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Romantic Ramblings, Revisited:
Eco-logics of Mobility in Sina Queyras's *Expressway*

Jenny Kerber

Sina Queyras's 2009 book of poetry *Expressway* begins with two epigraphs that explore modern life's fraught relationship to time, wherein considerations of past and future run up against the crush of the new and the now. The first, from Wallace Stevens' "Lettres d'un Soldat" (1918), deliberately confuses temporalities with its advice to "have no rememberings of hope," while the second, drawn from a 2007 Daily Horoscope, offers more chipper, though arguably no less cryptic, advice: "'If you can't see the finish line in the near distance, don't get frustrated - - turn around! There you'll see it, miles behind you'" (Queyras 5).¹ This juxtaposition of references, which pairs the literary *avant garde* with popular wisdom of the sort that routinely floods e-mail inboxes, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds, reflects Queyras's larger intellectual and aesthetic vision, one that has experimented with popular forms of social media in the hope of creating public forums wherein people – and women in particular – feel welcome to express and exchange ideas about art. For Queyras and her readers, much of this experiment in public poetics has taken the form of blogging, specifically via the online *Lemon Hound* site that Queyras started in 2005, and which later turned into a multi-authored blog and literary journal.² The Daily Horoscope's assertion that the finish line is already miles behind us also serves as an apt shorthand for the vision of accelerated modernity *Expressway* goes on to explore, wherein wanderers cross landscapes "nowhere untouched" (7), and where Nature with a capital-N has become "nostalgia" (7). Two hundred years after the Romantic era,

Queyras's work prompts readers to ask whether nature can any longer be understood as something more than a fanciful *idea*. If so, then how might contemporary ecopoetics address the dynamic relationships between human and more-than-human worlds, and what might a re-engagement with certain Romantic texts contribute to the discussion?

A number of early ecocritical texts, including Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) and Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism* (1994), proposed that Romantic writers like Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge present helpful alternatives to dualistic modes of thinking that promote instrumental economic rationality and short-term solutions to environmental problems. Yet subsequent scholars have also complicated the idea that Romanticism holds the antidote to modern ills, noting that non-utilitarian approaches to nature within the period often existed in tension (and sometimes, in cooperation) with powerful new forms of consumer capitalism.³ Queyras's poetry shows an awareness of this mixed legacy, while at the same time pointing to the continuing value of the period's complex literary engagements with environmental questions. In the work of writers like Dorothy Wordsworth and William Blake, for instance, *Expressway* finds ways of juggling multiple ideas of nature, along with the ability to articulate what has been gained or lost in the modern drive for greater speed in cycles of production and consumption.⁴ Further, in her reworking of Dorothy Wordsworth's writing, Queyras develops new means for thinking about the relationship between private attachments and public voice. Finally, Queyras shares with many of her Romantic predecessors a keen interest in human movement at the local scale. However, because her sense of the peripatetic life also includes twenty-first century travel along digital highways, airport runways, and continent-spanning interstates, her transcodings of certain Romantic works

often acquire fresh relevance when read in the shadow of late capitalism's drive for endless circulation. Overall, *Expressway* draws on the energies of Romanticism in formulating a response to the daily pressures of accelerated life and information overload, but it does so without reinforcing an idea of nature as timeless escape. Instead, by keeping one eye on the future and the other on the past, Queyras's poems help readers to reclaim a sense of collective agency in dealing with the deluge of data and quest for speed that threatens to overtake our lives.

Expressway's opening sequence, "Solitary," begins with the movement of a nameless protagonist back and forth between two seemingly divergent landscapes: on the one hand we find her walking beside the I-95 expressway that runs down the spine of the eastern United States, described as a "[g]oat trail on steroids" (79) that "smooth[es] each nuisance of wild, each terrifying / Quirk of land" (16-17). If the pastoral is to be found in this place, it seems to reside only as a faint memory, as the activity of walking is made sensorily unpleasant by the detritus of consumption, and physically dangerous due to the speed of passing vehicles. On the other hand, we encounter the protagonist hiking through the Alps, scattering the last of her father's ashes. The Alps, land of Wordsworth's wanderings in *The Prelude*, initially seem far from the "emerald turf besieged by doggy bags" (5) that shoulders the I-95, yet here too humanity leaves its mark in the form of an altered climate. The spring of 2007, the speaker notes, sees the Alps "bursting into flames, / All the way to Mont Blanc, incendiary air" (21-22). "If future no longer has future," she asks, "where does it look?" (94).

The rest of Queyras's book can be read as a response to this question, and it does so using two chief strategies. First, instead of confronting the future head-on, it gazes

backward, like Benjamin's Angel of History, sifting through the wreckage of what we call progress to find alternate visions of human-nature relations, specifically as articulated in the writings of Dorothy Wordsworth and William Blake; and second, it uses techniques such as mimicry, compression, and punctured syntax to disrupt the smooth logic of instrumental rationality and managerialism that operate at the expense of both people and the physical environment. In what follows, I will especially consider Queyras's creative response to Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals*, looking at how conversation between the two writers' works allows readers to contemplate the changing meaning(s) of mobility in an era wherein highways of data packets and asphalt have rendered pastoral simplicity irretrievable. What does it mean – for ourselves and the environments in which we are embedded – to live and die by the logic of the expressway, which relentlessly pursues the most efficient, cost-effective means of getting from one place to another? What other activities are pushed to the side when what Paul Josephson calls “automobility” becomes the reigning dictum for how space, time, and movement are organized (6-7)? And further, how might poetry temporarily jam the circuits of hyper-mobility in ways that force us to reorient our relationships to space and place?

As geographer Tim Cresswell has observed, the bare fact of movement is “rarely just about getting from A to B. The line that connects them, despite its apparent immateriality, is both meaningful and laden with power” (9). One of the key ways that Queyras explores the fluctuating meanings of the line between A and B is by taking readers back to the writing of Dorothy Wordsworth in a section titled “Some Moments From a Land Before the Expressway.” This section forms the structural core of the volume, and in it Queyras creates a series of found poems drawn from Wordsworth's

Grasmere Journals from 1800-1803. The invitation to re-read Wordsworth at this point in the text offers relief to readers who have just made their way through the preceding section titled “Crash,” a poem sculpted entirely out of Google results from media reports about automobile accidents.⁵ When Queyras subsequently turns to Dorothy, who tells readers in her poem “Grasmere – a Fragment” that “Lured by a little winding path, / Quickly I left the publick road” (47), many will be only too happy to join her, seeking respite from the accumulated carnage tallied by the information highway.

On the surface, Wordsworth’s textual ecosystem seems simpler, more private, and less likely to overwhelm the reader than the rush of text Queyras has scooped from the Web to compose “Crash.” Visually, the found text Queyras composes out of Dorothy’s journals provides more breathing room on the page, and there is a sense of ease in joining Dorothy as she rambles through the Lake District gathering mosses and strawberry plants, visiting acquaintances, and periodically fretting over the health of her brother and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The focus in Queyras’s rendering of Dorothy is overwhelmingly outward and communal, as the latter seems much more concerned with recording the things she does, the people she meets, and the places she travels than with offering any extended window into the inner self. This sets her apart from the lyric “I” that is central to so much of Romantic poetry, wherein nature is often invoked as a means of facilitating human introspection. It also makes her a fitting counterpart to the contemporary feminine speaker of the other poems in *Expressway*, a figure consistently referred to in the third person.

Yet the relationship between private and public realms in Dorothy Wordsworth’s works is also more complicated than it initially seems. Although Wordsworth was

preoccupied with avoiding notoriety, an anxiety that Susan Levin suggests was enhanced by ambivalence about treading on her more famous brother's turf (*Dorothy Wordsworth: A Longman* xix), some of Dorothy's unpublished writings nonetheless made their way into her brother's best-known poems. Queyras's work not only reminds us of such traffic between the siblings' texts, but also brings Dorothy's work out into the wider avenues of print while remaining mindful of the complex signals such an endeavor communicates about whose voices will be heard, and how. In Wordsworth's time, as in our own, the responses to such points of overlap between private and public environments can sometimes be anticipated, but they cannot always be entirely controlled. As Queyras herself has remarked, with new technologies and modes of composition (e.g., Twitter, blogging), the line between public and private voice has arguably become more tenuous than ever ("Public Poet" 38-40).

Given the ways that public and the private worlds exist in dynamic relation, I want to suggest that it would be a mistake to conceive of Dorothy Wordsworth's work as uncomplicated, entirely local, or wholly private, for while her journals frequently attend to domestic life around Dove Cottage in the company of her brother William and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, they are also texts alive with forms of transit and social encounter that reach well beyond home and hearth. Not only is Wordsworth herself a woman regularly "on the move," walking through the Lake District in all manner of weather, but her writing is also populated by *other people* on the move, especially the landless rural poor who found themselves compelled to migrate when political and economic changes in the early nineteenth century rendered many traditional livelihoods unsustainable.⁶ Indeed, many of the vagrant figures documented in Dorothy's journals eventually appear in her

brother William's poems via the figure of the "solitary" (a term that Queyras also uses to title the opening poem of her collection). But whereas Dorothy's journeys are undertaken in the comforting anticipation of return to a stable domestic life, for many of the solitaries she meets there is no such guarantee. Queyras condenses one of Dorothy's encounters with these migrants into a vignette that effectively accelerates the reader's experience of the original text. In the excerpt, Dorothy meets "a woman half- / Starved 2 girls a pair of slippers / Had belonged to some gentleman's / child – not easy to keep on / Too young for such travels / Husband off with another, / And she *pursued*: fury, tears / Moved, I gave her a shilling" (161-68). The effect of this compressed speech heightens the sense of desperation found in the original text, and hastens an emotional response to that desperation in turn.

Further, and perhaps less optimistically, the hurried yet scattered character of these lines also formally mimics the shortened attention spans of the digital age and the relentless movement-without-finality that culminates in the expressway, that aid to passage that minimizes human contact and which rides roughshod over all "nuisance[s] of wild" ("Solitary" 16). It is only when the contemporary reader exits the expressway and rolls to a stop near a busy intersection that she or he might be directly confronted by marginalized individuals of the sort Dorothy routinely encounters, walking with their handmade signs between the rows of cars. Queyras's truncated rendering of the starving woman Dorothy meets thus suggests only the briefest of intervals for life narratives to capture the attention of charity before the light turns green and travelers roll on.

However, rather than offering a departure from the contemporary logic of the expressway, Wordsworth's documentation of nineteenth century social precarity shows

that, even in the era of the Grand Tour, mobility was not necessarily synonymous with freedom. Indeed, part of what simultaneously fascinates and unnerves Dorothy in her meeting with the desperate young mother whom she meets is that this figure represents an alternate path for her own life; as Susan Levin points out, the woman has spent her childhood in the same place as Dorothy, and her husband has repaid her investment in family life by leaving her for another woman. The latter situation, Levin notes, is “at once clichéd and terrifying, especially for Dorothy who must feel her brother is in some sense leaving her for another woman, Mary [Hutchinson]” (Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* 38).⁷ The extent of Dorothy’s emotional transport at hearing the starving woman’s story is indicated by the fact that she gives her a shilling, a significantly larger amount than she usually offers to beggars. In Dorothy’s account, then, the idea of ‘being moved’ is multivalent: first, the encounter takes place between two persons in transit; second, it feeds into Dorothy’s anxieties about her own emotional displacement in light of her brother’s coming marriage; and finally, it evokes sympathy in a writer who in turn records such events and readies them for transport into the more general imaginative register of her brother’s poems.⁸

Upon re-reading Dorothy’s journals in the early twenty-first century, one is struck by the way her diction eerily foreshadows Queyras’s concerns about modernity’s mixed blessings of increased mobility, connectivity, and efficiency. For instance, in an entry dated April 1802, Dorothy recounts an experience of coming upon a belt of wild daffodils dancing in the wind along the shores of Ullswater, the second largest lake in England’s Lake District:

When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side, we fancied that the lake had floated the seeds ashore & that the little colony had so sprung up – But as we went along there were more & yet more & at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about & about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed & reeled & danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing. This wind blew directly over the Lake to them. There was here & there a little knot & a few stragglers a few yards higher up but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity & unity & life of that one busy highway. (*Grasmere Journals* 85)

This scene preserves a detailed memory that would go on to furnish materials for one of William Wordsworth's best known poems, "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud," published in 1807. However, in William's rendering of the experience, the "we" of Dorothy's account disappears, and Dorothy's distinctive vocabulary of transportation infrastructure ("turnpike road" and "busy highway") is sacrificed in favor of a singular image recollected in tranquility by an individual speaker:

For oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon the inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;

And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils. (in Levin 256)

The sense of a world in motion that is so vibrant in Dorothy's description is here turned radically inward, as the "dance" of nature is translated into a flutter of memory registered in the recesses of the human heart. What is excised in this process of creative translation into the public male voice, however, is the acknowledgment that it was in fact a shared experience created out of the meeting of meteorology, geography, flora, and a sister whose presence of mind led her to record the experience in her diary.

In their selective rewriting of journals that served as source materials for some of the Romantic era's best-known works, Queyras's "Lines Written Many Miles from Grasmere" prompt readers to consider how meanings shift when text is refracted into at least three versions: William's reworkings of Dorothy's recorded memories in his own poems; Queyras's compacted, found text of 2009; and Dorothy's original version *with the present laid over it*.⁹ The latter point is especially significant, for it suggests the impossibility of reading Dorothy's accounts – with their references to highways and turnpikes – without transcoding them into the register of the present. Here reader-response theorist Hans Robert Jauss's conceptualization of different "horizons of expectation" helps illumine what Queyras's work achieves with regard to the writing of the Wordsworths. Jauss asserts:

A literary event can continue to have an effect only if those who come after it still or once again respond to it – if there are readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it. The coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of

expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics, and authors. (1553)

By leading us back to Dorothy's journals, works that have historically been marginalized in the Romantic canon in comparison with those of her Poet Laureate brother, Queyras effectively takes readers on a detour, leading us off the "publick road" of literary canonicity to consider an alternate poetic vision of nature made newly relevant by contemporary circumstance – what Erin Wunker has described as the "planetary" register of Queyras's work ("Toward" 106). This detour is doubly significant in that although the daffodils scene is one of the most widely cited passages in Dorothy's journals, Queyras deliberately omits all reference to it in her found version of the text. Like the roadway, then, Queyras's poem is a constructed thing built on top of other things; yet as it builds, it also effaces. Such effacement, though, is never perfect or complete, and by omitting the daffodils scene from her poetic sequence, Queyras wittingly conjures a speaking silence that prompts critics to go back to Dorothy's journals and discover details they might not have previously noticed. For instance, those "few stragglers" of yellow that Dorothy records as minor visual noise in what is otherwise a picture of "unity" and "simplicity" along "one busy highway" gain new importance upon reading Queyras's work, for their absence serves as a haunting reminder of individuals who are cast aside by modernity's quest for efficient conformity.

Another way that Queyras's deliberate effacement of Dorothy's text turns out to be paradoxically productive can be witnessed in the decision by both of these female authors to eschew the lyric's anthropocentric focus in favor of what Erin Wunker designates a "poetics of subjectivity, where the subject isn't only human" ("O Little" 38, 44). Reading

through Queyras's selective quotation of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals in "Lines Written Many Miles from Grasmere," one notices how the overall lack of a lyric "I" means that the reader's attention is continually redirected outwards, with the consequence that the entire poem is put in motion, its meanings never allowed to gather and rest in a single place. Witness, for instance, the sense of restlessness generated in the following lines:

Up to the rocks above Jenny Dockeray's

Left the water at near nine

In the morning to ... resolving to go again

In evening. One from Wm and 2 papers.

To the Blind man's for plants: Strawberries

To the Potters, upon the hill, went bleating

In the road after tea, round the lakes after tea

Crossed the stepping-stones

Down rambling by the lake (32-39)

With their lack of punctuation and staccato leaps from one adventure to another, these lines destabilize the oppositions of subject/object, human/other-than-human, and cultivated/wild in ways that prompt the reader to make connections between what might initially seem to be disparate activities.¹⁰ When stitched together, these activities resolve

into a picture of daily life rich in community relationships and surprising encounters between human and nonhuman others.

Especially in the poem's final section, we see well-known writers and texts sharing space with lesser known figures often overlooked in canonical versions of literary history: thus William's work on his famous text "When My Heart Leaps Up" and the *Intimations Ode* are given just three lines in Queyras's text, whereas five are devoted to Dorothy's delight in swallows that come to the sitting room window at Dove Cottage:

Wm haunted with altering his Rainbow.

Swallows come to the sitting-room

Twitter and bustle, hang, bellies

To the glass, forked fish-like tails

Swim round

And round again they come,

Wm (again) attempting to alter,

Then added a little ode. (176-83)

Where the swallows seem to cry out for attention, William's ode is rendered diminutive, and as yet, unfinished and uncertain. Queyras's found poem thus gives us a sense of Romanticism as very much a work in progress, and also highlights the importance of the domestic environments that nurtured some of its central creations.

As these examples suggest, Queyras's reworkings of Dorothy's text have the power to alert us to connections among water, weather, geology, plants, animals, and human communities. At the same time, though, the volume as a whole recognizes that a simple return to nature's past would fail to reckon with the ambivalent character of contemporary life and the adeptness with which reigning socio-economic orthodoxies attempt to translate nearly everything – even environmental destruction – into generators of capital. For Queyras, the very slipperiness of expressway logic that makes it so difficult to organize against politically also proves to be a source of linguistic fascination, for such slipperiness allows the writer to probe those sites where the vocabulary of liberation is haunted by a shadow self. In "Cloverleaf Medians and Means," for instance, Queyras explores how the precautionary language of environmental assessment that accompanies urban planning activities is frequently transposed into a less politically disruptive key. Freedom to protest highway expansion is thus recast as an invitation to (in)voluntary displacement: "Free to move on: those who / Find noise levels unacceptable" (8-9).¹¹ In a neoliberal climate where transactions have become "the new gold" (16), major political choices get reframed as products of naturalized economic momentum.

To "resist the thruway" (19) in such a context thus comes to seem aberrant, even deviant; as one of Queyras's speakers asks, "Who can resist / The slide of modernity, of being elsewhere always, ahead of / Oneself, texting oneself – not to bring modernity into the poem, / Pristine modernity, the dream" (24-28). Formally, the dialogue structure of this poem, in which a series of statements are ascribed to two anonymous speakers labeled "A." and "B." also resists the logic of clear opposition, for as the sequence progresses the lanes occupied by the two respective speakers begin to merge, leaking into

one another to such an extent that they form an unnerving erotic union wherein the road becomes both mediator and medium of contact:

A & B: [...] The road stretching, humid and damp, bringing no good news but itself passing, a shadow over us, under us, the road stretching ambulances and sparrow song, arterial to Atlantic and Flatbush, past Magic Johnson's Savings and Loan, its yarmulked peak and promise of luxury condos, beautiful, beautiful, the dying pansies and the face of noon, the tightening at the back of the knee, the road reaching. (130-137)

Syntactically, these flowing lines convey the idea that the expressway 'expresses' endlessly, yet at the same time that expression is monologic: ultimately, "It is money, only money that speaks" ("Divining Rod" 6).¹² By the time we arrive at a later poem in the book titled "Progress," what previously existed as a dialogue between A and B has been reduced to the language of A, and the possibility of genuine political or economic alternatives is replaced by radical sameness presented in the guise of consumer choice:

The expressway was born in A.

What is more self-referential than A?

Either, or.

The thing goes round on itself, the thing goes round. [...]

What citizens of A lack in political options they make up for in pastry choices, in supermarket items, in numbers, in health-insurance packages, in phone plans, in ways to choose

because:

Freedom is to confuse.

Freedom is to make a buck.

Freedom is to charge a fee. (19-22; 26-32)

Queyras seems to draw directly on some of the central ideas of *écriture féminine* here, exploring how linguistic, and in this case, neoliberal *economic* structures appear to present the reader with a choice between opposites even as one half of the opposition is destroyed in order for the other half to make sense. In the logic of A, all that is ‘not-A’ is defined in terms of lack, such that the vocabulary of opposition can only appear in terms defined by the very thing it seeks to reject. As Jacqueline Larson puts it, the very self has become part of a transaction (“White Line Fever” n.p.). To disrupt this logic thus requires a new kind of writing, one whose goal, as Hélène Cixous puts it in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” is to “break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable” (2040) in a way that rejects silence as the only option for those who have been cast in the category of “not-A.” For advocates of *écriture féminine*, this also means turning to the body as a site of multiplicity and heterogeneity that might contest the monologic authority of A, for the body becomes a site wherein possibilities for expression are radically expanded beyond the discourse of the supposedly rational economic order.

Before she explores the radical possibilities of the body as a site of resistance to monologic expression, however, Queyras first explores the pervasiveness of neoliberalism’s influence on a range of environments. Notably, this includes a closer look at how expressway logic infiltrates our most intimate physical spaces by subjecting bodies to what Stacy Alaimo would call “trans-corporeal” risks (19-20). In the poem

“Divining Rod, Or How to Find a Neural Pathway Hospital Exit: Emergency Land: HOV,” Queyras contemplates how some of the very substances that feed the expressway – for instance, fossil fuels, concrete admixtures, and roadside weed killers – later enter the neural and arterial pathways of material bodies, causing new “nuisances” in the form of unexpected mutations and accelerated cellular divisions: “the expressway, / Its millions of bodies hourly exiting / And entering, random the cell / With its division, millions hourly, dividing. / We rely on so much chance, why / Shouldn’t our cells mutate?” (14-19). In turn, the body itself becomes an unruly roadway whose lumpy tumors and rough patches must be smoothed by similar acts of ablation: “All along the expressway, its terminal / Ambulances, those men sanding away the day-old / Growth, these men in combat boots, waving flags / Saluting, directing traffic, rolling out the macadam the way the body holds the road” (34-38). Here, the technical vocabulary of road building (“macadam”) co-exists with that of militarism (“combat boots,” “waving flags,” “saluting”), suggesting an overlapping set of attitudes concerning landscapes and bodies that presumes bumps can smoothed out with the right combination of forceful solutions (for instance, applying bitumen, tar, or radioactive substances). In this case, however, the speaker’s sister, whose extended relationship to cancer haunts the poem, says “*No to radiation*” (45), and repurposes the expressway to escape any more attempts to prolong a life that has already been condemned by a single word: “*metastasized*” (25).

This poem’s examination of the interpenetration of different scales of mobility and networks of circulation can be traced back to William Harvey’s 1628 discovery that the heart pumps blood through the arteries around the body, and that blood is in turn circulated back to the heart by veins. On the heels of Harvey’s discovery, health,

including urban health, soon came to be associated with circulation. As Tim Cresswell observes, “road surfaces, previously constructed from pebbles, were made smooth through the use of flagstones. Urban planners and architects sought to maximize flow and movement. Words such as *artery* and *vein* began to appear in the texts of the new urbanists. They believed that blockages created bad health in the urban body” (7-8).¹³ Yet when these dreams of arterial circulation are exponentially multiplied and filled with exhaust-spewing vehicles, what initially promised to aid human connection starts to look like a more complicated blessing, especially when it affects human health in ways that lead to untimely exits.

In such a scenario, where expressway logic infiltrates even the most intimate relations such that the body’s veins and arteries become high-speed lanes for the transport of the chemical-pharmaceutical industry’s products in sickness and in health, where might the resources for resistance lie? Where, Queyras’s desperate speaker asks, “is down the road? Where is away? Where is outside / Of market? Where does the road not lead? Where / Without cloverleafs?” (“The Road is Everywhere” 3-5). By way of an answer, I suggest first that we turn to a series of prophetic figures that the speaker encounters in the course of her journeys across continents and along roadsides, and from whom she often seeks direction. Appearing most often in sections throughout the work that are designated “A Memorable Fancy” (after William Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), these figures help to reveal the repressive character of modern life, but also point to cracks in the logic of the expressway that might prove its undoing. A key turning point in the text occurs when the speaker meets one such prophet in “A Memorable Fancy” at the end of Book VII, a fisherman who sits on a rock while washing out a bowl. In response to her

question to him about how to meet the future, he reminds her of the value of taking a detour:

You can say, Calm. You can say, Slow. You can say, Enough. You can say, Easy. You can say, Pine, and mean it. You can say, Polish and breathe. You can use your tongue, and eye. You can check your pulse, let your hair grow, take less. You can suck on peaches. You can walk. You can read. You can let your mind wander. You can wonder. You can eat words. You can reach out. You can wait for clean, or you can make it so.... (24-30, emphasis in original)

Here, Queyras's poem also recalls Eliot's use of the Fisher King legend in *The Waste Land* in its quest to find a way to live in a modern place where nature has decayed but not expired. As Queyras's fisherman elaborates, "*Now, we swill the / future in our bowls not expecting anything to be clear. But we have / life, no?*" (16-18). The fisherman's invitation to embodied action in the face of ecological uncertainty leads in turn to a new kind of poetic vision for the speaker, one in which breaking up the expressway becomes a feminist project that reclaims the knowledge and movements of the body as forms of contestation against expressway logic. In the "Renewal" section of "Three Dreams of the Expressway," the speaker thus envisions a land in which women break up expressways with pickaxes and backhoes, "Cracking the earth's concrete surface, earthquakes of relief / For the pinched and corseted" (6-7). In order to break up the logic of A, to shake the foundations of thinking that presumes opposition can only be defined in terms of lack, the poem turns to a strategy of unmaking language that echoes the tactics of *écriture féminine*, writing *as if* a different form of consciousness premised on heterogeneity and multiplicity

were possible.¹⁴ As the speaker remarks in “Renewal,” “In this country / What I’m saying is another language, / In this country I could be deported. In this country where the artists are busy unstapling / The seams” (20-24). To express oneself ‘in another language,’ jamming the circuits of tidy sense-making via syntax that “Let[s] no swath of concrete go without interruption, without puncture and connection” (“A Memorable Fancy” 11-12), is to stake one’s hope on the idea that the future is *not* already predetermined. As one of Queyras’s poet-prophet figures declares in an earlier “Memorable Fancy” at the end of Part VI, “*You think the future is a lapdog, but you are wrong*” (28).

In the end, Queyras’s strategic invocation of writers like Dorothy Wordsworth and Blake, both of whom have a complicated relationship to Romanticism, reminds twenty-first-century readers of the value of older cultural texts for addressing contemporary anxieties about the promises and costs of accelerated modernity. Wordsworth’s journals, for example, remind us of the social precarity that often accompanies celebratory discourses of mobility, and of the need to create a future in which there are still places for ‘nuisances of wild’ to live and thrive. The work of creating that future takes many forms, including work done on the “publick road” of the World Wide Web. Indeed, far from rejecting new modes of connectivity afforded by digital communications, Queyras has often made a point of strategically adopting them, using her *Lemon Hound* blog over the better part of a decade to create space for diverse voices, and to nurture conversations about poetry that push the bounds of form and language.

Musing on the strengths and limitations of the blog project, Queyras observes that part of what a blog does is to reflect the lateral movements of an individual’s ongoing thinking process, while also showing how that process is plugged into larger networks of

thinking and writing: “The blog reflects all,” she remarks, “and leaves a traceable path through time, geography, reading, poetics, and so on” (*Unleashed* 6). The “little winding path” down which Dorothy Wordsworth invited her readers over two hundred years ago can still prove to be a route to adventure in the digital age, as readers of Queyras’s online writings have been able to trace the many intellectual and ecological pathways that lead in and out of physical books encased between two covers. Whether those intellectual pathways possess the durability to outlast the disposable consumer technologies that produce and distribute them, however, remains an open question.

Further, it’s worth noting that tracing a path is not just a physical act, but a temporal one as well. The genre of the blog is premised on a commitment to daily or other regular intervals of writing that keep pace with life. Ideally, it complements other exercises of dailiness, but at times its demands can be unwieldy. Queyras’s decision to conclude *Lemon Hound* in 2015 drew attention to the finitude of both money and time, and her decision to sign off with an image of unleashed dogs bounding off to frolic in the grass suggests that there are other kinds of dailiness that also need to be valued, and that devotion to a public audience must be balanced with private pleasure. Hopefully, the re-launch of the site in 2017 will help to nurture rather than hinder that balance, and at a minimum, will give Queyras room to write and room to run.

Similarly, the enactment of ecological hope sometimes leads one away from the laptop and outside into places like the ditches of the I-95, those sites that confront us with the uncomfortable consequences of leaving nature “nowhere untouched” (“Solitary” 19). The dailiness of the diary and blog is ideally accompanied, then, by regular visitations to other spaces that remind us that our mechanisms of connectivity are not detached from

other ecological circuits, but rather have lasting material effects on them. Overall, ecocritical conversation in North America has been strengthened by Queyras' encouragement of a wider dialogue between the public discourses of environmentalism and avant-garde art, for if we take that dialogue seriously, it might challenge not only the parameters of what we mean by "nature poetry," but also who might read it. As she comments in *Unleashed*, "Who says nature poetry has a certain straightforward language? Who says that it is accessible? How is accessible described by a given group of individuals encountering poetry? I suspect the average reader is more prepared to have his or her mind blown than we know" (111).¹⁵ In its refusal of the straightforward linguistic path, *Expressway* reminds us that while "it is too late to be simple," it is not too late to hope, or to put that hope into action in the public realm: as the speaker of *Expressway* concludes, "Go forth and undo harm. / Go forth and do" (98).¹⁶

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¹ The reference to the epigraph of *Expressway* is by page number, while all other references to Queyras’s poems in the volume are by line number.

² Queyras concluded her blog in May 2015, noting a desire to return to her own work and an unwillingness to continue a site fuelled by uncompensated labor. However, recently Queyras announced a re-launch of *Lemon Hound* in Fall 2017 (*Lemon Hound* 3.0) that aims to pay contributors for content creation. In the meantime, the site’s rich archive remains available to online readers. See <https://lemonhound.com>.

³ On this point, see Campbell; McKendrick *et al*; and Morton, *Poetics*.

⁴ See, for example, the work of Bewell; Hutchings; Morton, *Ecology*; Rigby; Soper; and Easterlin, among others.

⁵ Here Queyras works in the spirit of Kenneth Goldsmith’s “uncreative practice.” See Goldsmith 15.

⁶ It is worth noting that Dorothy’s sense of ‘peoplehood’ extends well beyond the human species; for example in her Alfoxden journal entry for 20 January 1798, she refers to the growth of young wheat, running water, and sheep on the slopes as collectively contributing to the idea of a landscape that “peoples itself” (*Grasmere and Alfoxden* 141).

⁷ William married Mary Hutchinson in 1802 after a two-year courtship, and by most accounts Dorothy came to have great affection for her sister-in-law, though prior to the marriage she expressed some anxiety about how the union might affect her position in the family.

⁸ See, for instance, William Wordsworth’s “The Leech-Gatherer,” “The Pedlar,” “The Discharged Soldier,” and “The Blind Beggar.”

⁹ See Jacqueline Larson’s discussion of Queyras’s “poetics of refraction” that looks backwards at poetry’s history (which, like objects in a rearview mirror, is closer than it appears), while also keeping an eye on the road of the future. See Larson, “White Line Fever.”

¹⁰ For more on how Queyras’s technique interrupts the lyric’s focus on the human as the sole and central ego, see Wunker, “O Little” 42.

¹¹ One notes here a twenty-first century parallel to the Wordsworths' documentation of forced mobility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in light of the fencing of formerly common lands, and the growing mechanization of agriculture and former cottage industries. For more on the relationship between the privatization of nature in the Romantic period and similar gestures taking place under contemporary neoliberal policies, see Heynen *et al* 10.

¹² The wry commentary Queyras's speaker offers here on the primacy of commerce is likely influenced by the fact that the poet was living in Brooklyn during the gentrification boom of the early 2000s.

¹³ Foucault made similar observations in his 1977 lectures at the Collège de France. See especially his lecture from 18 January 1978 for a discussion of the rise of discipline in the liberal state and its connections to optimal circulation (29-53).

¹⁴ See Cixous's insistence that feminine texts must shatter the frameworks of institutions and language that allow no room for woman to function except within the discourse of man (2050).

¹⁵ See Queyras's "Lyric Conceptualism, A Manifesto in Progress" for more on how she envisions bringing together lyric conventions more traditionally associated with nature poetry, with conceptual techniques (*Barking & Biting* 61-64).

¹⁶ Queyras draws the phrase "It is too late to be simple" from fellow Canadian poet Lisa Robertson. The line serves as one of the section epigraphs in Queyras's 2006 volume *Lemon Hound* (23).