

A Taxonomy of Ghosts

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ABSTRACT

A Taxonomy of Ghosts

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A Taxonomy of Ghosts is a collection of poems based on the journals of Archibald Menzies (1754-1842), Scottish surgeon, botanist and naturalist outfitted to the exploration voyage of the HMS *Discovery* and *Chatham*, under the command of Captain George Vancouver from 1791 to 1795. Using kernels of the original journal text as a point of departure, these poems employ a variety of techniques to intervene and expand them outward; they venture into the less documented territory of Menzies' domestic life, turning the botanist's keen observational gaze toward matters of the heart—love, loss and longing. The second segment of the book is the poet-as-speaker's reflection on her encountering both the Vancouver voyage and the coastal landscape that bears its imprint. In dialogue with both the original journals and other historical and literary representations of the Vancouver voyage, *A Taxonomy of Ghosts* is a meditation on the powerful force of names and naming, the representation of history and one's own personal connection to the past.

For Marjorie

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Prologue

Archibald Menzies (1754-1842) was a Scottish surgeon, botanist and naturalist aboard the exploration voyage of the HMS *Discovery* and *Chatham*, under the command of Captain George Vancouver from 1791 to 1795. The journey remains one of the most important and exhaustive maritime surveys of all time, which charted the North American west coast from California to Alaska. During this voyage, Menzies collected a vast selection of the natural productions of the places they visited, bringing back to England over 100 plant species, as well as preserved animal specimens, geological samples and a wealth of writings and sketches. The purpose of the voyage was threefold: its first objective was to acquire a more complete knowledge of the northwest coast of America, with specific attention to any significant waterways that might lead to an inland passage connecting the west coast of the country to Hudson Bay; the second to conduct an investigation of the natural history of the countries they visited, including reports on the soil, precious metal deposits, plants and animals that might be of use to the empire. The most important and perhaps least concretely defined objective of the voyage was to reclaim British property at Friendly Cove from Spanish control, while maintaining a friendly and open relationship with Spanish ships and captains. The diverse and far-reaching objectives of the voyage presented no little amount of difficulty and conflict; Menzies and Vancouver laboured under fraught relations for the entire voyage, each believing the other to be a hindrance to the particular task he was charged with. Such tensions resulted in a wealth of ambiguous, out-of-sync and often contradictory accounts

of events, and while a source of frustration for many historians, these fissures in narrative consistency have proven to be very fertile creative ground.

I first discovered the travel journals of Archibald Menzies in the summer of 2001 while working as a puppeteer for the Museum at Campbell River. I had just moved to Vancouver Island from Edmonton a few months beforehand, and the overwhelming presence of the natural world was coupled with the shock of an absolute loss of familiarity—the landscape protruded like some kind of unnatural excrescence: mountains rising out of the seawater, layers upon layers of islands scoring the horizon, razor-beaked barnacles clustered on every rock, highway ditches infested with blackberries and broom spilling onto the shoulder. Here, there seemed to be an excess of nature in a way completely unimaginable to thin-lipped, frigid Alberta, with its dry fields and skinny birches. I felt claustrophobic and unnaturally transplanted, and I think it was for this reason that Menzies' journal spoke to me with such presence: here was a man confronted daily with the excess and strangeness of a foreign natural world whose only means of wrangling it into submission were a few glass jars and some Latin names. He traveled up a coastline with a seemingly infinite number of un-navigated channels; far from being contained within a set of firmly imagined political borders, the coast was instead a porous membrane with the potential of connecting the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic, via Hudson's Bay. As such, it is not difficult to figure the country as a kind biological entity itself, the winding system of inland passages as complex as a digestive system. In my mind, these journals cannot help but be tinted overall with this sense of anxiety—though Menzies himself, while a painstaking observer, rarely turned his gaze inward to reflect his own feelings on the matter. These “poetic expansions” of the text are contaminated

with my own anxieties and the fictions meant to protect them. For quite some time I was worried about the prospect of this kind of cross-contamination—about tactfulness as much as truth—however, I was eventually persuaded to defer to Captain Vancouver as he is presented in George Bowering’s novel, *Burning Water*, on the matter: “The imagination... You speak of it as if it were the opposite of facts, as if it were perhaps the enemy of facts. That is not true in the least, my two young friends. The imagination depends upon facts, it feeds on them in order to present beauty or invention, or discovery” (132). This collection opts for a momentary ceasefire between fact and imagination, or at least a careful navigation of their overlapping territory and reciprocal influence.

The poems in the first part of this collection take as their object Archibald Menzies’ travel journals, published in two volumes: the first, *Menzies’ Journal of Vancouver’s Voyage, April to October 1792* (Victoria: William H. Cullin, 1928. Ed. C.F. Newcombe. Reprinted online by the Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Library and Archives), details the voyage of the *Chatham* and the *Discovery* from their arrival off the coast of California to the company’s meeting with the Spanish explorer Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra at Nootka Sound. The second is *The Alaska Travel Journal of Archibald Menzies, 1793-1794* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1993. Ed. Wallace M. Olson), which documents the continuation of the survey after wintering at Friendly Cove and charts the west coast of America north of Restoration Cove in Burke Channel, British Columbia. Most of the poems of the journal section dated during the voyage contain at least a kernel of text from the originals however, these have not been set apart typographically for aesthetic reasons—all dates from 1791-1795 accurately

refer to the events as they are documented in Menzies' journals, and a list of references has been supplied at the end of the text. These pieces are complemented with fictionalized journal entries from later in Menzies' life, after he has left the world of exploration behind. In James McCarthy's 2008 biography of the naturalist, a scant three pages out of 208 are dedicated to Menzies as a married man, despite this partnership lasting 34 years—nearly half of his life. McCarthy simply remarks, “although there were no children, it appears to have been a happy marriage” (178). These poems transplant the character of Menzies as I have come to know him into the domestic setting of 6 Chapel Place, between Cavendish Square and Oxford Street in London.

All poems in the Specimens suite take their titles from the “Plant Species Collected by Archibald Menzies 1791-94 as listed (simplified) by E.W. Groves (2001)” appearing in McCarthy's *Monkey Puzzle Man*. “Territory” contains text from George Bowering's *George, Vancouver: a Discovery Poem* (Toronto: Weed/Flower Press, 1970).

A Fiction

I received your kind letter this morning and return my sincerest thanks for your kindly admonitions & solicitations respecting the finishing of my Journal before Captain Vancouver's is published. It is what I most ardently wish, for more reasons than one, and therefore have lately applied to it very close... A desire of making it a full and continued Narrative of the Voyage and my being but a slow hand at the pen are the principal reasons for it taking so much time.

-Archibald Menzies in a letter to Joseph Banks, January 3rd, 1798

“Early on the morning of the 19th,
The Tides made so strong that our best bower
Cable parted & we lost the anchor
Irrevocably. Against a fresh breeze,
We weighd and plyd with a Northward aim,
But the flood tide being strong against us,
We made very slow progress until dusk
Where we moord in a Channel by the name—”
His hand hovers over the half-filled page.
His temples pulse like tides against his skull.
The study walls begin to lurch and sway,
And bureau bobs as if engulfed in waves—
For he cannot bring himself to recall
The name of the passage they sailed that day.

The Journals of Archibald Menzies 1791-1837

A. Menzies, of the house of Menzies of Culdares, approx. four miles west of Aberfeldy, Perthshire, est. 1057. Distinguished member of the Royal Society of London, surgeon in the Navy and naturalist to the expedition fitted out by government for making discoveries, under the direction of Captain Vancouver. Son of James Menzies and brother to William, Robert, John and James Menzies II, also highly regarded botanists and gardeners. Married, without children, from 1802 to 1836; died February 15th, 1842.

“...every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name.”

—Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*

April 8th, 1792¹

The entire surface of the Sea is beset with them as far as the eye can see: *Medusa velella*,² of a depressed-ovoid form, with a deep, thumb-shaped concavity in its centre. The creature is tinged a most miraculous shade of blue & minutely dotted all over with indigo-purple spots. Its underside is beset with papillae & soft, pendulous filaments, while the upper side is tinged with a silver hue, rippling out across the body in concentric striations. A thin membrane crosses the body diagonally, which answers the purpose of a little Sail that provides it the locomotive power to navigate the Ocean's surface. What a wonderful contrivance of Nature that such a primitive & seemingly helpless creature should be able to travel unmolested through these rough & inhospitable waters.

We have continued to sound at 90 and upwards of 100 fathoms but still have no ground. The *Chatham*, which the sailors have quite less than affectionately renamed "the HMS *Dung Barge*" continues to tilt & list awkwardly as she is in quite desperate need of re-ballasting; her sluggishness is a constant source of irritation, especially after this long bout a-sea.

¹ More than a full yearⁱ now since we pulled away from Falmouth, chugging ever forward through uneven stretches of time. Days are wholly exhausted by a dreary sameness which seems to stretch on eternally, the horizon so repetitive in its appearance that one risks becoming blind to it—the whitish-grey palette of clouds & the constant mizzle which refuses to actualize into rain. We are all desperately awaiting some crop of rock to appear & mark some presence amidst the undifferentiated landscape & calendar. The faces of the same Hundred-and-one men shuffling across the same 99-feet of deckboards are also in danger of collapsing into indistinction: each eye becoming one eye, each mouth melding into a collective of red gums, cankers & loose teeth.

ⁱThe anniversary of the voyage's launch on April 1st, was marked by an unusual display of extravagance on Capt Vancouver's part—a 2nd helping of Sauerkraut to all those who wishd it. I am by no means a superstitious man, but one cannot help but feel that setting out on the All Fools' Day may have proven a less than auspicious beginning.

² Sea blubber

April 8th, 1802

Portrait on our Wedding Day:

The subject measures five feet,
three and one-quarter inches
from toe to crown, with a slender
torso & long, slim extremities.

The face is acute petal-shaped
& of an ivory complexion,
the bridge of the nose & cheeks
beset with a cluster of minute freckles.

The head is set with glossy black
& naturally spiralling locks of hair,
which, smartly docked at the nape,
curl away from it in pappose strands.

Eyes are coloured dark chestnut
to bistre with a corona of lighter
copper pigment around the pupil,
& are fringed with short, thick lashes.

One might classify the subject's
overall appearance as "quite pretty."

May 1st, 1792

Around midnight we built a fire & regald ourselves with some refreshments. The mood of the men was jovial & pleasant, despite the fatigue surely felt by all. Mr Pitt, having consumd no little amount of Spruce Beer, departed from the fireside to relieve himself in the woods, not suspecting that his micturition would be a cause of a significant disturbance; quite suddenly a small animal, about the size of a cat, dashd from the woods near where Mr Pitt stood, sending him reeling backward as it charged toward us in a most crazed & desperate manner. It is only with a great stroke of luck that Mr Puget had his Musket in hand and managed to fire a shot at it. In the throes of its death it discharged a most foul & offensive spray in the direction of Mr Pitt, the unbearable stench of which caused us to extinguish our fire & pack up our belongings immediately. I suspected it to be a type of Skunk³ or Polecat & wishd to bring the body aboard the vessel for further examination, however after having carried it with me for a few dozen feet, the smell became too overwhelming⁴ and I was forced to abandon my prize in a little copse of wood just before the shoreline.

³ *Mephitis mephitis*

⁴ For days this phantom odour seemd to follow us everywhere; resurging in the most unusual of places:

riding on the salt air of the quarter deck,
or in the Capt's cabin & chart-room.

Although I have many times scrubbd
my hands clean, I cannot be rid of it—

so strong at points that its taste
lingers in my mouth & coats my food,
no matter how far upcoast we travel.

May 1st, 1803

One need not rely on the burden of heritable traits
to know that sailors' blood animates your veins.
In your pulse, the fervour of the churning sea
is channelled through veins and capillaries.

That you are woman does not disguise this fact;
one need only trace the letters of your family name
to feel the cresting & breaking of waves—
the wax of its "B," the ebb of its "W."

I was utterly charmed when Adam Brown
related to me the story of his little sister who,
at fourteen years old, struck a rat dead
with the single swipe of a broom handle

against the white tiles of the family bathroom floor.
"Her accuracy," he said, "could rival that of any
of the finest gunmen aboard any British vessel
from here to the shores of the New World."

Somehow I could not avoid recalling this story
as I watched you toss your bridal bouquet
into a throng of lace-clad ladies at our wedding.
Your smile so liquid, your aim so deadly.

May 2nd, 1792

On a Tree close to it, we find
the skeleton of a child

carefully wrapped in some
of the Cloth of the country

made from birch bark
& some woven matts.

A bunch of small yew boughs.
A wooden cup.

The bone-house that is
the supposd seat of the soul

now affords tenement to
a young brood of mice

who disperse into the hollows
of the abandoned village.

May 2nd, 1837

Dr John Hunter⁵ was quite fond of telling this story to his new students at the Royal College of Surgeons over a fine glass of Scots-whiskey after their first day at class:

He once had taught a very talented young student, whose skill with the knife was unparalleled—it was as if the blade had eyes and the retractor were an extension of his own hand, a sixth digit, so natural were his movements. Watching him dissect was as much proof of Divine Grace as Caedmon, for the little flicks and manoeuvres of his wrist were so precise & intuitively guided that they could not have been studied but rather must have been imbued with some secret knowledge of the Lord's Divine Plan. This student had a very beautiful young wife whom he loved more than anything, and the year that he opened his own private practice was the year she gave birth to their first son. They lived quite happily for a while near Leicester Square—he healed many patients and made numerous Scientific Breakthroughs; meanwhile, under the care of his mother the boy grew into a healthy & inquisitive toddler. One winter, the child grew ill & suffered a most terrible fever. Despite the student's wealth of knowledge & expertise, he was not able to save him—the boy passed away in his arms one night as he tended to him. His wife, so distraught by the loss of their child, agreed to let him attend to the funerary arrangements, and the little body was taken away that night.

Several weeks later, she awoke in the middle of the night to find the bed beside her cold; her husband was not there, and so she rose to find him, softly calling out his name. She walked through the house which was very quiet & still—only a slat mellow light diffused from beneath the door of his study. She pushed it open to find her husband seated at the desk with his back to her. Lined up on the table in front of him were dozens of glass jars with a variety of mounted wet tissues sunk in their spirits—a cross-section of a lung, flayed stomach lining, spinal cord—and in the centre, a tiny Heart. She could not speak but for the horror of it. He had dissected his only son. He looked up from his notes to see his wife's stricken face, and the words trickled from his mouth: "I have not found the thing I was looking for."

⁵ John Hunter, F.R.S. (1728-1793), a distinguished surgeon at St George's hospital and physician to King George III. A man as famous for his blunt speech as his sharp scalpel. His final words were reported to have been: "If I had the strength to hold a pen, I would write how easy and pleasant a thing it is to die."

May 8th, 1792

The morning was pleasant & calm & we were set for our return back, with the expectation of later meeting with Mr Johnstone. As we had a fatiguing day's row ahead, we stoppd at this point to prepare breakfast. Our victuals were greatly diminished & so we sufficed with a small meal comprised of tinned beans & smoaked fish, as well as tea. Not far from where we breakfasted, we saw two human heads impaled upon the points of two poles of about twelve feet high & buried a few yards asunder. The poles entered through the digastricus⁶ & pierced the through the cranial vertex.⁷ Upon further examination of the poles, I found that these had a great deal of uniformity, showing much care in their craftsmanship. I returned to my breakfast only to find that the beans had gone cold.

⁶ The vertex of the skullⁱ represents jointure of the frontal, occipital & parietal bones. This crown protects the telencephalon, that part of the brain which governs movement, language & memory.

⁷ Contraction of the digastric muscle elevates the hyoid bone. This, in turn, causes the depression of the mandible necessary for such functions as mastication, breath & speech.

ⁱA little ditty echoed in my head all day:

“There once was a young lad named Fred
Who oft wore a necktie to bed
But one night his cot
Got a hold of the knot
& the force swiftly popped off his head”

May 8th, 1837

Remember, dear wife, the bouquet
You curated from the garden that day?
Your pointing finger the executioner,
My shears the guillotine blade
That clipped branches of tea roses⁸ & chives,⁹
Verbena,¹⁰ apple blossom¹¹ & rosemary¹²
As we wandered the garden maze.
You thrust that strange collection of souls
Into my hand and as thanks lay down
On the verdure and bloomed for me.
Each day as these pages grow darker,
I am reminded that to love something
Is to possess it piece by piece.
To inhabit its layers one by one,
Until all its secrets are gone.¹³

⁸ *Rosa x. odorata*

⁹ *Allium schoenoprasum*

¹⁰ *Verbena bonariensis*

¹¹ *Malus domestica*

¹² *Rosmarinus officinalis*

¹³ With the vessel I forded
every capillary of the coast

& gave each wretched
jut of rock a name.

I had not imagined
a place I could not go

until you went there
before me.

May 8th, 1792 (Cont'd)

The night was so dark & foggy that no stars shewd through. The sky and the water seemd identical in their elemental composition, both so Black & Humid. Though we continued to row well into the night, a heavy Ebb tide pressd against us and it felt as though our muscles straind against the darkness itself, which surrounded and weightd on us on every side. As a result the pinnace & cutter became separated by a great distance, and our hopes of reaching the intended place of rendezvous quickly were dashd. The only means of keeping together was by the frequent firing of Muskets, minute pockets of light and sound that were snuffd almost instantly by the night. We slept¹⁴ on the rough-pebbled beach, shelterd against the wind & rain only by the upturned boat, which served for the evening as a makeshift tent. Moisture seepd into my clothing & I was all over drenched with Rain & Salt-water, with tiny bits of debris sticking to my face and lodging in the cuffs of my sleeves & boots.

¹⁴ In my disturbd sleep I dreamt of throwing handful after handful of rough dirt into an open grave, grains of jagged sand forcing their way painfully beneath my fingernailsⁱ as I clawed at the earth; and yet the more I threw into this abyss, the deeper it became until its bottom could no longer be seen. I toiled the night through and awoke exhausted.

ⁱWhat interlopers carry we with us,
Stowd away on our person—
Body, Soul & Mind?
What traces do we leave behind?

May 15th, 1792

Silence & solitude prevail
Over this extended territory.

Even the feathered race
Have abandoned it,

As if unable to endure the stillness
That pervades everywhere.

The fog presses down on my canoe
Like a white wave;¹⁵

I paddle through it like snow.
My movement so illusory

That even my body does not know
If it is paddling backwards.

Have the cranes¹⁶ truly taken wing?
Or were they inhaled by the fog?

I cannot certainly say
Whether the chill against my teeth

Is caused by a northerly wind
Or the flap of their wings

Against my face.

¹⁵ "And Time is setting with me, oh!"

¹⁶ *Grus Americana*

May 15th, 1836

This evening she prepared a boiled egg with toast soldiers for my supper that I am often very fond of eating on Sundays. When I cracked the top of the shell, however, rather than its usual lipid-rich & viscous consistency the ovum was instead a rather sickly & displeasing shade of pale yellow.

“The egg is overcooked,” I remarked from the dining room. She was occupied in the kitchen, opening and shutting various cabinet doors & clanking dishes.

“I put it on for the usual four and a half minutes,” she replied.

“Well, clearly some unforeseen variable has altered the trajectory of this little experiment, as the protein chains have almost completely solidified,” I noted.

“Sometimes an egg just boils a little differently,” she said. She appeared in the archway of the dining room, wiping some variety of hollowware with a tea towel. “But if you like, I’ll only put it for four minutes next time.”

“I hardly think that will be necessary,” I said. “However I think it would be prudent to launch an inquiry into what errant variable might have produced this result.” She did not conduct the suggested inquiry but instead went to lie down for a nap.

June 6th, 1792

The establishment of our camp has afforded me some time
To pursue my Botanical researches & provide in my journal
A survey of the terrain & its products for the Empire.
The weather being fair this morning, I wanderd
Over a fine, rich meadow croppd with grass¹⁷
Reaching up to my middle, Nature's own luxurious carpeting,
Abundantly tufted with grass-clover and wild flowers.¹⁸
Presently, I have penetrated the verge of the forest,
Where I recline beneath the shade of an hazle nut¹⁹ tree,
And let my mind turn toward loftier thoughts of Botany.
As a Traveller wandering over these unfrequented Plains,
I am regaled with a salubrious & vivifying air impregnated
With the balsamic fragrance of the surrounding Pinery.
The scent transports²⁰ me back to when I was a boy
In the garden at Styx house, hedged by a row of Scots pine,
Those stout, bearded soldiers with their saluting branches!
Then, I was but a bud in the Garden of Knowledge,
Most eager to uncover and name each part: dividing
Pistil from petal, stigma from stamen.

But now, the natural world
fills me with more substantial Nourishment;
under the broad and majestic sky of this continent,
My own heart offers up a reflection of its magnitude
As finely featured as any of its own pure lakes.
Under the great canopy of taxonomy all is connected.
But—here comes Mr Whidbey from the camp
With his Musket swinging freely at his side.
He appears to be carrying some sort of water fowl
With hornlike excrescence rising from the ridge of its bill.

¹⁷ *Agrostis scabra*

¹⁸ Among these, apparently a new species of *Melanthium*, from which I have procured some specimens and seeds!

¹⁹ *Corylus cornuta* – A variety of beaked hazle nut

²⁰ I speak, of course, figuratively, as the differences between the Scots and Lodgepole pines are numerous. Firstly, the seed cones of the Scots pine are pointed ovoid-conic, whereas those of the Lodgepole egg-shaped, short-pointed and very resinous; the lodgepole is also markd by a thin, conical crown, as opposed to the flat-topped foliage of the Scots.

June 6th, 1805

You are in the Garden
barefoot again,

little toes as mouth-watering
as fresh peas.

June 27th, 1792

We sailed North Eastward & soon afterward came to a small Cove, in the centre of which the picturesque ruins of a deserted village adorned an outcropping of rock whose beauty and solitude induced us to land. Naught but the frames of the oblong houses remained, and their rows of heavy beams opened skyward through the pines, very much resembling the curvature & irregular structure of a ribcage; the hewed crossbeams forming their sterna. Upon landing, we found that this village was inaccessible on every side except a narrow pass, cleverly conceald with Maple branches, which admitted only one person to ascend at a time. On this steep & steady climb, I marvelld as the ruins revealed themselves to me in greater detail—hundreds of these skeletal tines protruded amidst the treetops, and as many had fallen and were now being consumed by the groundcover of the forest. Certainly 4 or 500 Inhabitants must have at one point dwellt here. When we broke onto a clearing at the top of the peak, we were met with an intollerable stench that overwhelmed the senses. The narrow Lanes between the Houses were filled with filth & nastiness & swarmed with myriad *Fleas* which fixd themselves to our shoes, stockings & cloths in such an infinite number that the whole party was obliged to quit the rock in great precipitation, leaving the remainder of these Assailants in full possession of their Garrison. The moment we reached the Water side, we immediately stripped ourselves & immersed our Cloth, in the expectation of drowning its adherents, but to little or no purpose. When we returned to the *Discovery*, we were made to line up on the deck, shivering and bare, while the affectd garments were put to tow along the stern of the boats. As our red & welted flesh was ravagd by the sting of saline spray, I was certainly reminded that each man is rendered naked, made equal, beneath the gaze of the all-seeing.²¹

²¹ “The beauty of it:

all over adorn'd with a curiously polish'd suit
of sable Armour, neatly jointed,
and beset with multitudes of sharp pinns,
shap'd almost like Porcupine's Quills,
or bright conical Steel-bodkins;
the head is on either side beautify'd
with a quick and round black eye.”

—“On a Flea.” Robert Hooke, *Micrografia*

June 27th, 1837

A wise man²² once said
that the passion for collecting
leads a man to be either
a miser or virtuoso.

As I stand in our spare room
amidst this collection of curiosities—
dried specimens & their constituent parts
labeled and arranged, sealed into silence—

I cannot help but wonder
which of the two I am.

²² Charles Darwin, F.R.S.

July 13th, 1793

I dreamd last night that I was navigating the Channel alone aboard the Pinnacle, the water so remarkably pale and still that even the paddle seemd to make no disturbance to the surface. I lookd up to see a canoe approaching over the waters, bearing two Native passengers—the first, a low, squat & surly old woman who steerd the vessel & behind her a man of the most sullen & savage countenance, disfigured with the loss of an eye who was drapd in bright red cloath and bore on his front a fox's head. By his general deportment, I assumd him to be a Chief or some figure of importance & I made to hail him by speaking the word *woagan*, which is a word for friend in their language. However, my speech made no effect, for all round the boat seemd shrouded in silence. Here I noticd the hem of the Chief's dressing traild off the canoe & into the water and everywhere it touchd, the water about it turnd the crimson color of the cloath. The wake of it sent ripples of red running throughout the Channel & soon the shoals were steeped as though in blood and every rock & grain of sand likewise staid.

This morning, a mash of lingonberries²³ was set before me as an accompaniment to our breakfast & the syrup pooled amidst the seeds & red, raw pulp. At the sight of this, a sensation leadened all through me—that I have signd a contract which cannot be undone.

²³ *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*

July 13th, 1806

Early last May, we argued.
I now remember it clearly.

The subject in question
was whether it is suitable

for a man of my age
to foray into fatherhood.

I said that at fifty-two,
one nursery is enough

& continued to water
my greenhouse seedlings.

To this you said nothing,
but went to work planting

seeds in the front garden.
Now, after three months'

germination I see the fruit
of your anger: for you sowed

only geraniums²⁴ & poppies,²⁵
row upon row of searing petals,

the entire lawn burning.

²⁴ *Pelargonium hortorum*

²⁵ *Papaver rhoeas*

September 22nd, 1793

Today I saw the reticulate venation on the underside of a leaf of *Betula serrulata* illuminated as I held it against the rays of late-afternoon sun; a network of feathery veinlets which extended to the farthest reaches of its serrated fringe. Seated in a patch of grass with the leaf held between my naked eye and the declining sun, I captured the image in my sketchbook at the expense of a mere hour's time and a Thousand charcoal lines. Though the days remain clear and bright, the mercury has droppd significantly—now reaching no more than 35 or 36° of Farenheit's scale in the full sun.

September 22nd, 1837

The air being of this character, I was reminded of the time we sat in the garden beneath the falling leaves of the old Wych elm, when I charted the little map on your palm. I watched you marvel at this miracle of cartography; your open hand lay in mine.

"Here is *Venus' Mount*," I said, tracing the thenar muscles with my forefinger, "and these little crosshatched lines are the rivulets of her glaciers." I continued, "And circling it is the *River Life*, which as you can see in your case bears a strong and steady course." Then moving across the metacarpals, "And here you can see it joins with the *River Heart*, which flows from coast to coast."

You asked, "And what of this fork in the *River Heart*, where it branches off in two directions? What does that mean?"

"Dear, silly thing! What do you mean, 'What does it mean?'"

September 28th, 1793

Capt. Vancouver writes his name up and down the coast,
scattering the names of English officers across every Peak
& Inlet. This morning, I witnessed him unzip his flies

and write his own name in the snow—such proper cursive.
A Naturalist understands where to plant his own name—
in fertile soil. Recall the time-honoured parable of seeds

sown erratically, only to perish on rocks and inland roads.
As for my own name, I have tucked it into the very fabric
of Life, a currency to circulate through the xylem:

Arbutus menziesii. Chimaphila menziesii umbellata.

If man's gaze cannot extend to the farthest reaches of the globe,
let it instead turn inward, toward the infinitely divisible.

September 28nd, 1837

Young Mrs Menzies, *Bella Caledonia*,
The prettiest specimen I ever gave my name.
Your mouth bore the subtle flavour
Of marsh samphire,²⁶ as though salt-water
Coursed ever through your veins.
Strange that you, a botanist's wife, bore no seed
But instead stayed in your glasshouse frame
Rooted as a tuber, resolute as moss
Clinging to the parapets of Styx house like ivy
As all the while I girdled the globe.
When I buried you, I could not decide whether
Your wreath should be of hothouse blossoms
Or thistles²⁷ & humble bell-heather.²⁸

²⁶ *Salicornia europaea*

²⁷ *Cirsium vulgare*

²⁸ *Erica cinerea*

Dissection of a Sea Otter

XVII. *A Description of the Anatomy of the Sea Otter*,²⁹ from a Dissection made by Everard Home,³⁰ Esq. F.R.S. and Mr Archibald Menzies. Transcribed by Mr Menzies.

A Description of the External Appearances

The subject measures four feet, four inches long
From the nose to extremity of the tail.
The outer pelt is slicked with sebaceous, silky gloss.
White-tipped hairs colour it with a cinereous silver cast.
The whiskers are white, thick, rigid bristles.
Ears³¹ are notched & nearly naked.
Eyes,³² imploded, unable to bear examination.
Teeth strong conical incisors, broad, low-ground molares.

²⁹ *Enhydra lutis*

³⁰ Dr Everard Home, Royal Society Fellow and Surgeon at St. George's Hospital, pupil and brother-in-lawⁱ to the late & much esteemed Dr John Hunter. Though as of late accused of plagiarizing the latter's work, I am certain that these most grossly exaggerated charges will be dismissed as soon as the missing documents are recovered.

ⁱThese two most famous surgeons in all of London were linked in brotherhood by the lovely poetess, Mrs Anne Hunter (*née* Home), a most competent composer of metric verse:

“Come, behold what treasures lie
Deep below the rolling waves,
Riches hid from human eye
Dimly shine in ocean's caves;
Stormy winds are far away,
Ebbing tides brook no delay;
Follow, follow, follow me.”

³¹ How unnaturally quiet the nights now seem in the absence of the ocean's continual roar. I half-suspect a variety of selective tinnitus to be the cause as I lie in bed with the silence blaring all around me; ghostly waves rolling through & through the Cochlea.

³² I have frequently been visited with a most peculiar recurring dream in which I am back in Scotland, her hills coloured pewter in the pale dawn. They lead me back to our little chapel in Weem, with its tower's shadow tilting over rough, rain-spackled tombstones. It begins to mist and everything is wet, & my clothes stick to my shivering body. In the ground there is an open grave. My sense of Horror precedes the sight: the grave is flooded and teeming with coral, ænemone & medusæ. The rain, heavy now, splashes and disturbs the water's surface, distorting the sight of my body therein, limp, bloated & naked. Starfish set in the ocular cavities of my skull like Amethysts & Topaz.

A Description of the Internal³³ Parts

Overall presence of *panniculus carnosus*:
A strong, striated, subcutaneous muscle layer.
The tongue sports soft surface papillae, a bifid tip.
The stomach is a collapsed, flaccid sac
Containing residual chyme of molluscs.
Lungs empty, having been sunk in spirits.
Pericardium envelops a short, round heart.³⁴

³³ I am a man who dismantles parts
into parts into parts. My tools:

the scalpel's bite, the ship's prow carving
measured channels into dark unknowns.

Let us speak of the incision,
of what is at stake in the wound

when the body, seamed like a peapod,
awaits the great shuck:

beneath the surface of that slit
lies the amalgamated potential

of anomaly, the fear of discovering one thing
substituted in the place of another—ⁱⁱⁱ

A sea of arms waving from the ocean floor
The residue of a former lover

ⁱⁱⁱOne cannot help but sense that it was all somehow an act of artifice—whale flukes which faked strange vessels under sail, conjuring, in our imagination, battered Spanish deckboards. Your fixed & unchanging expression as you stared at the fireplace, not looking down at your fingers in a flurry of movement, twisting strand upon strand of lambs' wool, constructing something that I could not know by way of a process I do not understand. I have no instruments with which to sound those depths.

³⁴A name is written into the book of my body & etched onto the surface of my heart.
The scalpel is the pen and the pen is the scalpel, spelling out those letters that I cannot forget;
This act of writing such comforting agony that I pray the wound shall never scar over,
but instead be written deeper and deeper until the wretched thing itself is destroyed:

Janet. My love, your name is Janet.

Specimens

“A special frame, eight feet by twelve feet, with glass panes, was constructed on the quarter deck to hold botanical specimens collected on the expedition.”

-Wallace M. Olson, “The Vancouver Expedition”

“Noted botanists... were greeted as the conquering heroes.”

-Ibid.

I. Labrador Tea – *Ledum Palustre*

Obdurate evergreen

spreads rapidly following fire;

rhizomatically reproductive empire

whose control is never
a question of *how high*

but *how far*.

Shoots out sprouts from the root crown,

recolonizing

even as burnt

logs smoulder.

Ash the most fertile soil.

II. Scotch Broom – *Cystius Scoparius*

Sweet-reeking tumorous blossoms the yellow
bulge of pregnancy obscene below the
flowers' folds rumped pocketed pockmarked
Petals not delicate nor papery nor gossamer
but thick like cuts of meat Freckled flushed
awash with fever the seed pods stringy hairy
gesturing obscenely to the earth below as
they curl like bony beckoning fingers nails
untrimmed and dirty

III. Canadian White Violet – *Viola Canadensis*

Heart-shaped, fine-veined leaves
Are fringed with teeth, dainties
Adorned with dental dentelle.
Winter-white inflorescence
Haunted by hibernal anxiety:

Ice mizzle gnawing at exposed skin.
Pale particles of solstice sun refracted
Through the jagged incisors of icicles.
A barbed hook lodged in a pike's cheek
Beneath sheeted ice.

IV. Stink Currant – *Ribes bracteosum*

In moist soil.
Erect inflorescence with
Purple-brown veins, bearing
Bitter, black, glaucous fruit.
Sparse hairs and

Yellow glands
On the underside of leaves
Secrete skunk-scent on palms.
Palmately lobed perrert.
Five-fronded frotteur.

V. Mountain Avens - *Dryas octopetala*

Imbricated eight-petal bowl.
Corona of citrine stamen.

The solitary specimen
Lays claim upon glacial terrain,

Prostrate against limestone outcrop,
Roots clinging to barren rockface.

Its faith in the establishment
Of community unfailing.

VI. Pacific crabapple – *Malus fusca*

globe-shaped pomes are cartographers
of the tongue:

VII. Thimbleberry – *Rubus parvifolius*

The red, hemispheric fruits are not true berries but rather communities of numerous drupelets grouped around a central core. Their texture may feel like velvet against the tongues of beavers, black and grizzly bears, black- and white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn sheep, wapiti, coyotes, common opossums, porcupines, collared pika, cottontails, skunks, raccoons, red foxes, gray foxes, fox squirrels, red squirrels, Douglas and eastern grey squirrels, golden-mantled ground squirrels, yellow-pine chipmunks, deer mice, white-footed voles, ruffed, blue and sharp-tailed grouse, ring-necked pheasants, California quail, greater prairie chickens, grey Hungarian partridges, American robins, northern bobwhites, northern cardinals, catbirds, band-tailed pigeons, yellow-breasted chats, pine grosbeaks, thrushes, thrashers, towhees and humans.

VIII. Coyote tobacco – *Nicotiana attenuata*

The bruised stalk yields its tack and scent
when gripped firmly at the base;

profusion of taper-throated blossoms
and spindle leaves quiver as it is reft

from the earth; loose, sandy soil
shaken from blind root clusters.

Transplanted from rocky washes
into tight-knit, fenced-in garden rows.

IX. Sampire – *Salicornia herbacea*

Believed to be a corruption of the French,
l'herbe de St. Pierre—Saint Peter's herb—
sampire *est une dévotée* to the fisher of men.

The salt-steeped *succulent peut survivre*
l'immersion complète in seawater, bronchial
branches *qui respire* through baptism.

Ses prières in the mudflats and salt marshes,
dans le temple of the untethered tideline;
Cependant, sloops and schooners sail by.

XI. Round-leaved orchid – *Habenaria orbiculata*

Exotic boreal beauty's pale complexion
reflects circumpolar knowledge:
slender roots bathed in glacial runoff;

nude, leafless stem stretched skyward,
straight as a dancer's spine,
toward a sky of matte-white cloud;

small creamy-green blossoms belie
late-summertime maturity;
ever under-ripe, unready, pouting.

XII. Pacific madrone – *Arbutus menziesii*

Easily recognized by its distinctive orange-red
that peels away in papery layers to reveal
immature, olive green bark beneath,
cool to the touch as ocean stones.
An umbrella-shaped canopy
of waxy evergreen leaves
extends from irregular,
crooked branches;
an appearance
of leaning
against
sky.

XII. Prickly pear – *Opuntia polyacantha*

Adaptability the key to gaining ground
(Latitude 25.9 to 47.9° North):

Spines can be terete to flattened,
stout to acicular to bristlelike,
straight to curling.

Stem segments wool tan to brown,
narrowly to broadly obovate,
elliptical to circular.

Seeds can be oblong to subcircular.
three to seven millimetres,
coloured tan to grey.

Points of Intersection

“you & I
with nothing touching
but our private thoughts:
mine of poetry,
yours of a strong morning.”

—George Bowering, *Points on the Grid*

Points of Intersection

50.0162609, -125.2476213

I stole a replica of the naval outfit worn by Captain George Vancouver from the Museum at Campbell River so that the lead singer of our pirate punk band, The Lusty Barnacles, could wear it for our inaugural concert at the Elks Lodge. I, myself, wore a kilt.

*50.0199122, -125.2479486; 50.029164, -125.273987; 49.9807957, -125.2422204;
50.030811, -125.270756; 50.029164, -125.273987; 49.975, -125.227343*

We pinched each other every time we saw a Monkey Puzzle tree: Dogwood and 7th, Shelbourne and Somerset, Penfield Road and Juniper Drive, Spruce and 16th, Cornish and Crescent, Simms Road and Galerno.

50.011151, -125.243014

Garnet rolled up a piece of vanilla leaf, smoked it and got a migraine. It was the first time I rode in an ambulance.

49.894562, -125.141411

We made a lean-to out of driftwood and cow parsnips, a fire out of driftwood, supper out of boiled cow parsnips, and tongued the tender stalks while scattering phosphorescence over the ocean's surface like static shock with flat, black rocks.

42.5677867, -84.82468

I wrote a musical puppet play titled *Menzies' Plants*, which featured such historically inaccurate songs as "Wish I Could Be (A Conifer Tree)" and "Laser Rockin' Barnacles." I lost Ripple Rock in the move from Ollie's place.

50.029164, -125.273987 – 48.435277, -123.382241

Abby and I hitched a ride to Victoria along Oceanview Highway; felt the curve of the coast from inside the cab of a two-ton full of farm prawns.

50.093715, -125.187836

Padding barefoot away from the bonfire, a shard of mussel shell split the skin between my big and second toes and my blood spilled on the shore.

50.039018, -125.332804

Perhaps his wet, black footprints, like mine, once evaporated against the heat of the same smooth, sun-baked stones; the ghostly traces of where we waded in.

Puppeteer: Reconstruction

The workshop's settled cedar sawdust
mingles with the sweet carbohydrate
smell of wheat paste, the tang of acrylic.
The journal on the workbench shucked
and held open with a smooth ocean stone
to the frontispiece portrait: Archibald Menzies,

his apparition spectral amid streaks of
slate-grey and Parma-violet oils. A vase
sustaining cut stalks of black sugar maple
rests, unaffectedly, on a mahogany end-table.
Impossible to tell if his eyes were the colour
of chestnut, shale or sable.

Sculpting the *columella nasi* around
the mesh wire skeletal frame, strip by
sopping strip generating tissue, muscle,
and stringy nerve end, I am reminded
that every reconstruction is an act of fiction,
whether folksy, forensic or historical.

Nature Walk

Adam first named all living creatures, assigning a name to each in accordance with its purpose at that time, in view of the nature it was to be subject to.

—Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*

A nature walk behind the museum is an exercise in metaphor;

Arctostaphylos Uva-ursi, more commonly known as common bearberry;
but also known as kinnikinnick, or mealberry, or hog cranberry by some authors.

the macrocosm folded into every sepal

Achylus triphylla, more commonly known as vanillaleaf;
but also known as deerfoot, or creeping goosefoot, or tined achylus, or antlered achylus,
or cloven-hooved barberry; also known as sweet-after-death, or hangman's satchet, or
Pacific reeking clover, or fragrant false-prophet by some authors.

and nothing understood except thorough the self,

Impatiens capensis, more commonly known as touch-me-not;
but also known as spotted snapweed, or orange balsam, or fiery celandine; also known as
lady's earrings, or slender-stemmed sautoir, or bauble-of-the-woods, or common
jewelweed; also known as Cape touch-me-not, or spotted touch-me-not, or erupting
cabbage, or gilded cannonade, or finger-of-God, or Dutchman's bugle, or bridegroom's
folly, or bishop's seed, or bitter oozing monk by some authors.

as if refracting its name could help somehow to know it:

Polygonum persicaria, more commonly known as black heart;
but also known as willow weed, or pinkweed, or smartweed, or stranglewort, or Trojan
marshweed, or pernicious salesman; also known as lady's-thumb, or spotted lady's
thumb, or many-fingered knotweed, or devil's lace, or knit willy; also known as heart's-
ease, or redshank, or lover's nape, or spot-on-the-sheets, or redleg, or whore's-garter, or
sheath-stemmed redshank, or adultress's tongue, or Great Adam's knot, or Frenchman's-
fever by some authors.

there in the underbrush, growing imperceptibly.

Articulation of Rocks

Detachd, peaked rocks & rising suddenly.

Perpendicular precipice of reddish earth & sand.

Stiff & clayey,
Steep & cliffy

Caverns forming commodious recesses.

Small silicious stones.

Gradient of smooth, obtuse summit.

Rugged, picked rocks abounding in Iron Ore,
impregnated with Metal.

Massy solids coverd
with a thin layer of blackish mould.

Dragon Rocks.
Naked rocks.

Puppeteer: Animation

40° palmar abduction of the right thumb:
Gestures to an imaginary vessel, stage right.

60° flexion of the index and middle fingers:
Head nods in agreement.

Opposing thumb to small finger:
Picks up a stem of salal; clutches it to chest.

Alternating supination and pronation of the forearm:
The whole body declares: no.

Full digital abduction:
A rigid expression of shock.

50° flexion of the wrist:
Mimics death.

Articulation of Weather

Cold rigorous blasts.
Fluctuating airs in every direction.

Frequent squalls & thick gloomy weather,

boisterous & unsettled;
heavy sea-thick & hazy.

A fresh gale attended with frequent showers.

Foggy & calm.
Dark & gloomy.

A fine breeze from the N W.

A light air of wind.

Quadra Island Triptych

I.

I hate the smell of the ocean. Its eternal upchuck on the shore. Its clots of seaweed and spitty foam. Its bloated, helpless jellyfish. The ferry bobs nauseatingly, spackled tarmac slicked with salt-spray, a slap of white paint unnaturally covering the metal bolts and beams. The ship is locked in a bottle of sea and sky, but there is something too open, too malleable about this horizon. The double-beast backs of islands rise out of endless open waters.

II.

You work at Walcan like your mother and brother and father before you. Perpetually wet and iron-scented, concrete floors slopped with the pink-tint runoff of sea-cold blood, the mix of it all surging into steel grates. The conveyor belt swarms: a sea of convex irises and fat, silver scales. All day long a steady stream of tail fins slap against your thighs, itchy and numbing. Those motions ingrained in muscle memory are an assault against anatomy—knife tip slits from gills to pelvic fin, unjacketing the rubbery sleeve. Viscera lifted with a skilled flick-flick of the wrist. Stomachs, spleens, livers, hearts; no individuals here but an assembly of parts, stripped to the corrugated cartilage of backbone.

Until a split belly yields a cache of ripe, unctuous, red roe—tacky, coral-coloured orbs that stick to your rubber gloves, adoptive. You scrape them into a plastic container, drive home with them on the dashboard and, despite your flush of opprobrium, sit beneath the kitchen light popping pearl after pearl between palate and papillae, each tastebud baptized in the serum of the living world.

III.

It's dark already when I dock. I know it's you waiting there because the aura of fish follows you everywhere. It's in the cracks of your bitten-down fingernails, your mouth. After Hooley Road, we set about the work of putting one foot in front of the other, into the trail-less bush, decoding alder bark and blackberry bramble with bare, blind hands. Spruce roots. Underfoot, foliage is breeding, seeding, seething, spreading, sending out shoots, unfurling, fractalizing, ferociously fucking, tree fungus erupting with spores and ironwood exposing its sugary clusters. Huckleberries thrumming like hearts in time to the midnight tides.

In 2011, It Was Attempted to Find His Grave in All Souls
Cemetery at Kensal Green, but the Plot Was So Overgrown It Was
Impossible to Tell Which Was His

An ivy-wound sarcophagus
is a human-shaped hedge:

knit stems emulating the slope
of a shoulder, a protrusion of toes.

A gravel road esses through
sunken, pockmarked bogland,

moss plots with cracked tomb-
stones crooked and tilting as teeth.

Veins of blackberry bramble bar
a mausoleum door, their fruits

small, black as pupils, seeds
so strong they split stone beds.

I am looking for the writing³⁵ here,
the book that speaks your presence

amidst cedar mulch, milk thistle,
sweet grass, Queen Anne's lace—

but the lichens are a chancellery,
slate substrate their wax tablets,

their chemical gnaw translating
signs into soil, unwriting.

³⁵Such as,

...many years a surgeon in the Royal Navy in which station he served in the fleet commanded by Admiral Rodney on the 12th of April 1782. He afterwards twice circumnavigated the globe first with Captain Colnett, and again in the voyage of discovery under the orders of Captain Vancouver as the naturalist of that expedition.

He added greatly to the knowledge then possessed of the natural productions, especially the plants, of the various countries he visited. After practicing his profession for many years in London, he retired to Notting Hill where he died on the 15th of February 1842 aged 88. Sincerely respected and regretted by his numerous friends.

Or,

...many years a husband in her loyal service. Married on the 8th of April, 1802, he acquiesced to having dahlias in the bridal bouquet, despite thinking their inflorescence both excessive and inefficient.

He had always yearned for a similitude between the structures and behaviours of the heart, for example, that the weary, unconscious constrictions of the auricles were somehow indicative of an unerring, instinctual fidelity. It was an incommensurateness that disturbed him to the end of his days; however, he understood that it is neither the botanist nor the explorer's charge to chart that which is beyond representation.

Huckleberries

Bright red beads so abundant
that spindle branches droop
with the weight of their bounty.
Pick a potful in a half-hour or so,
even if you nibble as you go.
How easily they yield, falling
into your palm in sweet clusters!
The sound of them hitting the bucket
bottom, soft as drops of rain.

Think you've picked a branch bare
and in a cloud's-breadth look again:
dozens more appear beneath
the shelter of oblong leaves.
Today, you've filled to the brim
of your pail. Tomorrow, travel
deeper down the trail.

Territory

for George Bowering

I take, and I have taken, I seize, and I have seized, possession of this soil where I have disembarked...

-Esteban José Martínez Fernández y Martínez de la Sierra, 1789.

I.

On what grounds to stake a claim to this territory—
this assembly of letters & phonemes,
ferns & flowering plants, mosses & lichens,
memories, marine algae?

That old chestnut³⁶ of translation:
Skah-kwee'tl renamed Port Quadra by the Spanish,
Port Quadra renamed Port Discovery by the English,
Port Discovery renamed a slew holy of things
by my grandfather the day the motor fell off his boat
and sank to the ocean floor.

II.

September 4th, 2010

Dear George:

I did not see the
 sunlight
cast up from the sea,
rippling across her legs
at Passage Inlet.

But I imagined leaping
 from the dock
at Quathiaski cove,
the water vice-grip cold,
the ferry chugging in.

³⁶*Castanea dentata*

I did not
 sail beneath
a suspended bridge
invisible in the fog.

But I did
 wade in to
the knee just to feel
the current's magnet.

She did not
 lay under me
like a brown
snake of the earth.

But she did
 shuck me
an oyster right
there on the beach.

III.

I fear I bear some resemblance to that poet-at-port, hooked by
some sailor's line about the albatross they noosed around his neck.

He swore he carried the weight of that big, gooney bird
till it rotted off of its own accord, cracking the maritime curse.

As he spoke, the old salts chuckled in the background knowing
he never could have used a belaying pin to knock the thing down,

big as a pterodactyl.

IV.

I flew the shielded flag
with golden sheaves of
wheat in its heart, snug
and landlocked within

borders of royal blue.

IV.

April 8th, 2011

Dear George:

If Columbus sailed for spice,
and de Fuca sailed for gold,
and Meares sailed for skins,

what wind bolsters our sails?
What monarch's fancy compels
us to chart this territory?

No courtly cash lines our coffers,
(unless Canada Council counts)
as we venture into dark waters,

making and unmaking
the coastline in crosshatching
and long, wet strokes of ink.

Possessed by what lurked in that
network of inlets and channels
you & I followed them through,

one by one, in pinnace and cutter
to the finality of interpretation:

the flash and blare of a pistol
or an unmarked grave for two.

How revelatory: we're more anxious
about blank spaces than they were;
that irritating caesura between

thoughts and words when he wrote,
with his usual flair for understatement,

“The outline of this intended expedition

was communicated to me,
and I had the honour of being
appointed to the command of it.

At this juncture, it appears
to be of some importance.”

Organic Geomancy: A Manifesto

This is our voiceright. This is our inheritance.

- I. It is ours not as a legacy of imagined lines and borders, those that run subdermally beneath the Rocky Mountains; those that laterally bisect National parks like a scalpel. It is ours because the roots and suckers, seedpods and pappi are illegal interlopers every day.
- II. It is ours not because our grandfathers were named Mackeigan and Sutherland, O'Reilly and Alexander, but because our grandmothers were named Dody, Marjorie, Gertrude and Anita.
- III. It is ours because if the barn swallows are bricoleurs then so are we, binding together pellets of rivermud, algae and horsehair with our own feathers and spit. In the centre of it all, we incubate something that is incarnate, vulnerable and veined, something that is amazingly and terrifyingly in our own likeness.
- IV. To approach the text is to surrender ourselves to it with humility. Intimate reading is enacted with the patience of waiting—palms open, gifts offered, immobile—for an animal to approach us from the wilderness. This process can take days, months or even years.
- V. It is ours because, though we may not be able to make plants grow in our own gardens, someone at some point in our ancestry could; otherwise we would not be here.
- VI. It is ours because we have all, at some point, whipped our siblings with a sea onion, or failing that, a tennis ball in a sock, or failing that, a plastic lawn chair from Zellers.
- VII. It is ours because each of our tongues races forward to pronounce “Ladysmith” and then recedes into the wet caves of our mouths to unearth “Esquimalt.”
- VIII. It is ours because our paper is the offspring of its paper: spruce, pine, fir, larch, aspen and birch.
- IX. It is ours because all translation, whether interlanguage, homolinguistic or poetic, is an enunciation of violence. Nature has only two methods of absorbing that which is not of itself: tearing apart or swallowing whole.
- X. Look at the ocean, casting and recasting its spellings on the shore. The cursive of laminae at the tideline. The block letters of driftwood and stone. There are days when it names us, too.

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