

LIZ HOWARD / from *Of Her, After Song*

Is not the hybrid a melancholic? On a line between appearing + disappearing?
—Gail Scott, *The Obituary*

A RUDE INSCRIPTION AT THE TOP OF HEAVEN

Hush
all the falls of pulp+
paper graveyard invertebrates
wheresoe'er the new famine wars went
before any thunder contagion muted us
in the temperature dependent
marshlands

that opened all tributaries
of reddened mercury
when those lilies
fell me

naught a human heart nearshore the minimum
criteria

an uninterrupted silence
laid against
the fields
the fields
laid against
said DNA along the marginal pause

a disparity of garments trimmed the skin
to a threat

of arrest above
the overcrowded fog
with mosses
dioxin
so lovely

I forgot who I was

TENDER PATHOS: A DENSER, BLUE VAPOUR

Fresh+simple
any possible lake
could tell a bushwhack saviour
loon's likely moved
to crown land
a place time
would inscribe
as cloudless
in the rear window
of no fiscal return

last June
in heaven
tailwaters did valley the hydro
atmospheric adverse
emergency shelters
of children taken
on advisory
boil this water
of false men
electric

among haunts
of new aquatic species
as I heard them in autumn
before the prairie also
hoof-prints
half-effaced
spread

as legs in the corn
groping, lifted up
my lodges
my beaver
my own face

in the meantime
dredging every wetland
for a starry green+silent recreation
-al home

EVERY HUMAN HEART IS HUMAN

Ministry of the shaking dress
I could call this
a streamlet a better
coordinate, simply

lamprey
in the traffic
-ing style
no matter
any purple sky
or blue vapour

tender pine
became women
working the real
number is even
higher

when I was
out already
cunting in the fields for that fallow
had escaped me

in some marsh
of insufficient housing
laughing
all the time christ thought me
a fossil

I, Minnehaha, a small LOL
fiction antecedent
to quarry a nation

I gave you this name then said
erase it

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1855 epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* appropriated and confused Anishinaabe history and mythology and inserted/naturalized a colonial presence within Anishinaabe cosmology. It is a textual assimilation of indigenous rhythmic oration into a bombastic trochaic tetrameter, itself borrowed from the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*. Minnehaha, a creation of Longfellow, was the spouse of Hiawatha and whose death set the stage for the reception of settler influence later in the poem (I invite you to ponder this in light of current/systemic issues re First Nations women). *Of Her, After Song* is something of a translational détournement of *The Song of Hiawatha*. It is an intertextual recombination, filtered through the sited embodiment of myself and subsequent readerly selves, engaging the systemic tentacles of assimilation as they unfurl within and possibly enclose the contemporary New World. Words and phrases from Longfellow's epic are sampled and remixed. As I am both settler and indigenous the text may contain the sweet horrors of my diary; a girlish self-narrative that arose from the once irreconcilable. As I am a passable speaker of science it may include language from ecological reports on the Lake Superior region, in which the original text is set, and sociological reports regarding the injustices lived by many indigenous women, men, and two-spirit persons. These injustices are an inevitable extension of the ideologies inscribed in Longfellow's poem. *Of Her* is a linguistic performance that seeks to display/acknowledge its own implication in the effects of assimilation while simultaneously revealing those ideologies that underpin the assimilative program as it operates to this day. This is a project that seeks to continually "check itself" through each performative event of reading (including the internal speech act of a reader re-enacting the oration silently to herself). It is a suspicious text, a curious text, it knows that you peek over its fence in a kind of self-aware apprehension/appraisal. It wants to sing within you and be your neighbour.