

THE MINUTE REVIEW

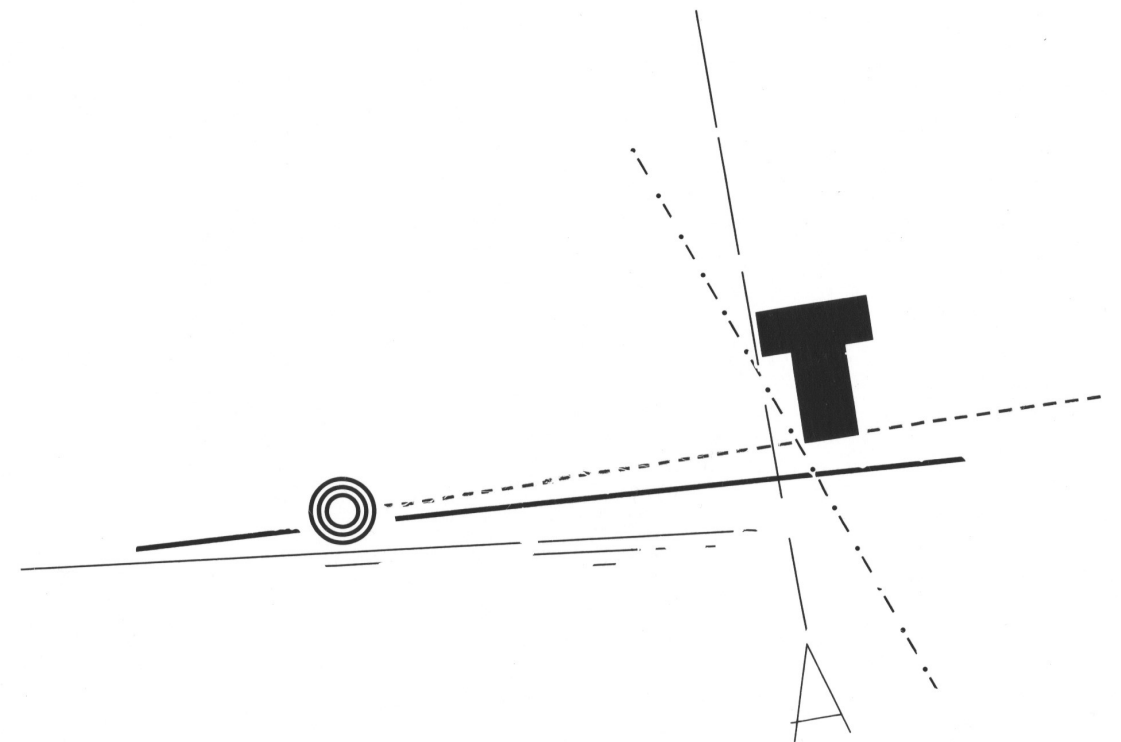
Vol. 2 No. 3 (December 2021)

a little magazine of poetry, prose, and reviews

Derek Beaulieu, editor

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Contributors this issue: petra schulze-wollgast | Charles Bernstein | Edric Mesmer |
Bruce Andrews | Eric Schmaltz | Aaron Tucker | Angela Caporaso | rob mcLennan |
Gary Barwin | Bronac Ferran | Nick Montfort | J.R. Carpenter | Julia Polych-O'Neill |
Thomas Dumont | Erica Baum |



petra schulze-wollgast

Charles Bernstein—*People Are the Same the World Over*

I am not the same as myself.

Thomas Dumont—Review of *Swan Song* by Sonja Ahlers
(Conundrum Press, 2021)

147 words about why you should read *Swan Song*.

It's

Aces. Affecting. Ambitious. Annihilating. Anarchival. Arch. Badass. Better-than. Bizarre. Bloody. Bonkers. Caffeinated. Candid. Capstone. Collagey. Comicky. Comical. Concrete poetry. Corny. Cringey. Cryptic. Cultish. Damning. Dangerous. Denunciatory. Divergent. Double-timed. Egging. Emotive. Ephemeral. Exemplary. Fan-girly. Fast. Fed-up. Femme. Feminist. Fetishistic. Frazzled. Funny. Girl-girly. Gobsmacking. Goofy. Gory. Gut-punching. Grievous. Groan. Haemophilic. Haunted. Heavy. Highjacking. Horrifying. Intense. Inimitable. Incategorical. Inky. Itchy. Iterative. Jocular. Jokey. Jugular. Juiced. Junky. Kicking. Killer. Kleptomaniacal. Klutzy. Crazy. Lingering. Long-lasting. Loquacious (not). Loopy. Luciferian. Lusty. Maniacal. Massive. Messy. Movie. Mutant. Nihilist. Nocturnal. Noisy. Nosferatic. Olfactory. Open. Opining. On-target. Poppy. Punchy. Punny. Quaking. Quartered (and drawn). Quick. Ragey. Raucous. Rapt. Raspberry-red. Razor-edgy. Razzied. Re-iterative. Rock-and-roll. Serendipitous. Spectral. Speedy. Spleenic. Spun. Successful. Succinct. Swirling. Telepathic. Testy. Textured. Titillating. Touchy. Traumatized. Tweaked. Überfrau. Unclassifiable. Underground. Unlike. Unquiet. Vampirish. Vascular. Venomous. Vertiginous. Videodromic. Vistoon. Visual poetry. Wanton. Wasted. Warpathic. Wild. Wowzers. Xcellent. X-ray eyed. Xenu-smashing. Yearny. Yes. Yikes. Ziney. Zesty. Zoonotic.

Read it.

Julia Polyck-O'Neill—*what is vision without a body*
(after Julietta Singh's *The Breaks*)

not an easy mother but a brutal system
spend days dreaming

scope my skin folks
scrape a small group of relations

awoke in the air and turned on the world
as her body aged

never trust a man
bodies are or in the aftermath

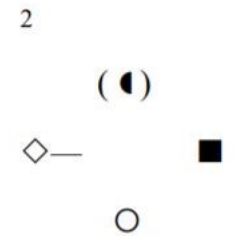
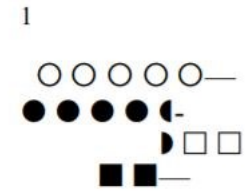
am I the perfect villain
am I obsessed with living

death's powerful allure
death's public body

bodies in space
bodies blithely abandoned

what is courage anymore
what is easy is brutal is public

Edric Mesmer—*poem drawn (for Drew)*



Bruce Andrews—Review of *Set Pieces* by Ted Pearson
(Spuyten Duyvil, 2021)

Pearson is our border-jumping self-uninvited melodramaturg for the One subdivided by Many. “What if the effects of language were operative inside me?” (Novalis)—where Language doesn’t make you everywhere. All set, unsettled, offbeat on the beat (policing the future). What is to be undone? First, our counter-socialization vouchers need to be revalidated. Totality endlessly repeats (in newly chopped-up fantasies). So this ‘crisis pessimism’ performs a linguistic analysis—of loss of ‘Sense’ & Value. Upending melancholy, unfree radicals rubbing abstraction the wrong way, with scrupulousness as death threat to complicity. And what are the odds on noise?—is the dealer crooked? It’s all in what’s over our head, an anti-imperial mayhem of signs & desire for the formless (which can’t be guilt-tripped). Down at the Interchangeable Vocabulary Inn, insights splatter, regroup, repeat, resplatter. Subject matters—can’t blame her. Bloodiness is Contact Improvisation. Hope is still delirium. It keeps coming back.

J.R. Carpenter—Review of *Like a Tree, Walking* by Vahni Capildeo
(Carcenet, 2021)

Vahni (Anthony Ezekiel) Capildeo is a Trinidadian Scottish writer of poetry and non-fiction, author of eight books and nine pamphlets. They are a writer of diaspora and plurilingualism, of oceans and islands. “Islands are provisional,” they observe, in ‘Odyssey Response,’ a poem commissioned by an actor and a pianist for a narrative recital first published in a pamphlet. Many of the poems in this collection have undertaken similarly multidisciplinary and collaborative journeys. Capildeo’s poetic project continuously up-ends and reconfigures expectation. In ‘Walk #5’, italicised lines from Shelley’s ‘Ode the West Wind’ are coupled with an eco-poetic counterpoint: “*O wind! The trumpet of a prophecy* / Isn’t required. Just bring our seasons home.” Where is this home of here and now? Many of the poems, and trees, in *Like a Tree, Walking* are rooted, as it were, in specific places. ‘Walk #6’ demands to know: “Where in Port of Spain?” are skies as blue as the always already blue of colonial imagination. “Blue is both an expectation and a thirst / during this climb.” In ‘Towards an Unwalking,’ Capildeo converses with Thomas A. Clark’s poem ‘In Praise of Walking,’ displacing the presumption of an able-bodied white man walking in ideal conditions, creating spaces for other bodies: “A hive of nerves, an explosion of activity, the apparent waiting of a body in too much pain to walk. O my mother.” A generous writer and collaborator, as Capildeo rethinks stillness, silence, and interspecies relations, they offer their readers strategies for engaging in this process: “Listening to a tree with another person, listening with a tree to another person; listening or hearing? Who conducts attention to the rim of the sky? Start there. Start twice, and that is twice again.”

**Nick Montfort—Review of *Fetal Position* by Holly Melgard
(Roof Books, 2021)**

I certainly have never read a better alphabetic list of utterances made during childbirth (courtesy of YouTube, from which they were transcribed) or half of a discourse in which a student pulls a PowerPoint presentation together for someone who is evidently both technologically challenged and tenured. There are also several amazing conceptual reversals, including the one in which Holly Melgard reorganizes pornographic descriptions of what it feels like to “be inside of a woman” so they tell the story of birth from the fetal, and eventually infant, perspective.

The book has interesting continuities and discontinuities with Melgard’s past projects, and provides a great excuse to discuss them. With Joey Yearous Algozin, Chris Sylvester, and Divya Victor, she has been part of the collective Troll Thread, a post-print poetry publisher that has been going for a decade. The official Troll Thread website is a Tumblr, their books are posted as PDF files on a Google Drive, and they can be printed and shipped, essentially at cost, by Lulu.com. Like the venture GaussPDF, Troll Thread exists everywhere and nowhere ... but even moreso. It clings like a barnacle upon some corporate white whale.

While *Fetal Position* may be Melgard’s first manuscript to be transformed into an externally published “real boy,” the book also further develops the humor of her many fine Troll Thread publications. One of those was *Colors for Baby*, a black-and-white book with square outlines and phrases underneath them such as “tooth,” “mayonnaise,” and “paper”—take that, Kazimir Malevich! Another book Melgard set up, apropos of the current shopping season, was *Black Friday*, not the first all-black book but the first one designed to cost a POD publishing company more than its retail price. Melgard is the designer behind all the Troll Thread books, and does this work wonderfully—work she also put into this new book.

Fetal Position is not only incisive in its engagement with labor and language, but also hilarious throughout. Take this more traditional publication to the coffeehouse, by all means, if you don’t mind slipping your fist into your mouth to stifle your howls. If you can bear it.

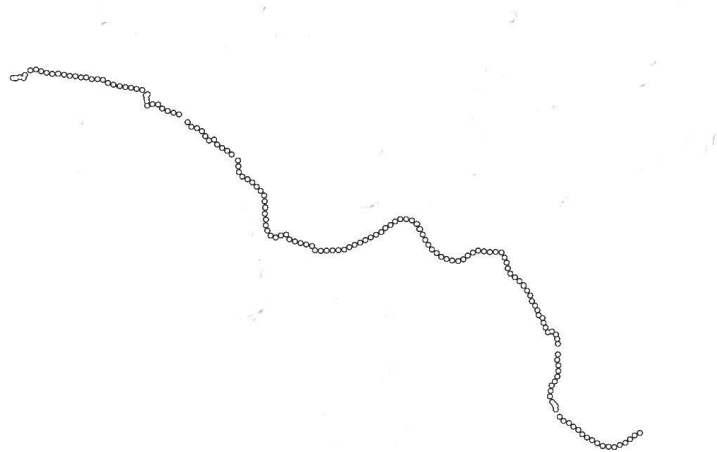
**Eric Schmaltz—Review of *A B C D E* by Charlotte Jung
(Trombone, 2021)**

Swedish poet and playwright Charlotte Jung’s poetry indulges the minimalist concretism of the mid-twentieth century, reprising the spirit of texts such as Eugen Gomringer’s “Wind” and “Silencio.” Like those poems by Gomringer, Jung’s chapbook (*SEED*) (Timglaset, 2020), for example, finds movement in small linguistic units and employs slight gestures to manifest the dynamics of individual words. Blood oozes in an extended spelling—“bleeding”—to depict its flow. While, in another example, the opening and closing of the maw is a “mOuthful” on the page. In Jung’s work, the drama and action of language take centre stage.

Jung’s new chapbook, *A B C D E*, from micro-publisher Trombone, takes up that same strain of minimalist, clean concrete poetics. Notably, the chapbook features Trombone’s signature uncut binding that prompts readers to peer into the pages as though they were individual alcoves. Its title invokes the alphabet song typically used to teach children to recite letters names of a given language. The chapbook develops a narrative—beginning with conception to a failed abortion to birth to growth—which Jung renders via individual words. The first poem playfully enacts a sexual encounter as the “a” of “penetrate” penetrates the word itself. This leads to an infant, signified by “infnt” held inside a large “a.” Following the speaker’s cesarian section (or “c-section”), a cavity is formed on the page as its letter “C” creates a nearly hollow opening. The sequence progressed across each page until the conclusion with a declarative “E” of “invincible,” perhaps announcing a child’s coming-of-age moment.

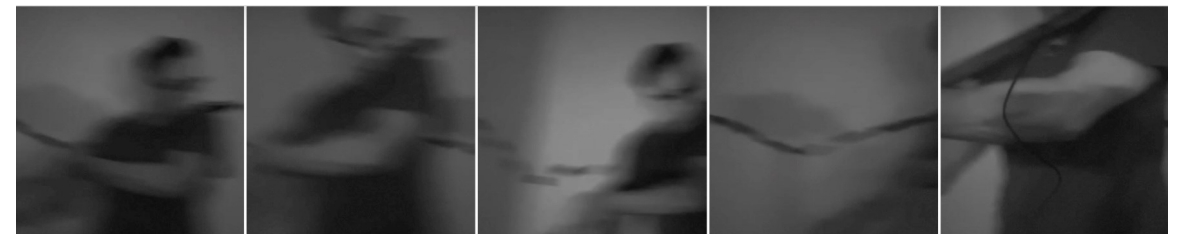
Across *A B C D E*, and as seen in her other works, Jung thoughtfully plays with scale and shape to convey meaning, developing visually dramatic sequences with constrained verbiage. Clearly, Jung has a keen eye for finding meaning in shape, closing the distance between signifier and signified. The pictorial and playful quality of these poems is notable and reminiscent, too, of Aram Saroyan’s ground-breaking minimalism of the 1960s, which Jung claims as an influence (while swerving from Saroyan’s anagrammatic impulses). In distinction, Jung’s *A B C D E* delights in directness and linguistic portraiture.

Aaron Tucker—*The Kamloops Indian Residential School* <->
Lavington, 131 kms (Highway 6; Highway BC-97N)



Bronac Ferran—review of *Provisional* (21.10.21)

A ‘digital variety’ show, entitled *Provisional*, organized by London-based artists/producers Simon Poulter and Roney Fraser-Munroe featured ten five-minute live online contributions. A standout was film-maker Pete Gomes’s improvised project, *99 Revolutions*. With a rotating camera and rotating microphone, found sampled sounds and a curious red colour saturating view of the screen, Gomes’s work shifted thoughts of hypnagogic dream-machines to hypnagogic scare-machines, that he encouraged to run rampantly in circles beyond plan or design. Gomes described this process: “The camera was continually spinning 360 around, facing my studio walls. These were marked with a thick black dotted and dashed undulating line. As the camera circled round, the lines seemed to be animated. When the camera faced me, I was playing a custom amplified wooden open hole bansuri-style bass flute, using percussive sounds. This was fed through a reverb echo and looper pedals. The images were all tinted in deep red using a physical filter directly on the camera. In addition, a chance audio sample, recorded the day before in an East London Street, was played 3 times. It featured an unknown man shouting: ‘Fuck off. Don’t talk to me. You don’t know me. I’m 58, I’m not a boy. I’m not a fucking boy alright mate. I want my money. You understand?’” Watching it I felt something akin to the live, yet hypnotic, effect of 1960’s liquid crystal films combined with the atmosphere conveyed in *Babylon* (1980) when a video camera somehow merged with men dancing together to a new “harder than steel” reggae groove in a makeshift ‘dub’ club in south London. Yet Gomes conjures a diminished live-ness, as if tuning into a bloodied zoom animus, turning in cycles of seismic redness, fed by blinking, fragmented stares.



Gary Barwin—review of *Without Form* by Ben Robinson
(Knife Fork Book & The Blasted Tree, 2021)

1

The word is everything that is the case.

1.1 The word is the totality of facts, not of things.

1.13 The facts in logical space are the word.

1.2 The word divides into facts.

1.3 The Bible, since 1500 has been subdivided into chapter and verse.

1.4 In the beginning...the word was without form and void.

1.5 But *Without Form* is not “without form,” it’s all form.

1.5.1 Like the concept of form the vessel of possibility before creation, this text awaits creation.

1.5.2 Waiting for the breath of “content,” for words to fill it.

1.6 Before you can say “Ben Robinson,” Ben

Robinson has taken the Bible back to a time before the word.

1.7 Since “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” ol’ Yahwie has done a Tzimtzum and withdrawn to leave conceptual space.

1.8 What’s the shape of meaning? How is a text a vessel? A vassal of meaning? Are we supposed to grid and bear it?

1.9 Robinson knows the Bible, old and new text-o-meant, and has left only chapter & verse. I.e.: only the numbers.

2. Augustine: “There are some, again, who, though they do not suppose that the word is eternal, are of opinion either that these are not the only words, but that there are numberless words or that indeed they are the only ones, but that they die, and are born again at fixed intervals, and these times without number.”

2.1 The Bible is the word made epistemological. But sometimes we get epist off.

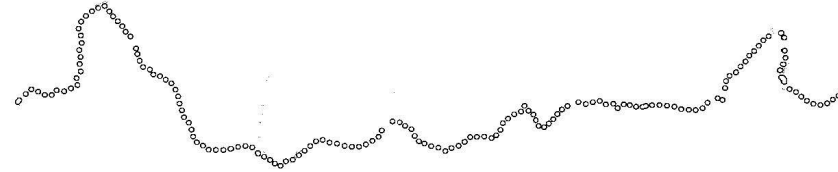
2.1.2 We have no words.

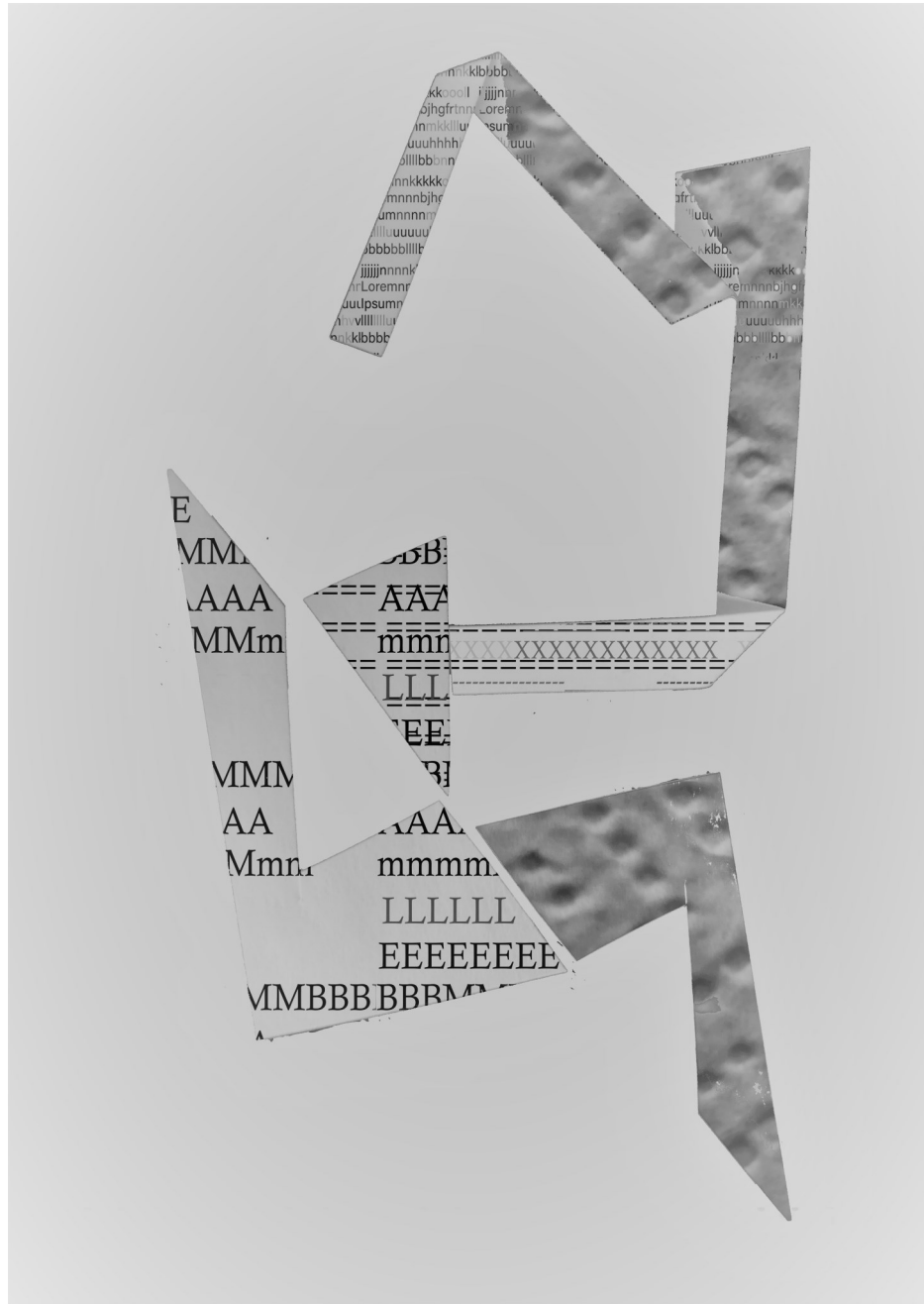
2.2 Just their possibility.

2.3 Or missing the words, we see how the Bible does a kind of Sapir-Whorf and everything is a template. It’s all signs and wonders. A hierarchicglyphic dance. These numbers show us how the word is countless. An accounting, an invisible music that renders the rods and cones visible.

3. I number this text among those which render me if not speechless, then counting its blessings.

Aaron Tucker—*St. George’s Indian Residential School, Lytton*
<-> *Lavington, 288 kms (Highway 6; Highway BC-97S; Highway -97C; Trans-Canada Highway /BC-1W)*





rob mcLennan—review of *Bramah and the Beggar Boy* by Renée Sarojini Saklikar (Nightwood Editions, 2021)

An elder Canadian poet recently mentioned via email that they see the notion and structure of the “Canadian long poem,” as championed through anthologies such as Michael Ondaatje’s *The Long Poem Anthology* (Coach House Press, 1979) and Sharon Thesen’s *The New Long Poem Anthology* (Coach House Press, 1992) and *The New Long Poem Anthology, Second Edition* (Talonbooks, 2001), no longer in play in contemporary writing. I disagreed, and the first example that came to mind was Vancouver poet Renée Sarojini Saklikar’s ongoing and expansive lyric assemblage, *The Heart of This Journey Bears All Patterns*. Hers is a poem of attention and ongoingness, composed across multiple poetry titles for more than a decade, at least: starting with her full-length debut, *children of air india: un/authorized exhibits and interjections* (Nightwood Editions, 2013) to *Listening to the Bees* (co-authored with Dr. Mark Winston; Nightwood Editions, 2018) and to her latest, *Bramah and the Beggar Boy* (Nightwood Editions, 2021). Given she requested I blurb the new collection, it also prevented me from reviewing the book, so perhaps this provides my opportunity to comment on the larger structure.

Any form worth exploring or championed requires a particular kind of mutability, and I sincerely believe that the “Canadian long poem” is something that has evolved over the past few decades, enough that I attempted to assemble my own version of “The Long Poem Anthology” circa 2007, including concrete and visual works, and more expansive considerations of the form. Saklikar’s assemblage manages to hold a fine line between linearity and collage, both on the large and the small scale, offering a sequence of projects within projects within projects, intricately assembled to form units that connect together into something else. Am I describing nesting dolls, or Voltron? Possibly both. And there is something very exciting watching the ways in which she combines the tradition of the “Canadian long poem” with traditions and stories from her own blended and assembled backgrounds, languages and cultures, something comparable to another Vancouver poet, Isabella Wang, through her own exploration around and through the North American English-language ghazal.

Saklikar’s is a project that should be revered and studied in the same breath as other great Canadian long poems, including bpNichol’s *The Martyrology*, Robert Kroetsch’s *Completed Field Notes* and Dennis Cooley’s *love in a dry land*. There’s such a delightful and energized way in which her poem includes anything and everything, a phrase that could certainly be used to describe each of those examples, but somehow Saklikar manages to do something unique, and uniquely hers with the extended and ongoing form. Saklikar has clearly absorbed and understood the myriad traditions of the long poem, and furthers the structures into wildly unexpected places; pushing the boundaries of what writing can do, and the formal possibilities of what bpNichol termed a “poem as long as a life.”