

arena, Montgomery keeps her focus firmly on humans... but does present animals who have some subjectivity.”

The above quote perhaps captures the essence of this entire collection. While Montgomery is best known for her memorable human characters, each of her stories is circumscribed by natural surroundings which play significant roles in their own right.

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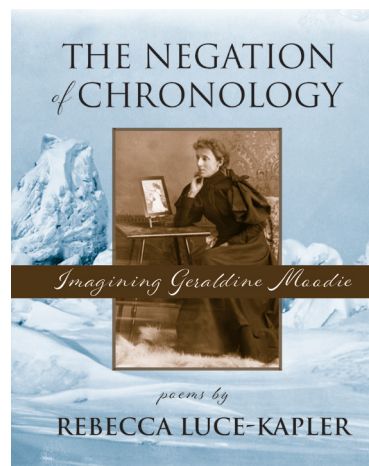
THE NEGATION OF CHRONOLOGY: IMAGINING GERALDINE MOODIE

Rebecca Luce-Kapler
Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2020

REVIEWED BY WENDY
DONAWA

A quiet irony underlies Rebecca Luce-Kapler's *The Negation of Chronology* as its narrative voices unpack the remarkable life of Geraldine Moodie. Although each poem seems as self-contained as a photograph, taken as a whole, they chart Geraldine's life from birth to death, and leave the reader with a full and replete account of her layered existence.

From an infant seen by her midwife to have second sight, to a restless and self-willed young girl, the poems chronicle a portrait of the artist Geraldine will become. A young woman of dreams and visions, she avoids the respectable oppressive life of the Ontario spinster by



choosing marriage to an ambitious NWMP Officer who will repeatedly uproot their growing family to postings across the prairies and into the Yukon. In these moves she encounters “the botanic/of a prairie flora/ that moves imagination westward” and sees “the edges/of her life close behind her”. In unfamiliar terrain she finds “unreadable” landscapes that “did not remember her”, but finds “an open spirit rises/ into the fullness of blue”, and “even the stars/ swallowed her in their bowl of light”.

Later, moving from Medicine Hat to Lethbridge while recuperating from a serious injury, she is given a Kodak, and becomes obsessed with the “search for a delicate/ thing shining from a backdrop”, a contrast to her husband's “certainty of opinion as he tidies his mustache”. “Already/ I trust this tiny machine”, she exults, and her thoughts turn to “the life/ I could live without him”.

Sabotaged by domesticity, its “rumped beds unmade”, the constant uprooting of her home, art, and growing brood (six!), the disapproval of husband and community at her “mannish” establishment of a photographic studio, the raw grief of a child's death, she finds her real life in her art, in “the light [that] has carried her away”. Her foray into the then-new and dangerous Photographic Powder deepens her art: “I long to map/a place onto glass plate until it

seeps into my skin”. Is this not also how we write or read a poem?

Despite being in many ways a woman of her time, her openness to and respect for her Indigenous sitters as more than exotic *objets* is articulated in “the beauty of their nature so they sit without judgement.” One portrait captures a prairie elder with “the look/of one who has seen the future rising/from a long past”; years later in the Yukon, an Inuit woman “happy/to wait, knowing/ that all she is can be/ gathered into the small box”.

Geraldine ages, “feels the wash/ of time settle around her ankles”. Grandchildren are born; Geraldine accommodates a marriage where “we never speak of feelings”. But “over the years our bodies have found/a geography they understand”. “My eyes measuring the light” is her fulfillment, eyes that “see otherwise/ something that lives beyond”, as her photographs do. And with a mischievous understanding of the constructed self, she explains her “imaging the way I want to be seen.”

Ironically, the poetry sequence's insistence on a negation of chronology, insists that the moment captured by the lens has no *before* or *after*, and yet provides a tantalizing linguistic parallel both in the individual poems and in the overall structure. Each of the poems is as self-contained as a photograph, and often as startling as the momentary image itself—interplay of light and dark, actual and metaphysical, in art as in life. Is this long-poem narrative perhaps a playful *ars poetica* for Luce-Kapler's own writing?

Luce-Kapler's diction is spare, direct, forthright; it sparkles with images of dark and light. Each poem has the clarity and completeness of a well-crafted photograph, and some of its mystery too. Layered meanings and implications place a moment in time, in place, in relationship,

in history, and provide the reader's imagination with the chronology the title so wittily denies.

Wendy Donawa grew up on the unceded Coast Salish territory of the Lekwungen and WSANEC nations; she spent most of her adult life in Barbados as an educator and museum curator. Since her return to B.C., her poems have appeared in Canadian literary journals, anthologies, and chapbooks. Her debut collection, Thin Air of the Knowable (2017) was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Award. A contributing editor with Arc Poetry Magazine, she lives in Victoria.

OUTSIDE IN: A POLITICAL MEMOIR

Libby Davies
Toronto: Between the Lines, 2018

REVIEWED BY AALYA AHMAD

In *Outside In: A Political Memoir*, long-time NDP Member of Parliament Libby Davies describes her early days of community organizing, Saul Alinsky-style, in the 1970s, helping to build the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) at a time when she was bursting with energy and fight and DERA resembled an (idealized) union, “militant and raw with an attentive and active membership.” Alas, few unions in Canada nowadays could be described thus. Indeed, one often hears talk nowadays of a crisis in both the labour movement and its erstwhile political arm, the NDP, a sense of ineffectiveness, stagnation, and the stifling grip of an “old boys’ network.” Indeed, Davies’ memoir is tinged with nostalgia for an NDP where “party and caucus lines” were not as rigidly enforced and MPs actively participated in occupations,

demonstrations, and sit-ins.

Outside In, arriving in a federal election year like a doorstep canvasser, is a particularly relevant book for this jaded epoch, containing valuable lessons for those on all points of the political spectrum and primarily for women considering a run for political positions. Many passages are marked with the heartbreakingly familiar sense of a woman forced to navigate impossibly patriarchal institutions, facing sexism at times subtle and elsewhere unmistakably overt. Davies frequently describes a sense of imposter syndrome underlying her commitment to bringing transformative change on behalf of her constituents of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, in which a burgeoning health crisis for drug users was blowing up at the time that Davies first went to Parliament. Her campaigns of support for addicts, sex workers, affordable housing, and harm reduction measures such as safe injection sites are arguably what Davies is best known for; her memoir reminds us of how difficult it was for her to hold onto her convictions at a time when these issues had little to no support, even among other New Democrats.

The fierce determination with which Davies advocates for her marginalized constituents is juxtaposed with these moments of uncertainty. For example, arriving frazzled for a media interview with a Conservative opponent, a younger, well-groomed Peter MacKay, for example, Davies recalls him looking her up and down—“I didn’t really look like MP material...” However, her years of “scrapping with political opponents” disprove the “silent judgement” of the Ottawa elite. The book offers its readers many such moments of Davies’ passion overcoming her vulnerability and sense of exclusion. We follow her as a rookie municipal politician and then as a rookie MP,

steadily gaining confidence as she learns how to navigate patriarchal political scenes. Similarly, she shows her readers the complications of the personal intersecting with the political—Davies broke ground both as a young municipal councillor defending her relationship with her partner and fellow politician Bruce Eriksen against scandal-mongers, and then as the first female Member of Parliament to reveal her later same-sex relationship. The memoir shows us the vulnerability underlying these personal stories, somewhat to Davies’ discomfort after a lifetime of public battle.

Davies identifies as essentially a community organizer, distancing herself from the “Ottawa vortex” and in passages like this: “My politics grew like a wild tree from the experience of organizing, not from the party” and “my political instincts came from the street, not from inside a political party.” Elsewhere, however, this conviction seems to falter as Davies becomes more comfortable working within the system. Early in the book, Davies speculates that DERA, as a scrappy young grassroots organization, might have achieved more if it could have been less “impatient and intolerant” in its power struggles with liberals and social service agencies. Her recollections are shot through with this duality, which is clearly articulated: Davies is nothing if not self-reflective.

Early on, Davies tells us, she learned “a basic political lesson: Don’t shy away from the institutions of power even if they oppress you; rather, learn how to use them for what you need to do.” Radical readers may ask how that squares with one of the core teachings of feminism, Audre Lorde’s reminder that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” In *Outside In*, the question becomes can we forge different tools? Is it useful or futile to keep chipping away