The following writing samples illustrate Jeanette Lynes' creative writing in two genres - fiction and poetry - as well as recent critical writing.

Excerpt from J. Lynes' novel *The Factory Voice*

(Coteau, 2009)

Audrey
Spruce Grove, Alberta (Briefly)
December, 1941

I know where the moon lives now –

At the east end of the sky. Where the tip of Lake Superior meets the future.

You don't mind if I run hard while saying exactly where, do you? I'm in an awful hurry. I have a train to catch, the God's Country Express. The train will carry me east, away from this whistle stop, away from cave-era parents, away from the ranch hand. And I'm likely to leap over gopher holes along the way, so if my words wobble in the next few minutes, that's why. This ranch always was riddled with gophers. If I twist my ankle on one of their front porches, I won't be going anywhere. I'll miss my train. My life will be over when it's hardly begun.

I'm only sixteen, but I'm told I sound older. That's because I read. All Star Comics. The *Spruce Grove Examiner* (my parents don't take the paper; they already know the news and it's not good), Hollywood-star magazines, books about Ontario. Is *that* ever one dilly of a place – fast and loose, sounds like, and lots of work. Shiny pages filled with art. I have to sneak into town, to the library, to look at these. Sometimes I dip into novels there, but I can't bring them home so I catch

glimpses in town when I can. I *did* manage all of *Anne of Green Gables* in bits and pieces and it was swell. Still, I keep my reading a secret and breathe each new word I learn into the grass. The newest word is *heroine*.

This ranch goes on forever. You could dash in the direction of doomsday and still not reach the edge, but I'll make it. If I had the Green Lantern's power ring, I'd be there before this.

I'll tell you something else; the moon loves industry.
The moon is modern.

Gopher hazard

There, I'm over it. Forgive me if I pant like a set-upon fawn. I'm built for speed, but my feet have been pattering over frozen acres faster than Gene Krupa's drumsticks. If my parents catch me leaving, they'll skin me. I could spout Bible verses about mercy until I'm blue, but they'd skin me anyway, my holy parents Horace and Daisy Foley. They've always called me a wild cork whistling in the wind – and *sly* – worst trait in a girl, according to my mother. They're right about me. You'd think they'd be happy, being right, but it frosts their brimstone socks, which doesn't make much sense when you consider. Stagger me I don't have time to consider. The train for Winnipeg then Fort William, Ontario, where the moon lives, stops here in twenty minutes, and only now do I scramble over the rail fence that marks our ranch boundary.

I've got to rest for a shake, though. I have small bones. This carpet bag drags me down. I've been hauling it across the pasture, along the ragged path through the darkening trees. Over frozen vetch. Knotweed.

Like I said, away from the ranch hand with the face like clabbered milk and huge, thunking hands that would wed me between yanking slick red calves out into the world (I can breathe better; on I go again). He talked to my father. My father talked to my mother. She talked to me. I talked to the moon.

I'll bet that sounds queer to you, but if you've ever been an only child like me it might sound less queerlike. A girl has to tell someone, and the red staggering calves aren't my idea of a good sounding board. My parents said "oh, dandy, you two can marry, carry on the ranch." That was more useful than finishing high school, they firmly believed. I told you they were cave-era parents.

All my life they've crowed "lo, the end is near." If that's true, I said, what does the ranch matter? They said we had to soldier on regardless. Speaking of soldiers, I guess they'd heard there was a war? There's always a war, my mother pattered on, patting the Bible.

And the ranch hand? All he did was smirk. He's been smirking since I was fifteen. Scheming with my parents behind my back. Making grabs for me in the barn. Calling me his dumpling, his colt. Then this whole wedding thing began to unroll like some crazy carpet I couldn't stop. They've got it all planned out, a simple service (*Audrey Leona Foley do you take*), perogy supper. *Carry on the ranch.* They used a fancy word for it, *vocation*. But let's –

Smallish gaping hole

call a spade a spade; I know what it's really about, begetting and begetting and begetting.

Here's little Audrey with her brood, roping her calves, cooking her flapjacks, living her Old Testament life when there's a swell modern world out there. Like I said, I read on the sly.

The Spruce Grove Library is the size of a fingernail. I'm supposed to be studying some special Bible for brides they keep locked in a glass case there. Comics beat Bible stories all hollow if you ask me. I just read my first Wonder Woman comic! At the library I always head for the shelf marked *New*, and there she was in her dandy outfit and her bullet-bracelet, holding her golden lasso, and wasn't she one glorious lady? I couldn't get enough of her. I'd give anything to be able to fly

like Wonder Woman or, stagger me, even be *near* what, or who, flies.

Instead of reading at the library, I'm supposed to be peddling these little sheets of paper with Bible verses printed on them around town, a penny a verse. My mother says that will teach me the value of money, and the pennies will go towards my wedding ovenware from the Corning Glass Company. I'd rather stand with a cob of corn stuck in my ear than peddle those verses.

I told my mother no one was home, that's why I came home penniless. If I'd stuck around here, I'd have had to cook up a new story, for people have to be home *some*times, don't they? And where would they *go* in a speck like Spruce Grove? But the pickle I was in with the Bible verses faded that day when I saw the newspaper ad:

Girls Wanted to Build Airplanes in Ontario
Earn Good Wages. Apply in Person to Miss Ruby Kozak, Head Office, Fort William Aviation

Stagger me if that paper wasn't lying open at the *Classifieds,* waiting for me to waltz in there like Matilda. Think about it. The next best thing to being able to fly like Wonder Woman would be spending time in the company of airplanes, wouldn't it? I'd so love to see how they fasten the wings. How they soar.

A cog cranked in my head that day. The ranch could ranch onward without me. The red calves could find their way out; Clabber-Face could save his big birthing hands for someone else. If I had wages I could find out about planes. I could do whatever I wanted. And I stayed so long in the tiny library, when I left it was dark and the moon had shifted. I haven't looked back since.

I'm nobody's dumpling.

Not that far ahead, the train station, lit by electric light. The lace of my canvas Jeeper comes unknotted, dangles, and could trip me. I won't let anything trip me. My shoes aren't fit

footwear for winter, but I'll worry about that when I reach Fort William, the Dominion's industrial hub (said the newspaper). *Audrey, do you take* – Clabber-Face – *definitely, oh, for sure, take my* dumpling (me), his colt. His newly-minted missus (me) gets whisked upstairs to see what's under that white dress. I already know the story, and when you know it before it even happens, it's no kind of story and you should find a fresh new moon. *I want to be someone, so no, I* don't *take you*

Final gopher

About the moon.

It hovers above the tip of can't miss this train, at the east end of the sky. Above Fort William Aviation. All I had to figure out was cash. Then, the day after the library, the solution hit home – since the thirties my parents had lost faith in banks, stocks or any modern to-do with money. They kept cash all over the house. Wads of rolled bills inside the cherry jar, the wedding fund my mother made a big *whoo-hoo* over. I cleaned it out.

And while I was at it, I took her one sin, lipstick. The wages of sin. I used it to redden my cheeks on this, my journey to the moon, hoping lipstick will age me to eighteen and help keep away Nosey Parkers asking where I'm going, and why.

Just before I left the house I cut my brindled hair for speed, and now it falls like short rain poured from a bowl. They send Clabber-Face to find me, doesn't hurt if I look different. Too bad I can't stand taller. I'm a half-pint. They'll tell me that stealing the money was the worst sin a daughter could visit upon her parents. I can already hear what they'll say, that's what I mean about knowing the story beforehand – it's got to be better than that.

One last short stretch of road and I'll reach the station. My ears don't need lipstick; they're small, hot bundles of readiness. My ankles are untwisted. Gophers, good-bye – *ha!* – your

little porches of pain didn't get Audrey Foley this time.

The moon is full, industrial. You could punch a hole through the sky, to the very spot where it hangs roundly, and touch it, but you'd need an airplane to reach that high. You'd need the longest ladder in the Dominion of Canada. Either that, or Wonder Woman's golden lasso. It would snag the moon and whoever's home in there would have to speak the truth, just like in the All Star comic. Maybe there's a chance, just a sliver of chance, I could be a tiny Wonder Woman, her third cousin. Sliver, but there for the taking.

Already I have wondrous ears. I can hear the train whistle miles away, west of me in alpine-framed Jasper, in Hinton's hilly saloons, the levelling-off lands. Best sound I've ever heard.

Here's the station. Shantylike, a sorry sign nailed over the door – *S* and *P* crumbled – *ruce Grove Alberta* all that remains. My ticker's about to leap from my chest now that the moment is here. I lug my carpet bag to the ticket wicket. Elmer, the usual stationmaster, isn't working. The moon shot a ray of luck right down on me when I needed it. I flatten the roll of stolen bills. "Fort William, Ontario. One way. Please."

Mr. Not-Elmer spouts times, change in Winnipeg.

Do I want a berth? You bet I do.

The train comes now, a dark, moving deliverance. All steam and screech. Brakes. I grasp my ticket. A striped arm helps me step up with my bag. I find a seat away from other passengers, which isn't hard at all – the coach is empty except for a fancy lady poring over some papers. She looks pretty with her wire-rimmed spectacles and she's not *that* old and likely could smile if she wasn't scowling over whatever dire thing she reads (I doubt it's a novel). I sit a few rows from her (when she's not gone to the smoker) and I press myself into the coach's shadows. It strikes me full now. I'm a runaway bride, a prodigal. But only to my parents and to Clabber-Face. I know better. I'm swinging on a new moon.

The engine bucks out of Spruce Grove. I feel so few pangs. Alberta is too small for me. I take one last glance out the window; a place never looks shabbier than when you're

leaving it, does it? A few boiled potato suppers through small, lit windows. The broken water tower. Poky little lives. I feel a dandelion-puff of pity for them, but then, *poof*, gone. The locomotive's *ka-choo* is the best song I ever heard. Sweeter than any tune by the Andrews Sisters. My parents are right; I *am* a wild, whistling cork. Let me be fully sly then. I'm the kind of girl Green Lantern would be proud of, a runaway success story, quite possibly a heroine. Yes. Wonder Woman's third cousin. Why not?

Town's behind me, moon's ahead. I notice, for the first time, a blanket folded on the seat beside me. I snatch it up, stuff my mouth full of wool to stifle – what? – my giddy, prodigal glee, or the higher joy-sob of a heroine on the loose?

You won't breathe a word of this to anyone, will you?

Muriel, B.S.E., M.A.E.
(Bachelor of Science in Engineering
University of Toronto, 1929;
Master's in Aeronautical Engineering,
University of Michigan, 1932)

She is officially a spinster. Thirty-six years old. She has her work, though. Her Master's degree protracted by polio, but earned nonetheless. She thinks silver linings, thinks clouds, as she clip-clops with her cane along the sidewalk that leads to the main entrance of Fort William Aviation, while the wind bangs her satchel against her wool-coat-covered thigh. Thinks aerodynamics. She grasps the brim of her floppy hat against a sudden gust. Snow falls in hard pellets like pop rivets. Her plum new job begins today. After nine years in a fusty office at Fairchild, she, Muriel McGregor, is now Chief Engineer at this plant with a contract for three hundred northern model Mosquitoes and a sky-high security alert in the wake of recent escapes – *subversives* – from Angler Detainee Camp. She'd arrived yesterday and, hunkered beside her steamer trunk in her new flat, had inked, in bright red, this milestone in her diary – *the Lakehead at last! December 15, 1941. Threshold!* Below these words she'd sketched a horned cartoon devil and added, wickedly, *Watch out for subversives and monsters!*

The head office of Fort William Aviation stands apart from the plant, separated by a frozen courtyard about half the size

of a Dominion-league hockey rink. Muriel notes, as she passes the courtyard's snow-covered benches, a Christmas tree listing crookedly as the bitter wind buffets tinsel and garlands of Union Jacks looped over its boughs. The pine's off-kilter stance gives it a forlorn look. She flips through her mental Kardex and remembers that she's to proceed to the reception area on the main floor of the two-storey office building. She stops for a moment to breathe the bracing air. Bears down on her cane. Before pushing the buzzer beside the office door, Muriel rolls her dream over in her mind – landing skis. Engineers have been trying to crack a foolproof design. This is how Muriel wants to be remembered, not as a spinster or a cripple, but as the brilliant engineer who perfected landing skis. Which is why the Fort William job is perfect; its long winters are ideal for testing skis.

She buzzes. Through the glass panel of the door, Muriel sees a girl with crimped hair skitter towards her. The girl introduces herself as Fraudena, the plant's switchboard operator, and urges Muriel to, "for pity's sake, come in out of that awful wind chill."

As Muriel stamps snow from her boots onto the mat inside the door, she recalls the long-distance telephone chat she had with this switchboard worker several weeks ago. The girl had warned Muriel that, since there'd never been a lady engineer at the factory, people were curious as cougars. Newspaper reporters from Fort William and Port Arthur had been ringing the factory, hounding Fraudena for information. The newshound from Port Arthur said he wanted to run a feature called "Queen of the Mosquitoes Lands at the Lakehead." Muriel had quipped back to the switchboard girl to tell reporters who call that she rises in the morning, makes hot oatmeal just like everyone else and does *not* bite.

The phone rings insistently on the switchboard, and Fraudena makes 'will it never stop' eyes and says whoever it is, they can just call back. She asks Muriel how her train ride was, all the way from British Columbia.

"Oh – grand, grand," Muriel breezes. "What a country this is." An odd thing to say, the engineer thinks, given it's her own country, but lately she's had the sensation of observing earth from outer space. As for the girl's query about her journey, Muriel leaves out a great deal.

She doesn't tell this crimp-haired creature with the funny name that she went to visit her mother on the west coast after receiving a telegram from a hospital there. She hadn't seen her mother, Annabelle McGregor, a prominent juvenile-court judge in Vancouver, recently retired and suddenly taken ill, for years. Nor had they been on speaking terms. Muriel had an account to settle with this mother of hers, but Annabelle was too weak to be taxed with any settling of accounts.

And then those interminable days on the train, nearly devoid of interesting characters, except for a fey girl with a carpet bag and a wild rodeo of hair who boarded at some speck of a place in Alberta. But the girl had huddled mute, or retarded, in her seat. The kid had also disembarked at Fort William, dashing rudely from the train in front of Muriel, not offering to help with her heavy satchel. Luckily, the plant had sent one of its young constables, a boy named Jimmy Petrik, to drive her to the Brodie Street flat the factory had rented, and to carry her luggage.

No, Muriel's trip to Vancouver had been futile, beyond the time it afforded to pore over the thick industrial folders the factory had sent her with their maps and protocols that wearied her, and the urgent *Possible Unauthorized Parts* memorandum that, while possibly grounded in rumour, distressed her and made her worry that her dream job might be slightly less dreamy than she'd anticipated.

"Miss McGregor?"

Fraudena offers to take Muriel's coat, hat and satchel. Muriel will keep the satchel; it contains files she'll leave in her new office. As Fraudena drapes Muriel's coat over her arm, she croons over its fine fox collar, then gives the felt hat a fondling sort of stroke. Muriel can only assume that textiles offer this frazzled soul, who handles telephone cables all day,

some sort of comfort. Fraudena says Frank Parks will be down any minute to give Muriel a factory tour, and isn't that him now?

The plant manager's legs churn in their direction. He might have resembled Jimmy Stewart, in better days. These aren't better days. Frank Parks wears a shapeless grey suit with wide lapels. His face, with its prominent forehead, is 'light-bulb-like,' Muriel thinks. He joggles her hand and tells her she must be the new lady engineer. She beams at his brilliant deduction. Pointing to her cane, he confesses that her *affliction* had slipped his mind. He asks if she's heard about the escape from Angler.

"Yes. It's all over the news."

"Terrible business about Pearl Harbor," the manager remarks.

She agrees.

He says he wants her to experience the plant from *the worker's perspective.* Her coat is gone, but he supposes they can dash across the courtyard to the employees' entrance without getting frostbitten. She guesses he's already forgotten she can't dash.

They head outside and she picks her way over the courtyard's icy path as fast as she can while the pop-rivet snow continues to fall. She senses that Frank Parks finds it painful to watch her, and so, to spare his nerves, she sends words into the air.

"Is it always this cold?"

His laughter is like a decelerated flywheel, a sound so unsavoury she regrets her gesture. "*Cold?* This is nothing, Muriel – may I call you that?"

"Of course."

They've almost reached the plant entrance.

"Besides," he says, "it's *dry cold* we've got up here."

Frank Parks swings open the door for her. They enter a foyer he calls "the portal for each employee, the checkpoint." She quickly pegs him as one of those people who love playing

tour guide. He tells her two thousand workers pass into the plant through the checkpoint every shift, and that, with the new Mosquito contract, the number is growing each day. This is the place where ladies' purses are screened. By screened he means checked for unlikely bulges (the inner compartments are left alone, in deference to feminine privacy, except in cases of extremely aroused suspicion). The morning shift is already under way, so the checkpoint security officer is on break. Once they've cleared the checkpoint, Parks explains, the workers click through the turnstile and stash their personal effects in the ladies', or men's, locker room, whichever the case. The manager assumes Miss McGregor's fine leather satchel sails above reproach. Muriel smiles and wonders if her Dr. Chase's Nerve Food would be confiscated if she were a regular line worker.

She shoves herself through the turnstile, slowly, careful not to catch her cane in the crossbar. Frank Parks navigates the barricade in one efficient thrust. He pushes open a saloon-style door. She steps through. He follows. They occupy a larger foyer now. Muriel muses, does this place consist only of thresholds? The first thing she sees in this foyer is a huge banner strung across the open area: ALL THIS COULD END TOMORROW. Below these words, in smaller letters: *Stay Alert. Report anything unusual, no matter how small.*

She'd been warned she'd have her work cut out for her. Her predecessor left a stack of industrial problems. Test flights had been crashing and almost crashing. Rumours that the test pilot, Orville Loftus, was on the verge of – *something* – had reached her ears. This frozen wasteland seemed built on rumour alone – anecdote, suspicion, gossip, radio news pumped with helium into the airwaves – stories of unauthorized parts, general skull-duggery, and now of unsavoury men, escaped subversives from Angler, lurking behind every spruce in Lake Superior country.

Muriel points to the words on the banner. "Surely it doesn't have to be this dire?" she asks.

Frank Parks stops the tour. She doesn't care for his look – it signifies how little she knows. He sighs. "We've had over a

thousand girls start work here in the past few months, Muriel. Some local. Many not. They've blown in from everywhere. Hungry for work. Wild as colts. Away from home for the first time, often. Giddy. They spur the local girls on, too. They all need supervision. We don't know who they talk to after their shifts, what they blather to the rest of the world, who they *consort with* in the wee hours. For all we know, they could be *double agents.* Only thing we're certain of is that they're girls, and girls have *loose lips.*"

"What are you afraid of them letting loose with?" Muriel asks.

Frank Parks sends her a managerial scowl as he moves them past First Aid. Ladies' Locker Room. Men's Locker Room. He stops just before they're about to enter the first production bay. "Industrial secrets, for one thing. There's something you need to know, Muriel. Talk, in this neck of the woods, spreads like – " He moves closer, startling her. He cups his hand to whisper, which unsettles her further. Sends warm puffs of breath into her ear – "*venereal disease.*"

She gasps.

Frank Parks steps away. "I see I've got your full attention, Muriel. If the Angler menace isn't enough – after all, those men could be anywhere – this factory employs locals who, we worry, are either Red Finns, or are thick as bandits *with* Red Finns."

"Some kind of fish?" Muriel recalls hearing that this part of the country is heavily Finn. She supposes the mood of a brooding race could come to pervade the larger population. Perhaps these northerners are highly prone to doom. As for the general *heightened* air on these frozen streets, it could stem from an outpost suddenly finding itself part of a larger drama.

Frank Parks laughs. Then goes dark. His face hangs on a chain that he pulls to switch the light on, off. "You don't know much about our northern culture, do you, Muriel?"

She confesses she doesn't.

"Red Finns have underworld connections. In fact, they pretty much *live* under the world. Since the war started, that's

a real threat and, when it comes to running this plant, a big fat thorn in my side."

Frank Parks flourishes open the double doors under the sign: 'A' Bay: Sub-Assembly. The immense noise jangles Muriel's nerves. She's used to working alone in an office with drafting instruments, blueprints, sometimes radio music playing softly. He shouts that the plant consists of three production sheds and sub-areas within them. His own secretary, Ruby Kozak, had sent Muriel an industrial floor plan; Frank Parks seems to have forgotten this fact.

Muriel lets the manager surprise her. "Three? Impressive," she calls back. She doesn't mention that the Fort William plant was based on a factory in Bouguenais, France, and is also similar to most industrial sites in England she's read about.

As they survey 'A' Bay, Muriel sees what Parks means about girls. This shed, the size of several stadiums, is a sea of yellow head scarves, shapely bodies in overalls, a blur of feminine hands, eyes that steal glances at her before turning back to their workbenches. There are a few men, older, in a recessed area under a large sign: *Caution: Sheet Metal Works.* So this is where they come every day. Muriel lifts her face to the shed's industrial-height ceilings, like those in airplane hangars, and its transom-style windows along the upper ten feet, or so, of the vast chamber. Windows that afford light but no view. No distraction.

Dust motes drift through the air as the manager escorts Muriel along one wall lined with bins as far as she can see. "Stores," he hollers, as they pass a dizzying number of containers, each numbered and labelled. Parks shouts over the din – "an airplane contains over twenty-thousand parts." She knows. Does he think he is giving a member of the Imperial Daughters of the Empire a tour?

They walk, observing contents of bins as if strolling through a gallery of art. Muriel recognizes these parts, could identify them in her sleep, but each brings new joy, nonetheless. To her, they're notes in a symphony. *Better,* for how many symphonies leave earth and fly? She gives her cane a

chipper tap on the concrete floor as they make their way along.

The lovely things inside the bins – pulleys, sprocket wheels, trimming cables, cowlings, clevis bolts, Morse tapers, filler caps, trim cranks, manifolds, throttles, alloy castings, spools of red wires, blue wires, yellow wires, wood spars, snap jack gears. Rivets with countersunk heads, round heads, flat heads, brazier heads, raised tits. Grooved rivets. (She bends awkwardly to scoop a handful of grooved rivets and let them ripple, like silver rain, back into their bin.) Thimble-wired cable, bushing cable, shackles, cotter pins, grommets, cocks, castle nuts, plain nuts, wing nuts, slotted nuts, self-locking nuts (she marvels at the sheer variety of nuts in the world), thousands of small notes making the symphony complete.

Frank Parks wants to show her the larger parts now, such as spruce stringers, struts, fuselage sections and all that truck, housed in the second production shed, 'B' Bay.

She follows him, going past girls who are grinding undercarriage sections and operating tube-bending machines. Other young women fit rubber stops on wing slat-tracks, coat hub bores with finish, sort rivets. It has always struck Muriel how solid rivets resemble tiny mushrooms. A sweet-faced worker picks through a tray of them, placing each bucktail end in the same direction. She looks up and sends Muriel a cautious grin. Muriel delivers a decidedly *un*cautious one back. The girl blushes. Nearby, a stout woman presides over a table of tubes – so many piles of snakes, coiled. She shoots pressurized air into them, checking for obstructions, Muriel knows. Good work. Down the line a tall, gaunt girl attaches skin-stressed stabilizers to a sub-section of fuselage. A severe-looking dame driving a crane whizzes by them as though she's on her way to a fire. A dark beauty checks for shearing on taper pins. Another, blonde (Muriel sees the wisps poking out from under her head scarf), assembles nose cones. The crane driver pulls a vicious U-turn before passing them again.

'B' Bay contains partly built cockpits, fuselages, wing and

tail pieces and the paint shop. Muriel would recognize the paint shop if she came through here blindfolded. She has a superb nose; it sorts, without difficulty, the various smells of flight. She fills her lungs with oxide primer, hot raw linseed oil, chromate primer, lacquer and enamel. She loves oxide primer best, and if she could dab it behind her ears she *would.* But the world, she suspects, isn't ready for industrial-smelling ladies. Frank Parks asks if her trek through the plant is tiring, given her *condition.*

"Not a whit," she says.

Hearing this, he hurries her along now, as fast as she can manage with her cane. They pass vast piles of plywood. Huge screaming saws operated by men whose eyes remain fixed steadfastly on their work. The sawdust makes Muriel cough. Smaller buzzing saws, more swirling sawdust, more coughing.

"Mosquitoes are built mostly of wood," Parks hollers.

She knows.

"And we've got nothing *but* wood in these parts. Trees," he adds.

She's noticed that, too. They leave 'B' Bay. More foyers, sign-plastered walls, such things as:

Buy Victory Bonds (spoken in word balloons by smiley squiggly cartoon-people)

Ask about our Employee Incentive Program

Regulation Parts Only

A rabbit warren of foyers. Frank Parks jerks his thumb towards a room to their right – "Forge in there." To their left – "Welding." Towards closed double doors – "Cafeteria." She glances at the notice beside the cafeteria entrance. *Please don't feed the mice.* All these signs could dizzy a person, Muriel thinks.

As Frank Parks swings open yet another set of double doors marked "'C' Bay, Final Assembly," he tells Muriel that some girls make dandy welders. They stop and survey the final production shed. This is where the music gets big, Muriel reflects; aircraft undercarriages rest on production jigs, while nimble workers in overalls rivet-gun inside, underneath,

above them. Yellow head scarves bobbing, holding steady, gunning, bobbing again, with a fervour that delights Muriel.

"Mosquitoes," Parks shouts.

She supposes he's referring to the airplane sections, not the girls.

"I know," she returns.

"You'll hear 'em called 'Skeeters,' too."

She looks forward to that.

The far wall of 'C' Bay is one gigantic door, as in an aircraft hangar. Frank Parks tells Muriel that the finished Mosquitoes are rolled out of the shed onto dollies, test flown, then loaded into crates and shipped out on the Superior water route.

Then he steers her back through the factory, past the staring, curious eyes of workers, to 'A' Bay. He asks her how she feels about climbs. At first, Muriel thinks he's referring to flight; she has been climbing in and out of cockpits for almost a decade, test flights. She says she feels fine about them.

"Good," he replies. "Because your office is up there."

He points to an upper deck, a kind of glassed-in box poised above Sub-Assembly. Beside her office, also perched on high, is Plant Security, "Conrad Kozak and his boys," he brays, then quips that Muriel will hover over Sub-Assembly like a hawk. This being one of Frank Parks' first forays into humour, Muriel doesn't understand, initially. After a moment, she smiles to acknowledge his effort. Parks would now like to share a little plant folklore: Kozak has spent his life at the factory, the manager prattles. Even in the thirties, when the plant was shut down for several years and sections of roof and walls were torn open by storms, and mice ran rampant through the production sheds and grass grew through the jigs where the occasional wild buck grazed, Kozak would make his rounds with his flashlight to check on things. It wouldn't surprise the manager to learn that Conrad Kozak had been *born* inside that factory.

Muriel supposes the north is filled with cracked characters

like Kozak, but she saves this sharp thought for red ink in her diary.

As they ascend the long wooden staircase to her office, Frank Parks, bouncing upwards and ahead of Muriel, tells her that his son, Frank Junior, is overseas.

"Air, water or ground?" She puffs while working her cane expertly up the many steps. She has been carrying her satchel all this time.

"Ground."

She supposes they must chatter on ascent. He swings his light-bulb face back down at her, and says if his boy wasn't overseas, he'd be sorely tempted to do some matchmaking, given that his own personal secretary, Ruby Kozak, "Con's daughter," is the prettiest girl in the plant by a long shot. Muriel doesn't know what to say. She's here to build planes.

They reach the door with her name on it – *Muriel McGregor, Chief Engineer* – the brass plate so newly affixed, metal filings still sprinkle its rim.

So this is her domain. They step inside. Muriel's heart dive-bombs. The large room looks ransacked. The temperature has fallen far below rational thought. In one corner, a chesterfield coughs up its insides. Near it, a gaggle of empty whiskey bottles, left by her predecessor no doubt. Large sheets of paper – bend-allowance tables – stabbed to the wall with tacks hang askew. Last year's calendar – 1940 – torn at the edges is gallowed to a nail. Wooden filing-cabinet drawers gape. A tower of files on the drafting table is labelled in an oversized scrawl: *Problems never solved.* The office reeks of cigar smoke. Dust scrims both sets of large windows: the one overlooking the production shed below, and the one on the opposite wall, facing a sawed-off mountain hazed in snow. The dust clogs Muriel's throat. She coughs.

"I'm sorry," Frank Parks says. "I ordered this office scrubbed from stem to stern. I don't know what happened."

Muriel tells him oversights occur. She stifles her disappointment at not being able to get to work. She sets her

satchel on the desk; the heavy bag detonates a cloud of dust.

"What happened to the last chief engineer?" she asks.

Frank Parks stands, shifting his weight in the messy room. "Karl Wilkins? Bad nerves. The more trouble with test flights, the deeper he dove into his bottle."

"What happened on those flights, Frank?"

"Your answer is probably buried in there." He points to the huge stack of files on the drafting table. "But it'd be faster to talk to Orville Loftus, the pilot. It'll have to be by phone, though, he's out of commission with a broken ankle from his last test flight."

Muriel had heard Loftus was difficult – or odd – or *something.* She sends this cautious word-balloon in the manager's dusty vicinity.

"Loftus is Loftus," he shrugs.

Muriel can see that, on the subject of the test pilot, she'll get nothing more from Frank Parks. He's drifted over to the dusty window overlooking production. She makes her way there too, and clears a patch of glass in the way someone would rub a viewing square in frost. They survey the hundreds of workers down there, moving with the rhythms of an enormous engine. Muriel sees, for the first time, several girls wearing red kerchiefs instead of the usual regulation yellow.

"What about the red tops?" she asks the manager.

"They're trainees," he says. "Or on probation. Or both."

One red-kerchiefed girl, riveting directly below them, catches Muriel's attention. The girl is a wonder with her rivet gun. She's light-years speedier than any other riveter down there, which Muriel finds all the more surprising given the girl's huge, pear-shaped body, and gigantic feet. The riveter moves in awkward, fumbling steps when she refills her tray from the stand behind her. But when she plants her platypus-like feet back into gunning position, she's a marvel.

Muriel, mesmerized by this clumsy grace, points to her. "Who's she?"

"Florence Voutilainen. Local girl."

"What's she doing on probation? She's astonishing with

that gun."

The manager agrees. "And she's only just started. But, frankly, there are some problems with her background check."

"Such as?"

He sighs. "Her mother."

A ratchet wheel turns in Muriel's stomach. She understands problem mothers. Her conviction that a daughter shouldn't have to atone for the sins of her mother surges through her anew. She feels for the big girl down there with the rivet gun. She asks the manager, "What's the hitch?"

"Her mother is a Red Finn. Henni Voutilainen. She's well known around here. She sews, takes in mending, but that's only a front for her underground activities. We're not sure who her cronies are, but we know they're enemies of the state. She's a bottom-feeder, an eccentric, a cramp in our collective side – in short, a threat to security. There's a file on her next door." He thrusts his thumb in the direction of the security office.

"But you can't be *that* worried," Muriel challenges. "You hired the girl, after all."

Frank Parks frowns. "We can't build planes fast enough. I hired her with reservations and, I admit, some pity. She's dirt poor. Wants to work badly. We're keeping a very close eye on her, though she doesn't know it."

"We, who?"

"Plant police. Young Jimmy Petrik's special detail is to watch her. After the escape from Angler, we can't afford to take any chances. The plant could be in jeopardy. All this could end tomorrow." He sweeps his hand through her shambles of an office.

The manager's dumb echo of the factory banner, for some reason, inclines Muriel towards laughter. She submerges the droll surge boiling up inside her. "Save it for your diary," she reflects – *they speak in slogans here.* Instead, she says, "Jimmy Petrik is a plant constable? The boy who met me at the train?"

"I don't think you should hold the lad's youth against him."

"Of course not," Muriel says, chastened.

Frank Parks grouses that the government will soon send some intelligence big shot from England, some Scot, to the plant. Why can't the top brass just leave them alone to build planes instead of miring them in red tape? Muriel can only click her tongue in sympathy. The manager looks at his watch. He has a meeting with a reporter. Because Muriel's office isn't ready, he'll ask Jimmy to drive her back to her flat to settle in there, maybe show her a few local sights along the way.

"That's the beauty of Jimmy," Parks huffs. "He's a jack-of-all-trades."

They return in silence to the reception foyer of Head Office, where the telephone rings and Fraudena chirps "Fort William Aviation." In the brief space between calls, Frank Parks asks her to page Jimmy Petrik in the security cage. She does so. "Jimmy will be right down," Fraudena says. She then announces that two reporters – one from *The Fort William Daily Times Journal,* the other from the *Port Arthur Herald* – have been calling yet again, asking for an interview with Muriel, a feature story on the new lady engineer. Each reporter wants first crack.

"You'll have to get used to the newshounds," Frank Parks advises. "*I* had to."

"Tomorrow," Muriel promises.

She is about to reassure him that she's dealt with press when she notices a poster hanging near the switchboard. Emblazoned across its top: *Wanted and Dangerous.* Beneath this, the face of a handsome, unshaven man. That knocks the wind out of her. Along the bottom of the poster, *Reward leading to any Information Towards the Arrest of Thaddeus Brink, Escaped from Angler Detainee Camp December 10, 1941.*

Vertigo rushes in. Muriel makes for the chesterfield near the switchboard. Barely reaches it. Fraudena drops her telephone cable and scurries over to steady Muriel onto its cushions. Frank Parks watches, stunned, an odd expression in his eyes.

He glances at the poster, then back at Muriel.

"Was the plant tour too much?" he asks.

"Yes, that must be it." Her voice shakes. Fraudena dashes off into the small staff room behind the switchboard and returns with a glass of water. As Muriel drinks, she dismisses the whole thing as a dizzy spell, and remembers the Dr. Chase's Nerve Food in her satchel. At the first private moment, she'll take some of that calming white powder.

Jimmy Petrik breezes in, flicking snow from the epaulettes of his plant-constable uniform. He looks different to Muriel in his working gear, his peaked blue hat with its gold braid and F.W.A. crest. Yesterday, when he'd met her train, he'd been dressed in a flannel shirt and worn trousers. He's ready if she is. The switchboard operator casts concerned eyes on Muriel. The manager delivers more odd looks, a mixture, Muriel discerns, of concern and suspicion. She assures them both she's fine, now. She thanks Frank Parks for the factory tour. Just as well her office isn't ready. She'll go home, rest.

The manager calls it a nerve-wracking time for everyone. He trots away towards the stairs leading up to his to office. Jimmy Petrik says a dirty wind's blowing outside. Fraudena asks Muriel once more if her spell has passed. After Muriel repeats, "yes, yes, it was nothing" several times, the switchboard operator fetches her coat and hat. Muriel puts them on, along with her best chipper act.

Muriel and Jimmy leave Head Office and walk through frigid air that revives her. To take her mind off the poster, Muriel studies the Petrik boy as they make their way across the packed-snow path towards the plant parking lot where his fine jade green De Soto waits. Jimmy asks what was going on in the reception foyer? Why was everyone all twitchy? Her long train ride to Fort William had caught up with her. Simple as that, she tells him.

The De Soto's seats are ossified with cold. During Muriel's factory tour, snow has accumulated on the streets of Fort William. Jimmy Petrik propels the automobile expertly through white drifts, past a trolley that shudders along the

Neebing Avenue tracks. He tells Muriel all about the Lakehead – his mouth working like a pneumatic rivet hammer between puffs from his Lucky Strike. He points out Mount McKay (the big sawed-off sill of rock to the south). "Covered in poison ivy," he says, "Indians call it thunder leaf. You wanna stay away from *that.*" He laughs, and Muriel, glancing at her cane, assures him she has no intention of scaling Mount McKay any time soon. Jimmy explains that the aviation factory is boxed in by Gore Street to the north, Neebing Avenue to the west, Mountain Avenue to the south, Algoma Road and the railway tracks to the east. Muriel's head swims. Jimmy says the Kam River – short for Kaministiquia in case she didn't know – runs near the factory and, past the plant, it splits into two smaller rivers, Mission and McKellar. These pour into Lake Superior. These rivers loop around two islands with the same names. Jimmy chirps on that if the factory didn't make this, it would make that. In fact, if Frank Parks said tomorrow they'd be gutting the plant and flooding it for hockey, it wouldn't surprise Jimmy. But he guesses the big Skeeter contract will keep everyone busy for a while. The plant used to manufacture boxcars – some people use the old, leftover ones for car garages. "There's one right there, for crikey sake," Jimmy exclaims, pointing to a wooden shed – basically, a large, rough box that looks like it rocketed through turbulent air and landed, more than a little worse for wear, beside a house of no great distinction. Jimmy assures Muriel that she'll see that a lot up here – using something for something else, what didja call it – imp – imp–

"Improvisation?" she offers weakly.

"Yeah, that."

They drive on. To Muriel's eyes, the place is drab – small houses, rail spurs, hostile rocks. The sole thing of beauty they pass, as far as she's concerned, is Vickers Park, snow heavy on dark firs – a stately square flanked by the grandest homes she's seen so far. But even this spot of beauty doesn't bring Muriel back to where she needs to be in order to steady her nerves. The man's face on the poster is all she can think about.

A much older face than the one she'd once loved, but the same features, nevertheless. The age he would be now. Muriel's vertigo threatens to return. She fights it back. As they motor along, she tries to focus on the snow. Snow troubles her, too. On the one hand, winter is what she needs to crack landing-ski design. On the other, snow tells stories. Wanted men like Thaddeus Brink leave tracks, are more easily captured. She hasn't seen him for so many years, yet she already prays for wind to wipe away his sought-after footprints. The factory tour fades from Muriel's thoughts. She loses sight, temporarily, of the great industrial symphony she's come to conduct. Forgets the big girl with the rivet gun, her Red Finn mother. Everything vanishes except *his* face on the poster. *Wanted and Dangerous.*

Jimmy Petrik shifts gears. Chatters. Smokes. But all Muriel hears is a gavel bashing down on a wooden magistrate's stand in Vancouver in 1918, the gavel in her mother's hand, the words "Thaddeus Brink, guilty as charged" thudding from her own mother's mouth.

Audrey
Under the New Moon
Temperature: – 26 F
Wind Chill: – 40 F

The wolves howl not far from town.
The wolves howl bluer than Billie Holiday, but they don't spoil my song.

You're probably wondering what happened to me. Tickled to tell you I made it all the way to Fort William even without the Green Lantern's magic ring. That's pretty good for a half-pint, wouldn't you say? The whole time on the train I pretended I was a deaf-mute so nobody would bother me. Nobody did. It was kind of a sorry excuse for a Christmas, though, rumbling along alone on a train, and I felt low, thinking about my parents back in Spruce Grove, wondering where I'd gone. But then I thought of Clabber-Face and the sneaky way they'd planned my whole life out for me, and I wasn't blue anymore, and each grain elevator shone like a little peak of hope. When the train finally stopped at Port Arthur, I dashed out of the coach so I wouldn't get tangled up with anybody, snagged a taxicab, told the driver – young and thin like me but much taller and what a case of acne – to take me to decent digs that didn't cost the earth. Talk about going in style, or *coming*, in my case – weren't those plush seats swishy-swash!

Source: Gutter Magazine UK, 2016

Séance, A Poetics

The bride's throat began to hollow,
to fenestrate.
Gone spindrift, like all brides. I know
how this sounds but *please* just this once
suspend your disbelief.
We'd inhaled our share of exploding flash powder.
The man in charge measured levels.
His new anastigmatic lens
rattled silver, wires went herky.
The deal table stormed, pitched us
forward in our chairs like we rode rickety tractors.
Our Medium, a small
Scottish woman, scoured houses all day,
still held a soap-curd scent. Shone
with metaphor: a pudding having a seizure.

Imagine a semi-colon here, quick, a voice said; and I did.
A parlor with grammar wields a tight ship. Period.
Conditions must be airtight and not blathering.
On burled walnut shelves Kodak's latest, lit red,
roosted hawkish. The best doily quaked.
A tall cabinet mimed antique telephone kiosk.
And outside, the stock market's awful disquiet,
its sunken, hermetic sentence run on. And on.

You didn't suppose this ended well,
did you? I blinked back a great mist of [no stanza break]

wanting my mother. Held hands within the circle
(to my left, the respected barrister's palm
sweaty; he missed *his* mother, too).
Whatever it took to scrape through.

The medium huffed: 'you missed a spot'
(dust diviner). Her throat sparked a hymn-tremolo.

Somewhere a bride lofted beyond questions.
In her own spangled dust.
A broach frothed before us. Meringue. No – *a face*
we chimed and no dissent, noted the note-taker. *A face*.

Shrunk within the small fogs
of ourselves we each saw the face we saw.
My mother, hungry, young –
I longed to retro-wire her the money
for high school. Longed so hard
I bit my mouth-lining red, missed a spot.
Bit better, harder
for full blood.

Even when the bride lost her throat,
ripped open by a wolverine wearing a pillbox
we believed in a township beyond the cabinet,
pastoral, with church picnics
where smitten dead boys bid for pies
baked by pretty dead girls.
Failing all else pastry
provides a reason to be here at all.
Pastry. And hope. Stupid, stupid hope [no stanza break]

its endless conjunctions and

Mother I'm still here
here in the vapor years
still making things up, hoping
something will come of it;
still stuttering through the brume
For that's what a poem does. Period.

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Things She Saw Before Anyone Else

JEANETTE LYNES

Body parts out of place—
Postman's fatal fall through ice—
folly, dreaming he'd shortcut the mail.
Farmer's shoulder un-socketed by a thresher.
Now, somewhere near Decimal a grain-train
wails off its rails while her little dog snuffles
shrubs at the limits of his leash.
So much lost bread.
Only the birds win.
But who believes a cleaning lady?
Only the hunchback lumping along Portage.
And who believes *him*?

No one imagines anything bad happens near Decimal.
Another farmer will dynamite
the schoolhouse during Arithmetic.
Tell someone besides her dog, incumbent on her—

Atop his endless winding staircase her employer
laughed down through wafts of snuff
then offered. Snuff. Might calm her nerves.
No drugs in work hours. She sniffs trap
surely as her little dog noses
hazard at the hems of paths.

Victor Hugo called death a flower. No one much
cherished *that* hypothesis. Skunk cabbage if
anything! She gives her wringer pail an extra crank.

A few dried currants dribble onto her prescient palm.
She craves bread duned with butter, bread's visionary
hum higher with butter.
The birds win and win.

Frog Hollow Press, 2015.

Jeanette Lynes

M.TRAVIS LANE, ECOPOET

M. TRAVIS LANE, ECOPOET

Few would argue with Laurie Ricou's contention that, given their "longstanding interest in nature, wilderness, and landscape, Canadian literary studies... might always be said to have been ecocritical" (324). Recent "ecocritical" developments in Canadian writing, then, surely represent the continuation of a tradition but with a renewed intensity, perhaps due to a sense of urgency around environmental crises or in response to globalization's homogenizing tendency to erase locale. Possibly, we long for place more than ever. In either case, the past few years have seen a re-energizing of poetic and critical discourse in the areas of environment, ecology, and place. Clearly, landmark publications by environmental thinkers like Lawrence Buell, Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, David Abram, and Chris Fitter, along with seminal anthologies such as *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm have been influential in disseminating an ever-broadening, highly charged ecocritical conversation. In Canada, poets have been at the vanguard of this conversation. The fact that, within six years, two special issues of *Canadian Poetry*—one guest-edited by Pamela Banting in 1998 and the other by Deborah C. Bowen in 2004—have been dedicated to ecopoetics, attests to the vitality of ecological inquiry on the part of poetry critics and poets themselves. Indeed, a considerable amount of ecopoetic writing destabilizes these categories in exciting ways, reflecting a kind of ecology, or interconnectedness, inherent in the field of environmental thought itself.

Deborah C. Bowen, in her introduction to *Canadian Poetry*'s special ecocriticism issue, referenced above, identifies a "community of Canadian poets" whose work reflects an "ethically charged ecopoetics" (7): Robert Bringhurst, Dennis Lee, Tim Lilburn, Don McKay, and Jan Zwicky. She considers these poets the "core" of this community and, indeed, there is considerable validity in this formulation. An alternative, more gender-based, historicized community was formulated by Diana M.A. Relke in her 1999 book-length study *Greenwor(l)ds* which traces a feminist tradition of ecopoets from Isabella Valancy Crawford through to Dorothy Livesay, Daphne Marlatt, Margaret Atwood, P.K. Page, Phyllis Webb and Marilyn Dumont. The study of ecopoetics can only be enriched by a diversity of approaches and communities. Most of the poets Bowen cites also produce "a kind of lyric criticism alongside [their] own poetry" (8) and are often in conversation with each other both in their writing and their lives as working poets.

Where do we situate a poet like M. Travis Lane who seems in some respects, to have fallen through the cracks of Canadian ecocriticism and yet whose work has long had a passionate investment in environmental issues? Despite the fact that Travis Lane has lived in Canada since 1960, her aesthetic roots are American. She studied Robert Frost while doing postgraduate work at Cornell University. And while American environmental thinkers like Gary Snyder have been important to Canada's ecopoets, the orienting thinkers for poets like Lilburn, McKay, and Zwicky are more likely to be European, Classical or, in Bringhurst's case, Aboriginal. Further, at the risk of putting things bluntly, Lane has never been prone to literary trends. While much of the discussion of the moment hinges around lyric, Lane is thinking about sentences. Her investment in narrative may not be in vogue. One could speculate further—about the male dominance of the Fredericton poetry scene, for example—but it is perhaps enough to say that M.Travis

Lane has, for whatever reason, existed somewhat apart from the major impulses within Canadian poetry. She writes like no other poet I know. And yet her ecopoetic concerns, as this discussion will illustrate, resonate in many ways with those of her literary colleagues. This discussion is ultimately less interested in speculating on the dearth of critical work on Lane (a problem that this monograph of essays in any case begins to address) than in revealing how she has been, all along, part of a broader ecological conversation. Moreover, I would suggest that Lane's work demonstrates a movement, over the years, away from a dramatized alienation from nature, to a more "ethically charged" (Bowen, 7), stance as well as a fuller, more affirmative ecological vision. It is time to grant M.Travis Lane membership in the ecopoetic community; doing so will not detract from her uniqueness but rather reveal that she has been, these many years, as engaged as any other ecopoet writing in Canada.

Like any poet, M.Travis Lane's project grapples with the perennial question of, as Tim Lilburn aptly puts it, "[H]ow to be here"(10)—which, as Lilburn and others have cogently shown, is an ontological *and* ecological question. Images of maps, monuments, and geographical markers have pervaded Lane's work from its earliest phase. Space precludes an exhaustive discussion of Lane's ecologically invested poems. However, a sampling of texts from her earlier work, her "middle period," and more recent poetry reveals that the problems Lane tackles with respect to questions of home, place, earth, and ecology have broader relevance for those interested in Canadian ecopoetics. For the sake of this discussion, I will consider Lane's 1980 collection, *Divinations and Shorter Poems 1973–1978* as indicative of her "earlier" period (though she published earlier than this; her first chapbook appeared in 1969); *Night Physics* (1994) as representative of her "middle period"; and *Keeping Afloat* (2001) as a more contemporary sampling.

Let me at this juncture, refine the question, "How to be here." More to the heart of the matter may be: "How can we be on this earth now that 'here' is too often toxic, colonized by development or resource extraction or designated a combat zone? The extent to which we have compromised the earth makes it difficult to define "home," or making a home or, as Don McKay puts it in *Vis à Vis*, as "the settling of self into the world" (22), in a simple, unproblematized way. Indeed, home is elusive, as McKay remarks: "[t]o make a home is to establish identity with a primordial grasp, yes; but it is also, in some measure, to give it away with an extended palm" (23). M.Travis Lane iterates a similarly paradoxical nature of home in her early poem "Colonial" (*D*, 85), which ends with the following paradox suspended within a stand-alone couplet: "for home is a place we've never been./We should not be home in it were we there" (85). Lane evokes the problematics of colonial space in the poem's opening lines: "Our little bells ring steadily;/ beyond them drones/the deaf Atlantic sponging us,/dot on a dull map, from our sight" (85). Images of erasure dominate these lines. The human presence on the earth seems diminutive, miniaturized, ineffectual ("our little bells"). What seems to be the colonizing force in this earlier poem by Lane, is an indifferent nature: "the deaf Atlantic" (85). This view of a hostile and indifferent nature seems quite in keeping with Northrop Frye's famous formulation of terror-of-nature as a dominant impulse of Canadian poetry. Clearly, the human is insignificant in Lane's "Colonial"— "us,/dot on a dull map" (85). Yet in contrast to the rather dark and sinister reading of this poem one might feel tempted towards, this poem also contains the seeds of the broader, more affirmative ecological vision evidenced in Lane's later work. In the mid-section of "Colonial," she presents us with an image of "antlers/rotting among the epitaphs" (85). Not a cheery image, to be sure—but what is glimpsed here is an integrative imaging of the human and the animal worlds, a fuller

ecological vision. "Epitaphs" are made of language, what some claim sets us above animals—a fallacy that, according to David Abram, has contributed to our current state of alienation from the earth. Writes Abram: "Language as a bodily phenomenon accrues to all expressive bodies, not just to the human. Our own speaking, then, does not set us outside of the animal landscape but—whether or not we are aware of it—inscribes us more fully in its chattering, whispering, soundful depths" (80). The key words in the seed of the fuller ecological vision Lane plants here are "rotting among"—easy words to miss, but terribly crucial. Despite this poem's imagery of victimization and erasure, it becomes a composting site in which we are absorbed in the same processes as the animal world.

Just as critics have not really begun to address M.Travis Lane's involvement in ecopoetic discourse, little mention has been made of her membership in the long poem tradition in Canada. Lane's extended works are not included in the long-poem anthologies typically used in university courses; yet, her credentials in longer forms and serial forms are sound. Lane's book, *Homecomings: Narrative Poems*, was published in 1977, and *Night Physics* (1994), the book I associate with Lane's "middle period," opens with the meditative serial poem "Fall-Winter 1990–1991." *Night Physics* also contains the sustained dialogic poem "Anachronistic Gnat Music." "Divinations," published in *Divinations and Shorter Poems 1973–1978* (1980) is a long three-part poem deploying different speakers. Of particular interest to a consideration of Lane's ecopoetics, is "Red Earth," the second poem in the triptych which, due to spatial considerations, can only be discussed briefly. In its critique of male knowledge in the form of the anthropologist-colonizer-husband figure and its negotiating of a space for the woman's more explanatory epistemology, this poem evokes Diana M.A. Relke's feminist revisionist reading of Isabella Valancy

Crawford's ecopoetic text "Malcolm's Katie" in which "an alternative epistemology of knowledge"—"an experiential way of seeing and knowing the natural world" is "introduced into Canadian poetry" (Relke, 1978).

The speaker of M. Travis Lane's "Red Earth" is a nurse who accompanies her anthropologist husband to "an Indian reserve where he intends to spend his sabbatical leave researching Malecite mythology and excavating the prehistoric grave sites which have given the reserve its name: Red Earth" (21). She is a kind of Mrs. Selby figure à la John Steffler's poetic novel, *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*. In the revisionist texts of Crawford, Steffler, and Lane, the authority of the male explorer or scientist is qualified. What Lane enacts in her long poem "Red Earth" is a kind of unknowing on the part of the anthropologist's wife and in this unknowing is her liberation. Lane's nurse travels to the site, initially, to be her husband's helpmate, to be useful: "I tend the fire" (22). She, too, is initially complicit in the colonizer's sensibility: "I want to tell them what to do... They have to farm/seriously..." (25). Lane's nurse/wife grows in wisdom the more she divests herself of certainty: "Perhaps what I don't understand/is something I don't even see" (25), a turn reminiscent of Tim Lilburn's observation that "[c]ontemplation grows out of the wreckage of other forms of knowing" (12). As the nurse's narrative of her own utility falls apart, she begins to open herself to a culture lived more in harmony with the land. As soon as Lane's nurse has "nothing to do" (30) she, ironically, begins to grow and thus embark on her own journey:

> I went to the tiny graveyard here,
> not John's red prehistoric dig, but theirs,
> tucked in the weeds behind the church.
> I missed the Priest on purpose, He goes back
> to the city after his weekly mass.

> I find him hard to talk to; it's as if
> he were always thinking of somebody else,
> or ashamed of this tiny vacant shed,
> Fleabane and thistles, the ground is cold
> all the year round...
>
> (*D*, 29)

The tangle of weeds, above, reminds us of the organic tangle of antlers rotting among the epitaphs in "Colonial." The contrast, too, between their "tiny graveyard... tucked in the weeds" and "John's red prehistoric dig" is striking. Their space blends readily ("tucked") into the natural landscape, unlike ("not") the "red prehistoric dig" which suggests an ugly wound or scare—there's a kind of detached air to "John's" site, occasioned perhaps, in the turning of "dig," normally a verb, into a noun—a process of objectification if ever there was one. What is foregrounded in the above excerpt is the first-person voice as active agent: "I went." Lane's nurse has assumed her own agency, paradoxically, by giving up control. A relinquishing of ego is, as the writings of many environmental thinkers affirm, the first step towards a fuller, more ecologically sound existence. At the end of "Red Earth," the nurse-speaker is "anchored" in place, and has acknowledged the open-ended mystery of her existence: "I can be nourished on anything" (41). Yet her transformation from utilitarian "helper" to one element among many in the land, is not without a cost. Through the linked images of the red blood of the "gash" in the nurse's side and, mirrored against that, on the "far shore" where "a wounded deer/fled from the dogs," Lane's speaker tells us: "It is not far./The blood-spots turn to berries at my feet" (41). Blood becoming berries is, of course, a metaphor. A kind of poetic intelligence which, in its web-spinning, is also an ecological intelligence, overruns the poem here and, in these final lines, gets the last word. And yet in terms of the poem's cultural politics, Lane is not naïve; earlier in the

poem, "John stained his mouth and hands with [wild strawberries]./ When I reached for some the old man's dogs/barked at me. He had said, "Don't eat them,"/broken strawberries, like blood—/the stained, red men" (37). What Lane seems to suggest here is complex. The imagistic similarity of red blood and red berries links the land and its exploiters; yet even though the berries may be "broken" or contaminated, they still play a pivotal role in the wife's movement towards a fuller ecological awareness. Perhaps Lane is reminding us that the context of colonialism in North America, the land—which has been "broken" by the colonizers, can never again be viewed as innocent, romantic, or pure.

Night Physics continues Lane's warning, evidenced in "Red Earth," against imposing our egos onto the landscape. An interesting thing is unfolding in these "middle period" poems—Lane's ecological project has begun to incorporate more images related to writing itself. This does not, in my mind, represent an inward turn so much as a broadening of scope and more integrated thematic web. Lane's poem, "About the Size of It" exemplifies this turn; landscape and writing are placed in conversation here, the *ars poetica* and the ecological consciousness are melded. Reminiscent of Earle Birney's well-known poem "Bushed," Lane's poem begins with the human ego over-running nature: "This man runs into the forest/breaking its red-tipped branches, flails/among the ice-encrusted leaves,/is,/he says,/ the poet of himself" (*NP*, 69). A reader at all familiar with Lane's poetry will discern, under this descriptive surface, an element of critique in the destructive and chaotic verbs "breaking" and "flails." By stanzaic increments the poem's speaker makes her critique more blatant and in doing so rejects the man's attempt to mythologize himself. "He/contains, he says,/what he has run inside" (69). "*He* says [my emphasis]," repeated in both stanzas one and two, foregrounds the gendered aspect of the will to power over the land, which, as suggested earlier, grounds Lane's work in the feminist tradition of

ecopoetics formulated by Diana M.A. Relke. In stanza three, the voice in Lane's poem shifts from a putatively descriptive to a declarative tone:

> Better he should go mousely; creep
> flat as a dry leaf; write
> on snow calligraphy
> of his own diary doings...
>
> (*NP*, 69)

"Go mousely"—this is interesting advice, and this poem can be read as a guide to ecologically ethical writing. Mice live their lives much closer to the earth than humans and though "creep" might suggest a rather ineffectual motion, it is cautious, strategic and clearly preferable to "flail," the signature verb of the man in the poem's opening. In "leaf" we see the merger of writing and nature, and Lane's "snow calligraphy" is reminiscent of the white page. Perhaps the most striking element of this stanza, though, is the directive to write "[o]f his own diary doings." What is Lane advising here? Her use of the diary is striking, since diary writing has often been regarded as feminine discourse and as such has been, at times, dismissed as mere confessional "trivia." Lane may well be embracing a woman-centred ecopoetics, here—the poem's advice might be loosely translated as "look closely at the domestic world, attend to that, and the larger world may be redeemed," Of course a poem can't be paraphrased or "sloganized" into something like "think local, act global." To do so is to strip it of its artistry. Nevertheless, I think it's important to recognize that *Night Physics* and a poem like "About the Size of It" marks a high degree of integration in that the *ars poetica* and the ecological vision become inseparable. "About the Size of It" isn't the only poem in *Night Physics* in which we witness an ecopoetics of minutia. "There Are Real Ants in the Metro" is a testimony to the act of poetic attention. "I have sat

all day watching," the speaker tells us. "Real Ants" is an urban nature poem and as such intersects with a larger ecopoetic discourse on nature in the city. What Lane's poem reveals is the closeness of the human and insect worlds—everything is connected in an ecological web if we only look. In the fourth of five stanzas, Lane's speaker tells us that the workmen "crawl out from their shaft at mezzanine" (*NP*, 76). The workmen "crawl[ing]" are akin to the ants. In keeping with the complexity of Lane's work, "Real Ants" could sustain alternative readings—as, for instance, a poem about the dehumanization of labour in capitalist society—but within an ecocritical framework, the poem speaks to the co-existence of simultaneous worlds, which in turn exposes the contingency of our own and de-centres human delusions of supremacy.

In *Night Physics*, Lane also continues her poetic investigation of longer forms. The collection's first piece is a serial poem in nine sections entitled "Fall–Winter 1990–1991." Written, in all likelihood, during the Gulf War, "Fall–Winter" is an anti-war poem that reveals the contamination of domestic landscapes far from combat by the evil of war; "A radar crested yellow bird haunts me," Lane writes at the beginning of the poem's fourth section (*NP*, 12). The poem's fifth section begins with the line "[a] tear drop hangs from the beak of a bird," and the seventh part opens with "Fluish and sick with listening to the news..." (*NP*, 13). "Fall–Winter" is a meditation prompted by images of how we try to paper over an earth ruined by war ("rubble") with "tidy garden[s]" and "bulb plots" (*NP*, 9). Lane's decision to begin this collection (which is dedicated to the Fredericton branch of Voices of Women for Peace) in a domestic landscape (a "tidy garden" with "bulb plots") (*NP*, 9) haunted by war places her in the company of ecopoets who, like Don McKay in "Materiel" (*Vis à Vis*, 37-49) take up the ethical mandate of a fully

responsible and, to quote Deborah C. Bowen's useful formulation again, "ethically charged ecopoetics."

Keeping Afloat integrates to an even greater degree two of M. Travis Lane's passionate preoccupations: the writing life and ecological concerns. The poem "Strive for a Deep Stillness" could serve as the *ars poetica* for this book and perhaps even for the contemporary phase of Lane's poetry. "Strive," a spare, sonnet-length poem, develops the directive for poetic attention set out in "About the Size of It." I will quote Lane's poem in its entirety:

> Strive for a deep stillness
> such as stars
> reflected from a glassy lake
> speak in its mirror,
> the motionless
> deep fathoms of the mountain
> with its white-locked head
> patient beyond all terror like the dark
> the tired enter willingly—
> not death
> but the long night of God,
> or the enduring being of all things.
> There is an emptiness contains:
> There is a farther poetry.
>
> (*KA, Strive for a Deep Stillness*, 62)

The "deep stillness" this poem endorses is delineated in terms that extend *beyond* the human world ("stars"). The mountain's "white-locked head," despite its anthropomorphic imaging, melds human and natural elements. A tone of reverence and contemplation suffuses this poem and its sonnet-like structure gestures back to the contemplative quartet of sonnets, "Dusk Sequence" that appears earlier in the collection. But the

main point I'd like to make is that while *Night Physics*, with its self-reflexive turns that examine the writing life, locates itself squarely *in* language, Lane's more recent collection, *Keeping Afloat*, probes a dimension *beyond* language—a "farther poetry." There is in *Keeping Afloat* a means of expression beyond words which qualifies the supremacy of language as humans' privileged purchase on the earth, recalling David Abram's remark, quoted earlier. In the second sonnet in "Dusk Sequence," Lane writes: "If this white field of brambles speaks/(if in another tongue) it speaks/the willing of all things,/their unified disunities, the names/of all requiring this long field" (*KA*, 45). Lane's "white field of brambles" carries forth the "snow calligraphy" in "About the Size of It." But the operative word, in the lines quoted from "Dusk Sequence," is "if"—"If this white field of brambles speaks" (*KA*, 45). There is both less assurance in *Keeping Afloat*, and yet more. The "unified disunities" of "all things" reveals a mature ecopoetic stance: a swerving away from imposing human order onto everything, towards and what Don McKay designates in *Vis à Vis* as a kind of wilderness-consciousness consisting of "not just a set of endangered spaces, but the capacity of all things to elude the mind's appropriations" (21). Another way of thinking about this might be to consider how Lane's white field of speaking brambles or McKay's formulation of wilderness brings us back around to the question every poet engaged with the natural world, must ask: to what extent can language represent the natural world? To even begin to answer this is to recognize an involution in language, the poet's tool box, at once humbling and hopeful. As Lane writes in "For Bulkington," "A sentence says more than its sentencing" (89). Our sentences do both less and more with respect to our engagements with the landscapes that constitute the earth. Elusive as they may be, our words, as poets, are our means of connectedness, our ecological web. Lane writes, in the final poem in *Keeping Afloat*: "To resist the sentence is to resist fellowship"

(91: "A Reader's Deductions," 90-91). And fellowship in words is, as the work of M.Travis Lane and her ecopoetic colleagues in Canada reveals, a crucial key to begin, as David Abram puts it, "to recall and re-establish the rootedness of human awareness in the larger ecology" (261). To "go mousely," as M.Travis Lane advocates, is to go close to the earth and above all, it is to *go*—to be—and to honour the membership of all small things in the fellowship of our earthly story.

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James Hampton's "Throne"