

see to see —

DANIELLE LAFRANCE: “20 Ki Adam\$@iitsTn'nikott.siuax

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Red squiggles underline the majority of lines I type from Rachel Zolf’s new book of poetry, *Janey’s Arcadia* (Coach House 2014). My word processor is angry: it wants me to know that words are spelt incorrectly—it wants me to correct these lines. And this is exactly what the text attempts to counter, this correction of Canada’s ongoing colonial, genocidal history. In an interview, Zolf describes how her work is “about denial and disavowal in some way, and I usually get there through looking at the rhetorical construction of competing knowledges. It took going all the way to Palestine to realize that I was ignoring my responsibility as a settler-colonial interloper on this land” (23).

Janey Settler-Invader, a mutated, multifarious subject, slithers toward the Red River Colony (splicing together Kathy Acker’s Janey Smith with Janey Canuck amongst other voices) in cyborg fashion—the feminine subject, but also a residual byproduct of the settler in the present: “[A]t the same time friends theorized . . . No. We eniptoy them continually, and trear them honestly, and thev fear and respect us” (111). The text attempts to actualize how it looks and feels when acknowledgements become formalities: “. . . The sisters / run an industrial school where 250 orph8ns and Indign / children are cared for at the horny sauce of discord . . . sans any kind / of boner but a wishbone” (73).

This book isn’t an answer to settler-colonialism, just as the question: “do you consider yourself a settler?” (as Zolf has asked audiences in multiple venues) isn’t an end-point. Any answer is *dissatisfying*. It is not responsibility so much as discomfort, an itch that must fester inwards then out, back. “We could say that the object of analysis in *Janey’s Arcadia* is not a ‘thing,’ but a mediation” (De’Ath). *Janey’s Arcadia* deploys OCR—software that digitally-encodes print material, often producing misspellings—and is intended to be read. In performance, Zolf pops a blood vessel in her eye as she sounds out the OCR’d text (becoming-monster, becoming anachronistic settler). Zolf wants to “make *more* noise” (“Recognizing Mad Affects” 3), a noise that

creates space for a new kind of dialogue between social subjects where it didn't previously exist.

While in Vancouver to launch *Janey's Arcadia*, Zolf organized a polyvocal performance of the names of indigenous women murdered in Canada in front of Gastown's Gassy Jack statue: <http://vimeo.com/118604189>. We speakers felt the extended interrogation and ferocity behind the text. Before we took on our roles, a group of tourists admired the statue. Witnessing this perverted glorification of Canadian history, this tour group was informed of the historical patriarch's lesser-known backdrop: Jack was a pedophile who *falked* a young 12-year old indigenous girl (Crompton and Wallstam). Such cultural memories are actively effaced, seemingly with naïve ignorance, but ignorance nonetheless: violence in its most banal form. *Janey's Arcadia* is not subject to the confines of the page—it demands another kind of action from the reader, the settler.

Rachel Zolf. *Janey's Arcadia*. Toronto: Coach House, 2014.

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JASON STARNES: On *The Missing Pieces*

A poetic and evocative list of literary works, art objects, films, people, and hyper-specific facts that have been lost to history, either because they were destroyed or because they were never allowed to exist, this slim volume by Henri Lefebvre, French poet

and publisher (not the well-known Marxist philosopher), represents loss nominally, notionally, producing a material limbo by the aggregation of negatives.

The Missing Pieces forms a record of entropy while also countering negation; it might be seen as a *litany* in that word's darker sense: "a tedious recital or repetitive series." It goes on—the losses are extensive and various—and yet the list exhibits a coherence that betrays a stable subject-position behind its highly personalized curation.

With every sentence rendered in the present tense, Lefebvre generates an eternal now which is subtle and matter-of-fact. Very rarely does the documenting voice emote: "The last seventeen measures of the *Third Concerto* of Bela Bartok are empty." And yet this is a highly idiosyncratic register, manifesting a particular ethic beyond the aesthetic indexing of things that are no more (or will never be). An unmistakable overtone of mourning pushes the work beyond the merely indexical.

At the conceptual level, *The Missing Pieces* engenders a poetics of evocation. Irresistible imaginative triggers often posit an intriguing positive content while revoking its possibility: "The love letters of Arthur Rimbaud to Paul Verlaine." The resulting creative trace in the mind blooms from a hallucinatory glimpse.

The Missing Pieces is rich enough to engage those readers willing to follow an implied train of thought through the philosophical traditions of negation in Hegelian dialectics, but this slight ellipsis of a text also facilitates random-access reading. In the negative spaces Lefebvre maps out, the absence of material artifacts generates positive creative thought, and a gain is derived from so much loss.

Henri Lefebvre, *The Missing Pieces*. Trans. David L. Sweet. Semiotext(e), 2014.

TED BYRNE: She Means What She Says

"Corked," the long title piece of Catriona Strang's new book, consists of brief letters to Proust—the writer Proust, not the character Marcel—intermixed with versus (let's call them that, she does), which could easily be imagined as enclosures slipped in with the letters, as extensions of their prosed thought. Although it has a thematic that resembles, and sometimes upside downs, the *Recherche*, *Corked* is not a reading of Proust. It is a writing, a researching, alongside of Proust, a parallel line that will never meet its interlocutor. The letters are familiar in tone, impertinent at times, but

usually affectionate. The reader is talking back to Proust, the writer, as she reads. He will not understand (“a kinship . . . which I suspect you would reject”). The letters are direct and often indecorous, and thus terribly unlike Proust, who, to take one example, writes a couple of dozen letters to his upstairs neighbour, Mrs. Williams, which are prolix, but can be condensed into a simple message: “Keep quiet up there!” He manages to say this in such decorous phraseology as: “from now on [please] make as much noise as you can.” (*Lettres à sa voisine*, Gallimard 2013)

She, the reader, is squarely positioned on the other side of a gulf—the same one that separates Proust from Céleste, his housekeeper. “Céleste c’est moi,” she says, echoing Flaubert, but with the force of solidarity. Not, I am indistinguishable from what I write, but I am on the side of, not the fictional Françoise, Marcel’s housekeeper, but the very real domestic, Céleste Albaret, who made Proust’s work possible. *Her* work was invisible to him—this is a man who never carried house keys. She, the reader, the letter writer, in *her* invisibility to Proust, places herself on the side of the domestic. On the other side of *mondanité* (lost time). On the side of the non-renewable resources that make production possible. This is the “original complaint” of her letters—that domestic labour is not valued. At the same time, the domestic is the other side of what is understood as the work of art in Proust (time refund), an invisibility beyond commodification.

The imbrication of resource extraction and domestic servitude in “Corked” reflects one aspect of its method. Here the relation of the earth to the body is not metaphorical. I could say that it’s metonymical, but I no longer feel confident in that distinction.¹ Let’s just say instead that it involves a simultaneous actuality. That is, resource extraction—the rotten soul of our economy—is a merciless assault on our earth; domestic labour is a form of resource extraction. This is not, I repeat, metaphorical, as is the age-old equation of earth and woman. She is speaking, very precisely, of the exploitation of the earth *and* the exploitation of the domestic body.

In “Corked,” as in the *Recherche*, time and memory are *both* incompatible *and* linked. This conjunction denotes another gulf in “Corked,” a gulf that both she and Proust stand on the same side of. This gulf is defined as “the abyss of uncertainty continually opening and closing all around us,” but it is something toward which she

1 I’m not the first to make this confession in the midst of reading Proust—see Anne Carson, *The Albertine Workout*, appendix 33b (New Directions 2014).

maintains a “reserve,” which is to say a distance *and* a surplus. In the opening versus, “gulf” is verbed (a Strang practice): “we need / not gulf / doubt // nor gist-pierce / our place // whatever grip / or drib / we might / or mean.” “Corked” is peppered with such four letter words. The words “doubt,” “gist,” “place,” “grip,” “mean,” for example, are repeated or rimed elsewhere with other monosyllables referencing meaning or certainty: “hook,” “point,” “grasp,” “voice.” A four letter word connotes a certainty that need not gulf doubt, an archaic meaning of gulf being to swallow. We can live in doubt and certainty, must. We can be certain, but only through a directness that sometimes leaves meaning (“gist”) behind. The poem’s opening lines also embody a pulsion that I would call paronomastic. You could never get past this gate if you conceived of it as a puzzle, an ambiguity, or even a gate. Language is already so burdened that it cannot but shift and drift, to the point where it can hardly communicate a simple meaning. As if to enact this, the opening poem suddenly drops into pure paronomasia. The word “grip,” once pronounced, precipitates its flip-side, “drib.” This is a meaning—our grip, our grasp, is a drib—and a pure sound coupling. The paronomast can’t help it. After one such foray into this language mud puddle, she says “put me / out of / your misery.”

One may be compelled by “Corked” toward non-meanings, but not toward whatever-meanings. Meaning in this work results from an accumulation: of repetitions, of contradictions, constraints, and intrusions, as in Proust. But there is no ambiguity. Take the “coincidental hook” for example. It occurred to me that it could also mean a hook with which something is caught, a metonym for bait, a lure. But it really won’t yield to this reading. It is clearly a hooking together. The coincidental hook is the conjunction that joins forever the incompatibles that keep us suspended between doubt’s intrusions and certainty’s necessity. She says so: “Imagine a coincidental hook; I mean, imagine that I’m content *and* unsatisfied.”

Catriona Strang, *Corked*. Talonbooks, 2014.

With thanks and apologies to: Louis Cabri and his paper on “Unsettling,” the first part of *Corked*; Christine Stewart and her book *Aroused by Unreadable Questions*; and Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*.

JORDAN SCOTT: Of Poetry and Science: Christian Bok, Adam Dickinson, Angela Rawlings, and Jordan Scott in Oslo

The Norwegian poet Mette Karlsen begins her article, “Microphonic Body Machine: Angela Rawlings in Norway, and Iceland,” by describing the first moments of the 2014 Oslo International Poetry Festival:

The first Friday of September 2014. Sun, 18 degrees, and asphalt that smells hot. Only a few, yellow leaves have fallen from the large leaf-threes of posh sculpture par Ekeberg, Oslo. Four loud North Americans walk between over-sized, sculpted women, and enter the heart of the park: a forest of glass that captures, cares for, and feeds back the voice of Angela Rawlings.

A voice that brilliantly sounded from *echology* to a packed room in the basement of the Litteraturhuset in Oslo, where rawlings read with Bok and Dickinson. It was also Angela who convened the “loud North American panel” on Poetry and Science that took place on the last day of the festival. A chance for, as she writes, “literary colleagues over the past fifteen years to discuss how poetry and science surface in our development, research, and output and consider our practices in the contexts of environmental ethics, inter-entity collaboration, pataphysics, and dysfluency.”

During the panel I asked about poetic ruptures common to all our work, characterized by a new, radical kind of love, or stewardship of nature; perhaps a new epoch for the pastoral that moves beyond any reverence for the sublime—think Angela’s poetic project to explore “familiar human-love” for glaciers by interrogating “inherited and learned anthropomorphism,” or Christian’s assertion that the organism used for his *Xenotext* (*Deinococcus radiodurans*) determines “how he gets to be poet.” We spoke of surrendering to an “other,” and examining our bodies for evidence of the perceptual act, of the poem itself. We discussed whether this ruptur—conceived as love in order to prevent and / or protect ecological blight—is a real poetic event of sincere expression or whether we find ourselves still at the threshold of an irrepressible violence that love often engenders—as a “degradation, a reduction, a ruining of nature into something we can understand” (Rossell).

Angela responded to this with “a will towards inter-entity collaboration.” Remarking how, in her current work, she “attempts to source aseptic writing and

sound poetry within Australian and Icelandic ecosystems,” she also discussed Adam’s current project, ANATOMIC, which “researches chemicals and bacteria within his own body.” Angela then considered the ethics of inter-entity collaborative practice in terms of “how the practice impacts the entities with which we are engaging?” Adam continued by questioning “the similarities and difference between a science experiment and a poetry experiment.” He asked: “can we say that poetry performs science (poetry conducts experiments in the realms of culture and language while science conducts experiments in physical and chemical realms)?”

We then found ourselves (as we often do) discussing the potential failures of ecopoetics. Christian discussed pastoralism as “a kind of nostalgia for an absent Nature, otherwise lost to the present” and asked how “the avant-garde might intervene in such an ‘ecopoetic’ tradition?—especially when the avant-garde (almost by definition) disavows all nostalgia for the past, in order to plunge headlong into an, as yet, unmapped, perilous future?” A future of poetics and ecology not easily reconciled but one that must (I think all four of would agree) find collaboration, dialogue, mutual respect and a lot of wine, as its center.

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