairie Fire* editorial staff on this email, and they can let you know more about our future plans for this issue as they become more specific. [Managing Editor Andris Taskins says that the office is still interested in working on the special issue.]

Here's what's happened: the way we handled the publicity just didn't bring in enough quality work, so we had to postpone and rethink. But *Prairie Fire* is indeed committed to trying again for this special issue. We're going to put our heads together and do a new Call for Submissions, probably with a much more exciting title and a more attention-grabbing and relevant scope.

**If you could let members of the LCP's Feminist Caucus know this news -- and indeed if you or any members want to send us ideas, suggestions, schemes -- we'd appreciate all such help.**

As *Prairie Fire* observes:

Anniversaries are bittersweet events. On May 24, 1918 most Canadian women were granted the right to vote in federal elections. That’s a landmark decision to observe. But there were still exclusions: it would be a long time before Asian-Canadians (after WW2) and Indigenous people (1960)—both women and men—were granted the vote.

Let's work together on how to be inclusive of those who were only afforded the franchise later in Canada and others, internationally, who remain disenfranchised.

Footnote 1

Women in Quebec had voted in previous elections dating back to the late 18th Century. "Unlike women in the other British North American colonies, women in Lower Canada (Quebec) who met the property requirements could vote." Elections Canada, [A History of the Vote in Canada](#)

Footnote 2

"Status Aboriginal women were excluded from political activities related to local Band governments until 1951, when amendments to the federal *Indian Act* removed barriers to women's right to vote or hold office in Bands. Aboriginal women were allowed to vote in federal elections in 1960, when Ottawa finally extended the franchise to all Aboriginal people, men and women." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, [Women's Suffrage](#).

[The History of Women's Vote - Library and Archives Canada](#)

Despite continuing protests, Asian women and men had to wait until 1948 to receive the vote, the year of the [UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which Canada helped to draft and then adopted.

Until 1951, the *Indian Act* also barred Status [Indian women](#) from voting for or holding office in their bands. Inuit received the vote in 1950; however, their names were rarely added to official lists of people entitled to vote, and ballot boxes were not brought to Inuit communities in the Arctic until 1962.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/suffrage/>

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-voting-rights/>

**Sonja Arntzen** taught classical Japanese poetry and literature for twenty-five years. Currently Professor Emerita of the University of Toronto, but living on Gabriola Island in B.C, she continues to research and translate works of classical literature, particularly women's poetic diaries of the 10th to 11th Century. Her most recent translation is *The Sarashina Diary* (Columbia University Press, 2014). Since 2005, she has been publishing her own English tanka and haiku in journals such as *Gusts*, *Eucalypt*, *Kokako* and *Red Lights*. With Naomi Beth Wakan, she also produced two books of "response tanka," *Double Talk* (2010) and *Reflections* (2011). In 2017, her "Glossa on Leonard Cohen's *Anthem*" made the long list of the CBC Literary Awards Contest.

### **Past Life**

Even as a girl child,  
somewhere inside  
I felt like an old man.

And as an adolescent  
somewhere inside me  
a little old man  
laughed at my youthful folly.

Once I gave my old dad  
a statue of a wizened Chinese sage  
for his birthday,  
but I might have been giving him me.

Later,  
after studying the culture  
of the wise old men of China  
and realizing the depth  
of its misogyny,  
I thought...  
how fitting a lesson  
it would be  
for an old guy  
who never gave a thought  
about women  
to be born  
into a woman's body  
and learn to like it.

*Thunder over the Lake: Hexagram 54 in the I Ching*

feet cold, back stiff  
she hugs her loneliness  
to herself  
stuffs its mouth  
with dry leaves  
watches it spew out  
complaints  
“he will not listen  
cannot hear  
me me me!”

and so she spurns  
all the gifts  
he can offer  
for the lack of this one  
comforting listening ear

*Thunder over the Lake*

“the Marrying Maid’s place  
is not correct”  
she must take up again  
the noble man’s task,  
“practice magnanimity  
offer protection”  
it is...  
“woman’s ultimate end”

**Live Ember**

an ember tumbles  
from the thick ashes  
of last night’s fire  
well-husbanded by our good iron stove  
enough of the sun’s energy  
stored in the wood  
remains in this single red coal  
to nourish the next fire  
for the tinder is dry, the kindling best cedar—  
not a dying ember then  
but a live one tumbling me back  
through millennia to a woman  
returning to her cave  
late from her gathering

overjoyed to see the life in the coal  
that will bring ease to the rekindling  
of that night's fire...  
is there yet salvation  
in knowing we are one  
with our fire-making ancestors,  
despite the excesses of fire-making  
we are crazed with,  
to recognize that human link,  
not tribe, not race, not nation  
not class, not creed religious or political,  
just the kinship of needing  
to keep warm

### **Ode to Our Solar Array**

“Your roof is perfect,” he said,  
unshaded, metal, right pitch,  
correct azimuth,”  
(that arcane word,  
drawn from Arabic,  
for the desert travelers  
were the first to study  
the direction of celestial bodies  
in relation to the horizon).

And so we leaped  
of the cliff of uncertainty,

financial (could we really afford it?)  
practical (so many more holes in our roof, won't it leak?)  
existential (is this what we really should do?)

and landed  
in a pool of energy...  
black panels silently absorbing light  
turning it to amber's quality,  
electricity,  
flowing through a cable  
into our territory's grid  
to power ice cream freezers, air conditioners and  
summer fair arcade rides  
when our needs here are small,  
then in the deep dark time,  
the power will flow back  
to us for heat and light,

a sort of sharing,  
small, local but connected...

### **June Gardening**

I will have to give up  
gardening one day  
when I can no longer  
kill  
these smothering buttercups  
(my sister's favorite flower)  
these perennial bachelor buttons  
(my favorite colour blue)  
just because they are too greedy  
these dandelions  
the first cheering blossoms of spring  
and famine food if one might need it  
just because they are too vigorous  
these volunteer opium poppies  
just because their seeds fell  
in the wrong place,  
these wild strawberries,  
these English marigolds,  
just because they are too many.

Why must wanting  
to nourish some plants  
entail the slaughter of so many others?

Let me fall for good one day  
in my garden  
and rot away to compost,  
let dandelions  
sprout from my hands,  
bachelor buttons pop from my eye sockets,  
buttercups mat my chest,  
let a Douglas fir take root  
in my abdomen,  
a nursery of cedars  
spring up between my legs,  
  
let it all just grow.

## **Plum Tree**

Fifteen years out  
of academic harness  
not out of academic pursuits  
but slowly cutting  
the traces...  
cajoled by warm loyalty  
to an old friend  
to answer the call for a paper,  
attend the conference

that was full of revelations  
among many things...

now come the comments  
to guide the revisions  
of the paper for the conference volume.

I read the thoughtful, perceptive  
apt criticisms:  
“remove the personal reflections,  
they are not suitable for an academic paper,  
check such and so facts,  
deepen and expand the research  
here and there to give weight to the argument—“

and my feet drag,  
the scholar within me  
is tired,  
old withered plum tree  
that I am,  
the poet in its gnarled branches  
wants to flower.

## **Inspired by Chet Raymo’s “The Soul of the Night, an Astronomical Pilgrimage” and a visit to my astronomer friend Nick Halpin**

Unable to sleep,  
she climbed a tower of words  
up the cone of the night,  
earth’s window to infinity.

Up and out the wizard’s cap  
she hovered above the plane  
of our solar system,

shot off into the swirling arms of our galaxy,  
careful to skirt  
the black hole at its center,  
somewhere beyond Sagittarius  
(looking from earth, that is),  
felt herself dissolve  
into the stardust from whence  
we all began,  
floated past  
a pale aquamarine veil of an exploded  
star,  
made familiar  
through a friend's telescope.

On and on she traveled,  
five hundred light years,  
out to Betelgeuse,  
the red roiling elder star,  
swollen with the wards  
it once held in its gravity.

Out of time now  
exhilarated free  
and suddenly  
lonely...

she was still herself,  
longing for so  
many things she loved.  
She was still a speck  
in the organic fuzz shifting  
over this one spinning world,  
she must attend to matters  
petty and grave (relatively speaking),  
continue to walk the tightrope  
between the wonder and terror  
of existence.

**Barbara Black** has had a varied career in writing and editing, including stints as an opinion and travel columnist and book, theatre, and film reviewer. She has designed courses for Open School BC as well as written and edited many public relations and government documents. Recently she has refocussed her energies to literary writing. Other areas of interest include ten years of vocal training which led to participation in the Pacific Opera Victoria chorus, as well as work as an oratorio soloist and jazz singer. She has attended numerous workshops in several disciplines including poetry retreats with Patrick

Lane, The Disquiet International Literary Program in Lisbon, The Banff Puppet Theatre Intensive, Rhiannon's Vocal Improv, and the Advanced Solo Voice Program with Nancy Argenta and Ingrid Attrot. Her latest passion is motorcycling.

## **microconundrums**

### *unheard music*

you swallowed a songbird  
its beak stuck  
on the same wrong note  
this is no time  
for minor melodies

### *cartography*

what you don't reveal  
becomes an antique map  
brown ink drains  
from continents  
I always ask for too little

### *urban jungle*

sun sets, sexed flowers open  
teenagers screech bat songs  
hysterical with their sense of  
freedom in the dark

### *the mauve question*

this is your heart  
this is a deer I befriended  
who comes in the dusk to eat roses  
does it see colour or is it  
the scent of something tender?

—Barbara Black

First published in [donttalktomeaboutlove.com](http://donttalktomeaboutlove.com), May 4, 2017, this poem won First Prize in the *Don't Talk to Me About Love 2017 Poetry Contest* (\$1000). It was set to music for three female voices by composer Lynne Penhale and performed at the 2017 *Feroce: Canadian Women Compose* concert in Victoria, BC.

## **Sister Eugénie's Wonderful Glass Eye**

from *Authentic Fabrications of My Ancestry*

With one unfloating eternal eye  
she moves in midnight  
ghostly as a jellyfish

down rows of ransomed moony faces,  
the ranks of the motherless  
scrunch-eyed like foetuses in salt solution.

As she passes,  
the girl in crib nine  
invents the bathysphere,

orphans herself in the metal ball  
and sealed from the tide of  
night sighs drops

by cord the fathoms down  
to be with her, Sister Eugénie,  
monocular among aquatic angels.

—Barbara Black

This poem won First Prize in the 2013 *Spark Anthology "Una Mujer" Literary Contest* (\$500).

## **Dream Sonnet 3: Mother, Crater Lake**

She contemplates her mirror-self, dead still  
the afternoon air. No grasshoppers sing.  
Lake limpid, a bowl of blue glass, a womb  
too cold to swim. Volcano collapsed.  
On the water's surface, foliage floats  
like debris in the fluid of an eye.  
Below, tiny crustaceans sieve the depths,  
diaphanous as foetuses, feeding.

She is lost to me, inhabits some new  
element, a place I cannot conceive  
nor know, nor find. One breath will affirm her  
long fall from this dream into another.

—Barbara Black

This poem was published in *Contemporary Verse 2*, Vol. 36 No. 1. It is currently being set to music for voice and piano by composer Allison Cociani for performance in 2018 in Victoria, BC.

## **Fado I**

*Seria...uma reza/ Que nos viesse matar*  
It could be... a prayer that comes to kill us  
—Mário Cláudio, 'Litania'

each love has its weight, its particular dream  
over time it dreads its own undoing  
it dreads being stranded in a starless night  
a star is an end, not a beginning

lovers, you are untouched by grace  
because you have stopped believing in it  
now night comes, with its indecipherable prayer,  
a prayer come to kill you if only you would wake.

—Barbara Black

This poem was published in *Contemporary Verse 2*, Vol. 36 No. 1.

### **Fado III\***

*Ninguém fale em primavera*

Let no one speak of spring

—David Mourão Ferreira, 'Primavera'

I won't speak of spring  
nor of its salt breath.

Remember how the tides  
poured across our bed?

We floated to a strange country,  
fish like scrolls at our feet.

The heart is  
...nothing we can see nor say,  
a dead sea without fury.

You are a small desert isle,  
dreaming drought.

I wanted to live there in that country  
but for want of water.

—Barbara Black

*\*This poem has been set to music for voice and piano by the author. It was published in Contemporary Verse 2, Vol. 36 No. 1*

### **Tsuniah Lake, August 2014**

Dogs pant on the porch,  
know the month by its smell.  
A seamless morning, mournful  
in the height of summer.

Clouds like steam,  
a broken sprinkler, drought.  
Dusty road smells of a rainless past.

Everyone's out fishing  
with unbarbed hooks.  
A forest fire burns  
a hundred miles north.

I taste its ash in my mouth.  
The land moves.  
An epiphany is close. As if  
at any moment it might  
rain rabbits.

Wasps swarm the fish gutting bench.

I remember the smell  
of my mother's hot iron.

What is the lesser crime?  
Remembering wrong  
or forgetting?

—Barbara Black

This poem was published in *Forage Poetry*, 2016. It is currently being set to music for voice and instruments by composer Lynne Penhale for performance in 2018 in Victoria, BC.

## **Moth of Knives**

Are you the dark brown one  
of the sweet-smelling soil,  
the solitary thorn who eats the tender leaves?  
Come, I have a gift of pine needles,  
and sap like a knob of golden glass.

Let animal night play its lonely song.  
I will gather notes in bracken ferns,  
carry them through the terrible woods,  
like a child moving through fever.  
Each step, moth of knives,  
I will stalk you with love,  
my music an invitation.

We'll lie down in the leaves.  
You'll whisper to me your secret words,  
each like a berry I must savour.  
I shall love you just this once,  
the moon like an old man's sleeping eye;  
no witness to our coupling.

O lover, your spines are my instruments.

—Barbara Black

This poem was published in *FreeFall*, Vol. XXII No. 1.

“*Make the birds sing slower, make me listen faster.*” Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers*.

## **Strange Attractors**

Chaos boy, our world was unfinished  
when you were burnt. O you,  
forgotten in the ashes, are back.

With brittle tinder, you rebuild your passion,  
your rage, inflaming the chimney  
with your pitchy smoke.

I remember your talent with fire,  
how you could make love to the head of a match,  
how you dreamed your spectacular eternal cure.

I leave you to consume yourself,  
while beyond this ruin  
tiny birds rasp their stricken songs.

My work is to transcribe their music.

—Barbara Black

This poem was published in *Tattoo Highway, The Lazarus Issue*, Vol. 23, 2014.

## **It is**

a summer night, in the bedroom  
with furniture white as in a dead girl’s dream.  
She’s asleep in the little princess bed,  
pillow smells of green grass and dew.

In the night, she wakes in another season,  
snowlight occupies the room.  
A force by the window watches,  
a presence, a wall of molten ice,  
neither air nor fire.

It observes her, eyelessly.  
Until she is altered  
in the too-white room.

She never told anyone,  
but inside she was cold, cold.

She had swallowed the pneuma  
of dread and attending,  
whose only purpose  
was to tend to the ones  
who will witness ferocious beauty.

—Barbara Black.

This poem was published in the workshop anthology *What Can't Be Contained*, Leaf Press, 2014, edited by Patrick Lane.