

Nicole Markotic / TWO POEMS

talk-talking

you can't fool me. you suggest we stay up all night. talking.
except we were. talking. about the movie we just
saw, about after-death experiences and chemical
reactions in the brain, about Laurie Anderson, about
about

the rain just there in the background. mood music. the usual
postcard lightning until the power blows out for good
and your roommate (soon to be ex) phones to say your
basement is full of water

my car without a heater or defrost, we can't see out the inside.
till water covers our ankles and the road is
disappeared. disappeared asphalt. we on an uphill.
so I don't want to rely on a stupid simile or
anything, but it was like being in a maze and every
road I attempt turns into tops of cars only

(tomorrow morning
these roads will be
splattered with
bucket seats
dragged out to dry
in the sun)

you decide each dead(wet)end to walk and I say swim more like it.
half the distance we cover is in reverse

your feet on the dashboard, mine dip into mush each time I
brake. she doesn't know where it's coming from, your
roommate's voice on the phone, but the walls impart
liquid. my car is almost an antique. is almost car
parts. the holes in the floor push the road when it's
water into our shoes. I refuse to not drive manic.
not for electric storm. not for you

the movie was about can a person come back after death and be
the same or is everything changed, altered? can we
trust our sense of smell? that the sounds we hear
are words, sentences? you've just come back from
Vancouver (my words shape your roommate's telephone)

prairie flood. when you were out on the coast, there was a
shortage of rain. now you're back we plan to stay up
all night sit on the floor talk movies eat popcorn
talk movie talk, but

your roommate's voice

my jeans sponge up a new burst of flood. this is crazy, you
say, there must be a way out, a way *up* from here

but then I can't help it: the high hits me sharp. slap. nirvana.
I reverse (full speed ahead) half a block both feet
sunk up to my shins. look out, I say, just when you
think it's safe to go back into the weather

how can I be ecstatic? what you won't ask

when the roads disappear around us, when months ago my own

world disappeared

(I phoned you in
Vancouver: this is
stupid but I can't
stop crying I've
been crying non
stop for five days
I'm not even sad
anymore just pissed
off where the hell
is all this damn
liquid coming from)

the plan is to stay up all night. talking

but: thunder and crash part of the. talking. blow up this
sentence. you not in. Vancouver. except: tonight
I'm in Calgary. rain matches every. or. you take
your roommate's words (flood, basement, expectation)
and hand them back to me. because. BC means
another province. means rain in winter. means not
talking about. talking

my tin car goes from water's edge to water's edge. retreat,
retreat, the weather keeps happening out/in/side the
car. your roommate's voice. we were talking that
movie we were yakking up late the thunder as music
the telephone's voice through the dark of the power
blows me out of the water slide your seat away from
not this province and buckets of lightning and
experiences in the dark. and Laurie Anderson. and
chemical movies

and now: we drive circles in the rain

portage

you come back from Québec your face alive. you have discovered
language. discovered the *inside* of the *other*. three
weeks later the car smashes into bodies: one. two.
three. you are the only one facing traffic

on the bus from Vancouver I write you a letter and it feels like
you, in another language, farther than a phone call
away. both of us jilted (dumped, punted, whatever) at
the same time. I stay in the here, spread myself
north to Red Deer, west to Vancouver; you woo
airports: Calgary, Toronto, Montréal, Amsterdam,
Frankfurt. your destination: away. quaint words:
woo. jilted. destination.

two nights after the accident you show up at [our] place. years
before the [she]. you can't sleep. no: don't want
sleep. we wake up and make tea. [he] feeds you
spiked liquid for hours. your *beau-frère*. that night
your voice telling the words while I doze and doze

when the car hit, you said, you could see the face of the boy
driving. the face disbelieving. your co-camp
counsellors — one in the van, one on the road — watch
the kids not the highway. the three girls: smack.
smack. smack. against pavement

in Germany you sign up for *Sprachkurs*, refuse to speak to the
other English students, take an apartment in town,
away from the *Universität*. you tell them not to write
back, you'll be in Switzerland by then

the old airport in Calgary used to be filled with cowboy art. a
huge wall mural shows the pioneers and Indians
meeting under a future downtown skyline

all summer I send you postcards from Alta. you disappear on
paper. disappear from the here. write a new
language possibility (*Ich kenne. Du kennst*). land a
job in Switzerland, camp counsellor for rich American
teenagers. teach them a qualified danger

the spokes from one bike wheel spread over a kilometre apart.
from the point of impact. how is that possible? the
police have figured out absolutely everything, you
tell me. the speed he was driving, the angle of the
point of impact, how the cigarette burnt his fingers.
loss of control. he swerved into the shoulder,
swerved into the cyclists. and out again. if the
police phone, you say, get the badge number and call
back. chances are it's not

three cyclists hit; three cyclists dead. the others in shock, no
memory of impact. you: the only adult facing traffic.
the car skid 30 metres before it stopped. (*Halt*).
one body pasted against the front grill. one beneath
where she slammed into the camp van. one somewhere
else. you can't help looking around: where is the
third body?

the great thing about Freiburg is you already speak the
language. *Deutsch*. no shock of immersion. you do a
Master's in Sports. *Fußball & Hockey*. in German

the great thing about now is that Europeans want to learn
American. sports and otherwise. they pay you to
teach their kids about the Flames

want to hear the funny thing? when [he] told me — I had to be
told by my soon-to-be-out-of-the-picture — I actually
heard you dead. the words: all three of them dead.
and then three long seconds. pre-rhyme of my three-
day space of disbelieving [he]'s future tense vacancy.
what can't be true

can't be's

bad movie scenarios. you: with more airports behind you than
goodbyes. and me: still expecting sense from
absence. still expecting words to fill up space

three minutes before the impact a diesel truck passed too close
to the shoulder. too close to your bike trip.
everyone off the road and onto the grass, you yell.
terrified of what might have been. what might have
been: only three stragglers. could have been twenty,
twenty-five, but you can't trade the degree of loss.
the face that came home from Québec alive (*c'tait
incroyable*) stares the driver. he shut his eyes
before the first hit. didn't see a thing

betweened

after high-school you catch a ride with your boss, Mr. Khumar.
he wants to see L.A. you drive away from September,
from paycheques and mid-terms. see ya in a year,
you tell Mom. then dive into a car and emerge two
weeks later in front of Matthew's condo. an uncle we
haven't seen since: crawlings and diapers. a father's
brother. a confirmed bachelor who's been married
three times

Mr. Khumar knows a couple who produce movies. cheap thrillers.
slashers. you stay at their beach house for two
weeks. twice a day you phone Matthew: ringings. on
your last day, he picks up. unc? you ask. neph, he
replies

you meet [she] in a classroom in Calgary. *français* only. summer
and winter and fall in the Chicoutimi, Québec, Montréal,
and it takes Calgary for introductions

you came back from Québec and your face was alive. you
discovered language. the *inside* of the *other*. when
[she] left, you closed up your eyes and travelled
Europe. your eyes facing traffic

Christmas Eve you sneak in the basement window and phone Mom
upstairs. you're in Arizona, you say. you're driving
on with Mr. Khumar to New York. you miss us. you
say this will be your first family absence. (*sehr*
komisch) the phone call lasts 20 minutes and then you
hang up. walk upstairs and into Mom's arms. Merry
Christmas, you say, what's for supper?

you crawl away from vision as dialect. seeings and wondering.
helpful hints. you dive into

each year in Québec you plan more and more elaborate tricks.
(*c'est pas parce qu'on rit que c'est drôle*). visiting games

you phone and say you're coming December 23rd, then
show up one week before. phone and complain you
can't afford the airfare, then walk in the door two
days before Christmas. the last year: you call
early in December, reverse the charges. tell me
you'll make it out by the 21st. I say I've learned to
expect you by the 15th. fifteen minutes later you
knock on my apartment door. collect call from across
the street phone booth

the parents of the American girl decide to sue the City for one
million. this translates into: they sue you,
responsible adult, municipal employee. in America, we
place a higher value on life, they say. up the ante.
they say their daughter is worth more

because brother doesn't rhyme with sister. but in German we
are *Geschwister*

that time Mom visited you in Montréal. you cycle to the
airport, intend to put her in a cab facing your place,
race her home. when you don't find her flight listed
you grab your bike and cycle to the other airport. Mom
waits in front of your apartment door and you cycle
pavement between runways

you pretend ignorance of [she]'s language. because you're
supposed to be teaching English. no *français* allowed.
you programme beauty pageants for the guys and
sleepovers in a bar. [she] hangs around Mom's house
after classes are over. for weeks and weeks [she]
laughs at your absence of words

if the police call, you tell us, don't say any words. always get
the badge #. chances are you're talking to the press.
assume this: chances are

in Québec you: only hang out with *francophones*, go to hockey
games (root for the Flames), cross the St. Laurent in
mid-July (cup your hands for a sip and get cuffed in
the head — this isn't mountain water, *bloke*), live in
the Hassidic district, teach English to kids who only
speak *joual*, eat *poutine*, watch American movies dubbed
into Canadian *français*, *parle & parle & parle* (your
face alive)

In Calgary: you cycle everywhere (wear a helmet now), enrol in 7
University classes (*Deutsch & français*, extra), play
hockey, coach hockey, go out with your classmates to
subtitled movies, visit the next-door neighbour who
bakes you cookies, study and study and then teach,
grow your hair and beard till Mom

[she] comes for Christmas (the exact day the exact time
scheduled) and you are lost again. in spite of
yourself. *belle-soeur*. but: [she] doesn't know
politics or art or literature, you say. [she] doesn't
know language. in spite of yourself

my last day in Red Deer I cycle south. one straight highway of
flat. you make me buy a helmet, make me cycle on the
left shoulder. cars honk and honk once they're past I
can't comprehend them. wind and boredom. truck
drivers wave. a construction worker offers me his
day-glow jacket. a woman in a pickup offers me a
lift. the road aimed at Calgary. the asphalt runway
at the Calgary International you take off from

any visit to Uncle Matthew (now, after your daily phone calls) he
gives instructions: we should grab our bags and go
to departures. not arrivals. go to departures and
he'll absorb us into his car, his air-conditioned LA
car and drive the 10 minutes to his condo, his air-
conditioned Playa del Rey condo. you visit once with
[she] and I fly there three times with [he]. between

Europe: you cycle all over. Switzerland, France, Italy, Croatia.
visit Dad's relatives, his friends. we were rich, you
write. send pictures of all the land Dad's father
owned before the war. before the leavings. you
cycle back through Austria, back to Germany. pack
your bike into a box and fly back home

at the airport I tell you about leavings and leavings. about
[he]'s goodbye (no words, just: *click*). I tell you
about the thousands of kilometres between here and
Freiburg—Québec just a speck in between. in the
between. I tell you about goodbyes

[she] becomes the invisible

the parents of the American girl don't sue the boy driving. he
is under 17, it was not his car. the parents of the
American girl purchase the car through several layers
of buyers. the parents of the American girl don't
press forward, don't drop the suit. you get to wait
and wait. write a letter of condolences to all three
sets of parents. we're glad the last thing our
daughter ... made her happy, one mother replies. the
parents of the American girl become the bad guys.
this is understood. you wait and wait. then fly here
again from Québec, land into the arms of

two more years of Québec. of carrying yourself into airports.
when the legal deadline crawls past (the point of no),
you leave the country: fly into absence

when [she] goes away and doesn't call, you phone Québec, talk to
the roommate, talk to a brother, speak into an
answering machine. when [she] goes away and doesn't
write back, you send envelopes of calendar pages and
mail-order coupons and special discount flyers. when
[she] goes away and doesn't, you take me out for ice
cream: [they]'re both scum, you say. scared of
words. of leavings. you buy a ticket to Frankfurt
(*langsam, langsam*), look forward to airports, transfer
your University credits, fly into language

when [she] goes away, and