

er dieu les deux
 mains jointes dans une
 même voix la langue tressée à
 ses gestes c'est le par-
 ler bas des
 plus pauvres qui manquent de mots pour
 dire
 chaque chose et ce qu'ils sont l'un
 pour l'autre les pos-
 sédés de la vie que dé-
 possède leur langue ap-
 pauvrie

« [J]e n'é- / çris pas, » peut-on encore lire,
 « j'in- / terprète une / à une les données
 é- / crasées de la / boîte noire du monde :
 le crâne a- / trophié d'une humanité tom- /
 bée bas. »

Les Verbes majeurs et *Trombes* sont deux
 recueils majeurs qui révèlent chacun à leur
 façon quelques mots essentiels écrits à voix
 basse, en mode mineur chez Nepveu, ou
 emportés par une belle puissance lyrique
 chez Ouellet.

Tasting this Place

Sasenarine Persaud

In a Boston Night. TSAR \$16.95

Fred Wah

Is a Door. Talonbooks \$17.95

E.D. Blodgett

Poems for a Small Park. AU \$19.95

Gillian Jerome

Red Nest. Nightwood \$17.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall

These four books give us the rich and
 complex tastes of particular places: Persaud
 gives us a Boston suburb juxtaposed with
 a South American homeland; Wah offers
 slices of Mexico, Vancouver, Thailand, and
 Laos; Blodgett sketches the outlines of a
 city park in Alberta; Jerome gives us the
 East Side of Vancouver with its condoms
 and dragons. All four poets strive to give us
 the rich flavors of these places, and explore
 what the idea of place means in terms of
 self-location.

Persaud's poems are delicious on the
 tongue. He gives us "honeyed milk"
 ("XVI: The Flame of Shiva—a Phallus?")
 and "Galub jamuns soaked in red wine"
 ("Boston Cheek"). There is an under-tongue
 taste of native language that the speaker—
 and now the reader—longs to hold in the
 mouth. On the plate, we have Brookline.
 This town/suburb becomes a strange land
 he helps us taste in its strangeness—the way
 the trees bud, the way snow compacts to ice.
 The speaker is living in exile and the poems
 are poems of displacement. Persaud avoids
 the typical ex-pat approaches of nostalgia
 for homeland or gratefulness for the new
 home. One of the greatest strengths of these
 poems, especially as a book of exile, is that
 Persaud shows us what's not there—no
 mother, no sweet cookie to end the meal, no
 satiety for the speaker. As we read through
 the book there is a growing tension in the
 spaces between the images. This is longing
 without nostalgia. The poet is also adept
 at balancing—the dryness of daily life, the
 bitterness of exile, and the sweetness of
 memory: "turmeric corn, lime peas, flaky
 roti, curried Yukon, / Basmati—she went
 to London—rice, baked turkey— / enough,
 enough, you ass, shut down the computer"
 ("Thanksgiving"). Each poem, held on the
 tongue, tastes true—he's one of those rare
 poets who gets the recipe of humanness
 exactly right.

Fred Wah's poem "Mr. In-Between" ends
 "how to find the door / to stand in the way /
 just be there Mr. In-Between" and this gives
 us a feel for the poems in the book. While
 the other three books are rooted in place,
 Wah's book is about standing in the door-
 way of many places. We press our ear to the
 door and hear a cacophony of languages, of
 songs, of voices coming through from the
 other side. Both the gift and the frustration
 of this book is our inability to walk through
 that door. Like Persaud, Wah explores the
 landscape of the exile: "From the summit /
 of myself I was on the other side, / part of

the exclusion act" ("Count"). Wah avoids the temptation to simplify the complex nature of this dislocation, but in dislocating the reader, he also keeps us outside. He counters that, perhaps, with sound: Wah's poems sing: "Being where / overwhelming scars / screams and frogs / attention to the mud / of mind embroidered shy" ("Evening before 30 quiet"). But while there is a pleasure in this sound, there is a dizziness to it too. These poems spin—we want to put our finger out and stop the record, just for a moment. Ultimately we are tantalized, but in the end Wah doesn't give us anything that rings in the ears for days after reading.

E.D. Blodgett's poems strive for stillness. The book reads like a meditation—a quiet moment in a yoga studio, or a walk through the park at sunrise—refreshing, but also temporal. What the poems are missing is dialogue—we have no real sense of a conversation with the poet, or of a conversation with the self. The poems are almost pure image, but unlike many contemporary haiku, which they resemble in other ways, they don't take surprising turns or use the final line to snap us awake. Instead, they lull us: "reaching with longing for / the other bank that rose / forever beyond their grasp" ("Gifts of a River"). Lines like this make us pause, but ultimately move on again, looking for the next plaque, the next poem. The best moments are the metaphorical surprises: "generations of / the sun standing in sheaves" ("Dreams of a City"). These small moments of perfection resonate in our ears. The rest of the poems provide a moment of quiet, but nothing we'd remember after leaving the park and returning to the world.

Gillian Jerome's poems are a visual feast. A reader could stay on one page of the book for hours at a time, tasting the flavours of the images: "People pluck banjos and guitars, drink beer in brown bottles / That turn yellow when they hold them up to the sun" ("Untitled"). Like Blodgett's and Persaud's,

hers is a book of place. One of Jerome's gifts is image juxtaposing while crafting the landscape of East Vancouver. We have a constant shifting of sand, and a hundred surprising leaps and connections: "The song of our liturgy, the song of the answering machine" ("Tenement Song"). Another notable technique is her ability to spin a poem out into the dream world, even into the surreal, and then know exactly when to reel it back in. "Constellation" does this perfectly—we inhabit the real world of the poem enough to plant our feet, and then can follow our dream selves into the landscape of the heart without getting lost.

Reading these poets together is like sitting down to a feast of the newest Canadian poetry. Each gives us a taste of these landscapes, and while some dishes are more satisfying than others, it's delightful to sit at this richly laden table.

Souvenirs inédits

Anthony Phelps

Une phrase lente de violoncelle. Noroît 17,95 \$

Gilles Lacombe

Trafiquante de lumière. L'Interligne 11,95 \$

Les Plages à la laine de chevreau. L'Interligne 12,95 \$

Compte rendu par Natasha Dagenais

L'auteur de plus d'une dizaine d'œuvres poétiques, Anthony Phelps, à la fois poète, romancier et diseur, commence son recueil *Une phrase lente de violoncelle* (2005) par « Il était une fois », des mots d'une simplicité trompeuse qui se trouvent dans la première section donnant son titre au recueil. Ces paroles narrent une histoire de rites de passage que reflètent les oscillations entre le passé et le présent. Alors que l'espace du passé exprime le regard d'un enfant ayant vécu dans « le temps de l'insouciance » et d'un adolescent habité par l'allégresse du « pas à pas de la vie », c'est l'homme « aujourd'hui » habitant un présent dans lequel c'est « la vieillesse qui s'installe »