



# *The Warren*

UNDERGRADUATE REVIEW



CAMPBELL  
CERMINARA  
BATES  
PROTEAU  
SMITH  
LAM  
MEHLER  
LETTARI  
MOUNTEER  
CADAMIA  
COWELL



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*The Warren Undergraduate Review* is a semiannual publication lovingly compiled by undergraduates at the University of Victoria. Submissions must be made electronically at <http://thewarren.uvic.ca>

All submissions are processed by the Director of Submissions and then blind-read by the editors. With some exceptions, the work approved by the editors is printed in the journal. If you don't think the journal is good enough, it's your own fault for not getting involved.

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# From the Editors

It's pretty easy to like Bob Dylan.

It's pretty easy to like T. S. Eliot. It's *pretty easy* to like Radiohead. But when a friend of yours comes to you with a poem, a song, or a piece of artwork, it takes an incredible amount of courage to see the work clearly—to say, “Yes, I really like this. And not only do I like it, I like it so much that I am going to share it with other people.”

It has to do with the psychology of canonization: if we were once capable of hanging people because they denied that the world was flat, we're certainly capable of turning the women and men of the canon into invincible geniuses, into historically inevitable pillars of a certain genre.

These men and women were no better than we are. When Jack Kerouac walked in with the first copy of *On The Road*, it had no paragraph breaks or margins. It was written on (what I consider to be) one absurdly long piece of toilet paper. Everyone's art is always rough at first and it doesn't make it any less exciting.

And yes, maybe Allen Ginsberg's childhood with his insane, institutionalized mother heavily influenced his ability to create great art. But, from what I can tell, the twenty-first century has no shortage of insane mothers. Dylan Thomas may have been a self-destructive drinker, but so is just about every undergraduate. Everyone is still uniquely suffering and their art is none the better for it.

What did these people have? The bravado to get excited about their own, and each other's, work.

I get one address each issue. This issue, I want to say just one thing: those around you, right here and right now, are the most important to the success of your art. We've created a community here—one that anyone can step into. Here's a group of very enthusiastic, very talented artists. Let's embrace it and see where it goes. Maybe we'll end up important people.

I would like to thank Open Space for letting us throw such a great launch event. And of course the incredibly gracious English Department, Faculty of Humanities, and Faculty of Fine Arts for their ongoing support. This whole production wouldn't be possible without them.

**Liam Sarsfield**, *Editor-in-Chief*

Great academic papers take creativity and the best works of art are conceptually strong. In my work for *The Warren*, I am constantly reminded that the lines drawn between intellectual and artistic work are slippery at best. Although differences between genres can be vague, this is not a movement toward homogenization. Rather, we mean to embrace artistic diversity and show that some ecologists are poets and engineers are designers in hard hats (I know they're not usually the ones wearing the hard hats—but you see my point). On some level we all know this to be true, but I think that we tend to forget it.

My hope is that in years to come we can expand to include disciplines usually excluded from arts-type zines. This year we received some fascinating popular science submissions, but unfortunately none of these fit well within the themes of the current issue. But scientists—do not be discouraged! Likewise, historians and critics. As I said at our Launch Event, we are your motivation; we are your support; we are your audience, your critics, and your biggest fucking fans.

Thank you to everyone who worked on this issue—to our Editors with the discerning eyes, to our Copy Editors who notice every detail, to Morag, Jack, Bryce, and Marco who not only get it done but have fun doing it, and to Liam for keeping our ambition high. Thank you to all of our submitters for their invaluable support and creativity. Thank you to Jamie who always reminds me that I really am doing what I love.

**Amelia Nezil**, *Vice Editor-in-Chief*

<b>Alina Cerminara</b>	Driving the Man <i>fiction</i>	5
<b>Brittany Bates</b>	Last Days of Summer <i>poetry</i>	11
<b>Dani Proteau</b>	On Sound as Physical Object <i>interview</i>	12
<b>Hilary Smith</b>	Growing Up Girl <i>creative nonfiction</i>	14
<b>Aaron Lam</b>	S-21 <i>photography</i>	19
<b>Maegan Rose Mehler</b>	<i>three paintings</i>	20
<b>Heike Lettrari</b>	Home: I Am Coming <i>fiction</i>	22
	On Fiction <i>interview</i>	27
<b>Jordan Munteer</b>	Exegesis & Girl Sleeping <i>poetry</i>	31
<b>Robyn Cadamia</b>	An Observer's Guide to Birds <i>creative nonfiction</i>	34
<b>Jesse Cowell</b>	Zanziger <i>drama</i>	37
	Contributors	38

# Alina Cerminara

## *Driving the Man*

He drove me on my twenty-first birthday. Thought I was a queer 'cause I couldn't hack making it with a broad from work or wherever. We were in his beater that he picked up when we moved to Reno. Lime green Volvo covered in dust and frost when he told me to get in.

Of course I'd heard about Mustang. The guys in senior year had bragged about going when they turned. Not just that ranch neither, but Cottontail, Chicken Ranch (before it got burnt), and Starlight, too. Us guys heard about it all and planned to go. I don't really know if any of them ever made it.

The old man and me had taken off outta Salome before senior year was out and I never even got my diploma. Ma had stayed behind. On account of her arthritis, she said, but she got another family with two more kids. Grown now.

He didn't say nothing when we drove out to the ranch. I only knew where we were headed when we passed a sign announcing Storey County. The radio flickered and he'd keep his lips moving to Billy Joel, not breaking when the road went silent. *Cause he knows that it's me they been coming to see to forget about life for a while.*

With the air too cold to crack a window, my chin stayed planted in my sweater. Felt the dampness in my pits. The thought of laying a girl at Mustang Ranch had brought a lump to my throat. I could just do her, I thought. No emotional shit. No touching afterwards.

I grabbed the Rubik's Cube off the dash and concentrated on beating my four-minute record. Did the first few turns but my hands were shaking so bad. If she was a looker, I could totally get it up. I could just have sex with her. Wouldn't have to look at her or touch her.

The ground whizzed by. You can go as fast as you want on Nevada roads. No curves to slow you down. We were going about a hundred and five miles an hour when the song ended and he realized the speed. The roads kicked up wads of dust behind us like shooting pucks. Sepia mountains draped around and snow crammed itself into divots in the desert. He slowed.

"I know where we're going," I said. He kept his eyes on the road. "I heard about them girls." The radio announcer started talking about the fags and their Gay Plague. I watched the old man flick off the radio and adjust his vest. So I asked, "They clean?"

He looked at me and snorted. "Jesus Nelson, they got the condom thing. And checks, they do checks." His voice spoke smooth, like the honey-ale he brewed. "Tell her you got a solid job. Like a junior exec or something. They love that."

"Like your accounting digs?"

"Something newer, son." He paused and squinted into the distance. "That arcade

game you like. Pac-Man? Say you invented that.”

He steered off Interstate 80 and onto Canyon Road. Two buildings spread out ahead of us. Big gates like prison movies and a sign that said Mustang Entrance Ranch. The circled sign shone red and yellow. We parked next to a bunch of beaters, and Cadillacs, too. He buzzed us in and only then was when I clued in he'd been coming here. He was a small guy. I outgrew him in seventh grade and if he could handle these women then what was I so sweaty about?

The Lady at the door greeted us in this big old mink coat, her legs sticking out like wire in a coop.

“Got to be somewhere, Johnny,” she said to him. Even though the old man's name was Allen. Even though I'd never heard anybody call him Johnny. “Line-up?”

He nodded.

The bar ran the length of the back wall—orange light shades and gold fixtures. Mirror-like tiles were half hidden behind booze. A guy in a golf shirt stood behind it. He wiped a glass clean, a wilted Marlboro between his lips. Other than the stools, the dark carpeted room was huge and stood empty. Crimson drapes hung from the ceiling in folds.

The Lady stuck her digits in her thin-lipped mouth and blew. The men at the bar leapt out of them chairs like hounds in a patrolled yard at the whistle. The broads soothed them with a knuckle graze along their jaw.

Girls hustled in from crowds of doors and before I got a chance to really admire a sweet ginger in spiked heels, the Lady glommed onto my arm and whispered, “Better be legal, because I ain't hoping for no sniffers.” Deep-set cobalt glared at me under thick drapes for lashes. She pursed her lips and tapped a ringed finger on her hip. “Got it?”

There were about twenty-five broads in the line-up, and every single one was giving me the look. Like they wanted to jump my bones. Like the ladies at two a.m. who stumble out of Casale's Half-Way Club and ogle the Paint Mart guys and me. Just less clothes.

Each girl purred her name. It must have been a fad when they were born, parents must have liked candy.

Hershey. Precious. Azaria. Razzle. Praline. Pixie. Wispa. Marilyn. Caroline.

He stood beside me, hands doubled up under his pits, peepers forward. The hollow tap tap tap like nails in beaverboard echoed from behind, coming from the Lady with an arm out the door—guess she had some place to be.

“Sift any out?” He swung his hand around and knocked me on the shoulder. Shoved them back under when I looked at him. “You choose first. Happy Birthday buddy boy.”

She was standing on the edge. Teetering, like she was going to fall out of line. Big hair. Shiny lips. Eyebrows dark and long like dirt smudges pulled across by grimy wrists. She had a pinky in her teeth like she was snagging out a strand of meat and her elbow jutted into the blonde's face to her left. Her tits almost touched her chin and her calves shone and outlined muscle. She wasn't looking at me.

“That one.” I pointed to her and dumbly peeked at him, not sure what to do. His lips pursed out and down. He nodded.

“Hear that Baby?” The Lady lit a cigarette and pushed the door open farther. “Ruthie Baby? Get your head out of your ass and bring the kid with you.”

Baby Ruth strolled toward me, one foot in front of the other, like a drunk test. Her eyes were like my grade school teacher's. Half blue, half grey, somewhere like that.

She stopped about a foot away from me and reached out her hand. Her palm faced upward, gentle-like.

I took it. He winked.

It was one flight of stairs and a hallway. Chipped crimson paint and walls that reeked of more smoke than our townhouses ever did. There was thumping from behind doors, grunts of guys making it with other broads, I guessed. The soft curves of her hands distracted me from too much thinking about the joint. I worried about the sweat. Imagined drips falling from between our fingers and onto the orange carpet. Thought she might let go if that started happening.

The pad was twice the size of the massive bed. Gold headboard with bars ran the length. Shiny blankets. A window on the far wall let in afternoon shine. The sill steamed from the sun and the chilled air. Metal through it shadowed a cross on the floor. A plant sat on the bedside table and I wondered who watered it. She un-gripped my hand and displayed herself on the bed.

“So, what’s your name?” Her voice was lighter than I thought it would be. She wedged off her heels and flexed her toes.

“Nelson,” I told her. My back was still against the door, head almost at the frame.

“Well, Nelson.” She bounced up and leaned herself against me. Without the heels, she stood to just below my shoulders.

“You got the special package.” Her fingers trailed a wonky line down my chest, like my belly button was her bulls-eye. “Whatever you want.”

“Package?”

“Yeah, the birthday-boy package. Pie in the sky, ultimate fetish, ya know...fantasy?”

Thoughts and words cluttered in my mouth and there was no getting them out. Stuck, I brushed her hand off and walked to the window.

Nothing but red. Just like Nevada to only give you dirt and sand and a tree here and there. The window looked out onto a back deck and a few ladies stood against the fence.

Baby came racing from the door and poked her head out to look. “See the one on the left? That’s Suzy.” She peered up at me. “The boss, Joe, just opened up Mustang 2 a few months back and she’ll be headed there tomorrow. She don’t play well with others, if you know what I mean.” Her breath steamed against the glass.

“Mustang 2. That the next building?”

“Sure is.” Baby Ruth left the window and slid onto the bed. “Never been inside, but I heard that it isn’t half as nice as this place.”

My eye started to twitch. I rubbed it.

“We’re lucky here. Us girls.”

The twitch didn’t quit. The sun burnt my back and sweat poured off me. I rubbed my hands on my pants and left wet marks. I looked at the walls. The chipped paint on the headboard, the cracked molding, charred marks around the door. The smoke lingered in my nose. I sniffed.

“Where you at?”

I fidgeted and slumped against the wall. “Should I take off my shoes?”

“Come here.”

She placed squares of plastic in a line across her shiny leg. Condoms. I was going to

laugh and recommend a balloon blowing contest but then realized that I was twenty-one and with a woman. Twenty-one-year-olds were too rusty to make condom jokes and girls didn't find them funny. I sat.

"Now which would you like." She tapped each one as if playing a game. "Flavoured." Her head tipped to one side. "Studded." Head to the other side. "Colours!" Back again. "Lubed up." Her eyes wandered up to me. "Or I can choose for you."

I thought of the Trojans under my bed. I kept them just in case because everyone hears about emergencies like that. When you gotta stop right in the middle because you didn't bring no rubber. I hadn't ever had a girl over to my place when I bought the condoms. Made me feel good to know they were there though.

The condom arrival freaked me out. Made it all real.

"So. You from Nevada someplace?" I asked, trying not to stare at the rainbow checkboard between us.

"You know, kid, I ain't no psychiatrist."

I knew. "From Reno maybe?"

"No."

"Reno's the pits."

"Blythe."

"Salome!"

"What?"

"I'm from Salome," I said, unnecessarily loud. "Forty-five minutes away if he runs the hot-rod fast. Which is always."

She peered at me from under those huge lashes, and then swept away the condoms. "You're nervous."

I didn't know what to do. She reached her arms to my head, fingers stretching and un-stretching. She looked stupid just sitting there, like a baby wanting a toy or something. When she finally shifted toward me and touched her fingers to my face, I flinched and moved back. Only pussies needed cuddles. Felt bad right away though. No broad had ever touched my face before. I told her so.

"Never?" she asked.

I didn't answer and so she stayed back for a minute and then reached again. Started for my chest this time. I let her leave her hands there but then she started moving them and maybe she wouldn't like the feel of it or something and I flicked them off.

She was real good-looking and probably not that much older than me. Probably even better looking if she didn't wear so much face crap.

"Do the guys that come here. Are they..." I paused, words getting lost. "Why do you work here?"

She leaned back onto her ass, sighed, and didn't answer me.

"What do you do, Mr. Nelson?" She ran her tongue along her front teeth, her chin in the air. Like she was thinking real hard.

"Invented Pac—" What the hell. "Sales. Paint mainly."

"I do the same thing." She paused. "Using my body in other ways. Though I get paid a whole lot more for my services." She laughed. She laughed and then hugged me. Her knees held her up and my body supported her. She felt so good. I let her stay there.

She slowly pulled me into her lap and used her nails to graze through my hair. Used her forearms to smooth up my face and then down it. She used her tits to pillow my head and she used her legs to wrap around me like a blanket. I shut my eyes and pretended that

she was someone else, and then I opened my eyes, hoping to see her.

I felt the soft padding of her around me. Smelled her smooth, cinnamon scent and shut my eyes. Content, maybe.

I opened my eyes an hour later on top of Baby Ruth. Her legs straddled around me, her fingers a crescent at her lips. She smirked.

I leaned up and she untangled herself, leaving her hand on my leg. I could tell our time was up. My dick was finally hard and her thighs looked soft enough to slice through with a trace of my finger. Irony is a fucking killer, especially when horny.

“Hey kid,” she purred. She sat up and put her arms around me. I didn’t flinch. Didn’t think about my sweaty palms or the rash on my upper arms. She put her arms around me and I didn’t mind it. Liked it. Liked that she did it without thought.

“That what you were looking for?”

I didn’t answer her. Probably looked like the strong, silent type who just didn’t talk much. But really, forming thoughts into words was hard. Feelings, even harder.

She jumped off the bed and shimmied on a sweater over her little top. “You remind me of my first john. Your age, too.”

“Yeah? How so?” I edged to the side of the bed.

“The guy was real tough. Lived in forests. Mountains. Sometimes headed up to the coldest bits of Canada.”

She thought I was tough. I put my hands on her thighs and she stepped closer.

“But he always came back to me. Maybe once a year he’d come. Always said he wouldn’t come back. But every summer, there he was.” She ran her fingers through my hair.

“Just wanted a hug some years. To be touched. How humans need that to survive?” She grabbed my face and looked straight at me. Wrinkles hedged out from under make-up, grew from her eyes and her mouth. “Crazy, hey?”

I thought that was stupid. People bumped into each other all the time. Shook hands sometimes. Even got into fights, like real fights, but that’s still touching. When the boys and I played ball, we always roughhoused. Can’t rough each other up without a little touching.

She jumped up. “Ready for downstairs? Your pop’s probably been waiting for a while. He’s the kind of guy who gets straight to the point.”

I forgot that he was here. In this place. Got an itchy feeling when I imagined him going through the same thing I just did. That he had to pay for it. That he didn’t have mom to do that for him no more. I slipped my sneakers onto my feet and tied the laces. Before I finished the second one, she crouched in front of me and completed the task. She looked up and put her hand on my cheek. Her eyes glinted in the corners and I hoped she wasn’t too stuck on me.

Had mom ever done that for him? Had she ever held him? He don’t need that kind of thing. He don’t need a woman to touch him. He probably just needed a good fuck. I wiped her hand off and got up. Wished that I just wanted a good fuck.

“Think you’ll visit again, Nelson?”

I shrugged. I didn’t need to pay for a girl. Could find them anywhere.

She walked me back down the stairs to the tune of new grunts. Think they’d build thicker walls in a place like this.

The light had changed and the place looked darker. The men at the bar had been replaced with new ones. The few scattered ladies all unrecognizable, too. The old man was

sitting at the end, arguing with the bartender.

“Forty-niners are goddamn lucky to have Montana. All I have to say. Fourteen of twenty-two passes? Damn lucky.”

The bartender pulled down a bottle of Jack and filled a shot. “I got a weak spot for Anderson.”

I walked up and hopped on the stool next to him. “Anderson’s an over-paid wuss.”

He looked at me in surprise.

“So, son. How’s it feel to be a man?” He leaned in, more interested in knowing stuff about me than he had ever been.

I was about to answer but reached my arm around his shoulder instead, in what was supposed to be an assurance of a good time. It turned into a hug. A full-blown, lean-into-each-other hug. He clapped me on my back and I held tighter and tighter. Felt his extra skin pudge out around my arms. He was warm and round and I hadn’t hugged him like that since I was just a kid.

He finally pulled me off of him and winked.

“This is my boy,” he signaled. He looked at the bartender.

# Brittany Bates

## *Last Days of Summer*

were a contraption of branches, open windows,  
grief as a glass of water on the table, hung linen

exhaling on the line. Now sanded down into something  
smaller—the sigh of his hands peeling corn husks.

She kept the river stone from the evening on the bank,  
surrounded by cedar: A lover's neck that smelled of cut wood

and sweat, a crack in the complexity of clouds where the light got in.  
A loon crumpled its silk-scarf wail into warbled laughter.

Things were left behind. Bobby pins and a pile of sawdust  
from all the corner's they'd cut. A knot of bed sheets,

house plants leaning towards a small square of light.  
She has learned to let her heart be slick

as a rainbow trout; how to slip out of someone's hands  
when they least and most expect it.

# Dani Proteau

## *On Sound as Physical Object:*

### *An Interview Conducted by Laura Matalas*

Dani Proteau is a third-year Visual Arts student at the University of Victoria. She is primarily interested in conceptual, installation, and sound art. Proteau's fall installation project, "Spheres, Circles," attempted to invert the artist's role as traditional representationalist by actively seeking to two-dimensionalize a three-dimensional space. Interested in the physical process of experiencing art, Proteau's "Untitled (Heartbeat)" installation—which this interview centers around—took place in November of 2010. In the spring, Proteau hopes to install her latest work in the Visual Arts building's Upstairs Gallery.

WARREN: Perhaps you could begin by introducing your "Untitled (Heartbeat)" installation.

PROTEAU: Sure.

Basically, in a small gallery space I set up two large speakers. These speakers played a very low-frequency sound, almost a low enough frequency that you wouldn't be able to hear it very well, but one that you could definitely feel.

So—you enter the room, and there are two large speakers playing this pitch. While you initially sort of think, "Okay, what is going on?" you begin to tap into this sort of alternate energy that the room embodies. You can distinctly feel the sound waves passing through your body as you move around.

WARREN: How did you determine what frequency you were going to work with?

PROTEAU: I wanted to make this project specific to a heartbeat that would beat at 120 beats per minute. The frequency of this in itself would be 2 hertz; however, due to what I was working with, this frequency needed to be raised. As such, I chose a frequency that was a multiple of the original frequency, so as to create a pitch that would resonate with your heartbeat.

A lot of people experiencing it had a very kinesthetic reaction to the work, and yet they were simply unable to articulate what it was they were feeling. In fact, there was one individual who had a very emotional reaction and started crying. There was something totally inexplicable that happened to her while she was experiencing it.

I think the reason why it was sort of an "indefinable experience" was that it was so physical. It wasn't something that was meant to be mentally graspable.

WARREN: Something else I find interesting is your having made the heartbeat piece within the context of visual art. How does this work comment on your position as an artist in the visual realm?

PROTEAU: (Pause) Yeah, that's interesting. It wasn't visual at all—the room was dark. It's a strange thing because a lot of visual artists now are dealing with experiences that aren't

necessarily visual. It is more about making an experience than making an object.

WARREN: Lazlo Maholy-Nagy talks about role of the artist as one of an educator. In other words, an artist offers up an experience that would otherwise be unavailable. In this sense he or she serves a kind of epistemic role in that they deal with knowledge.

PROTEAU: Yeah, and within the environment of a gallery space you are provided with an opportunity to focus in on a specific experience, whereas in the “real world” you are experiencing so many different things at once.

I think a lot of artists are doing this—finding a specific experience that they find interesting and presenting it in a context where we can actually talk about it. Sound as a physical “thing” seems really important in our culture now, so I wanted to focus on that.

WARREN: Sound is a physical thing: a series of vibrations. To a certain extent, this is a partial response to the question of your position as a “visual artist.” Your treatment of sound here is very material.

PROTEAU: Sure. This was a chance to pay attention to it and to discuss it.

WARREN: Thanks for taking the time to speak with us. Are there any general impressions of your work that you would like to leave the reader with?

PROTEAU: It’s important that I am not limited to the title of a conceptual artist, since there are too many other aspects of art that are important to me. The University of Victoria’s Visual Arts Department, being primarily a conceptual art school, has introduced me to a new way of thinking about art, and, to be honest, I’m still learning how to work conceptually.

# Hilary Smith

## *Growing Up Girl*

We sprawled on the warm driveway twitching our bare toes, sticky with tar. The street was flat and out of the way, the perfect place to learn to ride bikes. Nine years old and we still loved sidewalk chalk. We sketched models onto the black tarmac with long yellow hair like princesses and lips that made them look sad but beautiful. Maybe we didn't know the word sexy yet, but we got what it meant.

Our friend was telling me and Ains about babies.

"They happen when your parents have sex," she said. "You know what that is, don't you?"

I blushed. I was nearly in grade four, too old not to know about these matters. I knew from a couple years back that the boys got in trouble when they talked about it. A classmate had cornered my friend and me in the forest by our school, pushed us up against a tree and prodded us down there with a stick he'd found. He had the ugliest smile when he shouted that he was going to have sex with us. We didn't understand, but it made us cry anyway. We knew enough to tell our teacher and he had to say sorry. Our teacher explained that he had used bad language.

Sex was hidden from us. My mom called me princess; she cut the cable on our television and pre-approved the movies I watched during sleepover parties. Ains's mom bought her Christian girl magazines to combat the aisles of *Teen Beat* and *J-14*, because they were gateways to *Cosmopolitan*, and that was the gateway to a daughter she didn't want to have.

To explain, my friend wanted to draw it on the sidewalk, but we were too scared of being caught. "They'll tell you they do it so they can have babies, but wanna know why they really do?"

We did want to know. We had crushes at school and we suspected the two might be linked. Our friend continued, barrelling through our confused glances.

"Because it feels good."

Perhaps I felt a flash of recognition, a tug below my belly button. A name for the stirrings I felt but didn't know yet if I liked.

So this was our introduction, Ains and me.

My real introduction was later. I was sixteen. It seemed perfect—I was old enough not to be a slut, but still within the realm of new experience to be considered avant-garde. And besides, I was "in love," which at the time meant being with an older part-time drug dealer who gave me all the free pot I could ever want to smoke. Our first time was drunk, sloppy, at a party in someone else's bed. He grabbed my hips and rocked me above him, slurred that he loved me. I knew to arch my back when I leaned over him and pressed my palm to his chest. When friends asked me about it at school, I acted blasé, as if I lost my virginity all the time.

After more practice, I learned the fundamental ins-and-outs of the procedure and decided I enjoyed it. Six months later, once the smoke cloud cleared, the boy wrote me a

poorly punctuated letter telling me it was over. Fine, I bristled. At least it was done and I could continue without the prudish label of “virgin.”

Sex is becoming disposable—a condom wrapper. Girls are having sex before they reach high school. It’s as though feminists in the 1970s went too far and turned the problem inside out. The generation before us fought for sexuality without stigma, the freedom to fuck, and it worked—for the most part. But somewhere the message was scrambled, and today the sex is there, younger and younger, but the message of empowerment fell behind. Now, we have to pick up the pieces—explaining to the young girls about consent, condoms, confidence, and the other details that were lost in the flurry of liberation.

What I’m hearing is that good girls don’t sleep around, but they shouldn’t do up their top button either. Be sexy but don’t have sex. Girls in North America are being stretched between a contradiction.

I’ve heard of a group of twelve-year-old girls in my hometown of North Vancouver—girls I’ve met as a camp leader—involved in a prostitution ring, getting pimped to clients who’ve set a booming demand in the monster hotels recently built near the low-income areas and reserves.

These girls have already been told all the things they can’t: you can’t walk at night, can’t walk with your hips, can’t look as good as the other girls, can’t say the right thing at the right time. The posters on the bus stops and the teachers at their school tell them sex means many things—*teenpregnancyabstinenceAIDSviolenceslutrapeSTDdeath*—but they don’t tell them love. They certainly don’t tell them power. So when that older guy comes around, maybe he smokes and gives you that first drag of a cigarette, and he tells you, girl, you can make something with that cute walk you have there, damn, you’re going to take it because it’s the first time someone’s said you can.

After listening for fifteen minutes, I have enough material to write pages. These women, their stories make me want to laugh, yell, shake their shoulders or shake their hands, or give up entirely.

Maybe it’s something about being in a circle in a warm room, holding cups of tea. Maybe it’s something about being up late at night. But something urges our stories forward; it’s almost desperate the pace we’re talking.

This isn’t just us. These are the women who whisper in coffee shops, those loudly praising the notches on their bedpost, those who sit in circles in their own living rooms. This is not one but a hundred conversations.

We’re talking about masturbation, first times, saving it for marriage, not getting married, being with women, how to give great head, and the times we’ve felt so sick and messed up about our bodies that we want to lock ourselves up and never let someone touch us again.

When I was sixteen I exchanged numbers and names, but never discussed my actions in the sense of what it is to grow up a girl today. My mom never learned how to talk about these things so she looked the other way when she came down in the morning to find boys in my bed.

I taught myself sex through experiential learning. I thought this meant through other people, and that “people” meant boys, and that it definitely didn’t mean on my own at night. I didn’t know girls touched themselves to sleep, didn’t know until I was twenty and a boy I’d really loved had left me. I know many girls who don’t or didn’t masturbate until

they were older. We don't know how to map our bodies.

"I've never done that," one girl says. "I don't think I've had a..." She pauses. "No, I think I'd know if I had."

Sexual pleasure is most often framed as something given by another, and so growing up I sought it out. I didn't think, I just did, and a shadow of regret followed. Like if this didn't mean anything, what did?

But here, we're replacing what used to be silence. We're not just talking about the bad times. Believe me, there are plenty of the good times. We're talking about the times that guy made us come so hard we couldn't walk, the time we didn't get out of bed for 24-hours, that time with scarves, that time in Rome, and the time when she bent over the patio table and he did her in the rain.

But before all that, Ains and I, both freshly free of our not-so-cherished V-cards, considered ourselves targets in a way we didn't mind. We surrendered our bodies because we wanted to believe we were in demand. We were independent, sexy, and all those adjectives we'd always admired.

Ains was tall and beautiful in a way that made girls want to hate her, but sweet enough that they couldn't. I had the weapon of DD-décollage to reap the broken hearts she left behind. Her older cousins would dress us in tin-foil costumes and parade us around like miniature models when we were little.

"If you guess how long we've known each other, we'll give you a hug," was our standard line to a cute guy at a party.

"Uh...eight years?" His eyes darted between us.

"Not even close." One of us would inch forward. Sometimes, after two or three peach coolers, the line would evolve into "If you guess how long we've known each other, we'll make out." Teases. When they couldn't guess, we'd lapse into giggles, touch their arms in a calculated way, and shriek.

"Our whole lives."

We shopped for lip-gloss and lace underwear at the mall, made lists of the boys we had kissed, snuck out my bedroom door, and planned our outfits for New Year's Eve. We did everything together, and one time that went too far, and it made us feel sticky and uncomfortable, like the furnace was on too high. It was a guy we both liked and we figured it was a creative solution. She and I were scared to touch each other, and the way he grabbed both of our arms too tight made me feel nauseous. I looked only at him, and hoped he would look back.

When he drove me home in his red pickup truck later that night, he called his friend. He leaned back into his leather seats, one hand cradling the steering wheel, and said, "Dude, I just hooked up with a model. And a girl with tits as big as my head."

I smiled. I felt like my body was floating away from the rest of me, but at least I was hot.

Ains and I took the bus over the Second Narrows and entered the city of Vancouver. The bus wound through Powell Street, past the tents in Oppenheimer, past the droves of the derelict and displaced on Main and Hastings. Whores hung on each corner, and the way they scratched at their arms made me nervous. We'd heard on the news about the prostitution problem in Vancouver. One prostitute, after being raped and beat up bad by a john, reported the man to the police. She was laughed at and told, "It's just part of the

game, sweetheart.”

“God, that’s so sad,” I murmured to Ains. We thought we were clever to be concerned with the oppression that glared in our face, but didn’t care to look much further.

Our stiletto heels clicked along the sidewalk. There was no destination, just wanted to roam Granville Street, prowl for excitement, though we were too young to get in to anywhere worth going. We hung outside the bars and waited for the bouncers to notice us. When they didn’t, we went into La Cantina, a Taco Bell-like restaurant that was the only licensed place that would serve us. We ate Tater Tots and sipped Corona.

The street looked blurry when we walked out. A huge steel van was parked a few blocks up Granville, closer to the bridge where the stores were all smoke shops and peep shows. The size and tinted windows meant one thing: rock stars. I thought about the polka-dotted, boy short underwear I was wearing, and I felt young.

We walked up to the crowd of guys smoking and drinking in front of the van. They were calculated dirt bags: tattoos on their necks, jeans ripped at the knees, and long hair they had pored over to look casual. I recognized another guy from the pages of the punk magazine I had in my bedroom.

I can’t remember what we said but then we were on the tour bus. They didn’t ask how old we were, but I’m sure they figured we were under eighteen but thought it was cute. Girls stumbling to be cool.

I remember being in the back room of a smoke shop sucking up cherry-flavoured air from a hookah pipe, then being in a downstairs bar. A guy name-dropped his band. He asked us what we wanted to drink and we hesitated before we said Smirnoff Ice. I laughed at the jokes I couldn’t hear. I made sure Ains sat next to me, but she kept shifting closer to the guy who drummed for that band.

Ains told me he had invited her back to his hotel, and she was thinking of saying yes. She was sixteen and had a boyfriend. He was thirty. But it was an impossibly sexy idea, so she didn’t turn it down. The last thing I remember was someone calling me princess and handing me a fifty-dollar bill, then getting into a cab alone.

We figured our behaviour had no consequence, and the girls who got in trouble were a million miles away from us. But even girls as dumb as we were knew when these nights driving with boys and swimming naked at the beach had to end.

I was sitting on my bed in the one-room apartment I shared with my boyfriend. He balanced on the other side not facing me. His fists were clenched. When he got mad like this, I almost preferred a reaction: I wanted him to turn around and lay his fist into my face. That’s what he wanted.

*Ains was with another friend and it was early evening. They went for a walk around their high school, their one-inch zipper jeans hanging low on their hips. A car pulled up. They recognized the two guys, two seniors from their school, though they weren’t friends. They got in the car.*

“You are such a slut.” He pronounced each word slowly, waiting for me to hear them individually. He was upset. I had taken my shirt off during a game of strip poker at our friend’s house. Though I had been faithful in our yearlong relationship, doubt continually seeped into his mind. “It’s hard to love you when you act that way,” he said.

*The boys drove them past the gun range, to the entrance to a forest nearby. One slid his hand up from Ains’ knee to the top of her thigh. She giggled, pushed it off. “Let’s go for a walk,” the taller one suggested. I imagine she heard a voice saying no, but she didn’t want to be rude. They paired off, and the taller one took Ains into the forest path. “God, you’re pretty,” he whis-*

*pered into her ear. She smelled his heavy cologne.*

He grabbed my wrist so tight it bit, and there was a pause. He hadn't lashed out yet, but that didn't mean he wouldn't. "I don't even think I'd be able to fuck you." But he did, pressed himself on top of me and let me know how much I'd hurt him.

*She didn't want to be here, she knew that now. He pushed her to the ground, and her back smacked against the dirt. He yanked the zipper of her jeans down and pulled. She yelled for her friend, he hesitated, and she sprung up. And she ran like hell.*

Kids learn fast now, and soon those little boys and girls who tease each other in the schoolyard are teenagers, then they're in college, then they're husbands or wives, and they've still got the values they learned so early. I swear I'll teach my kids better but stutter at the opportunity. I tell the girls at camp, the ones who cover their tiny bodies in T-shirts at the water park, that they've got to love themselves first.

"But we're black girls, so we gotta watch our figures," one girl said. She sounded so confident.

Last month, I spoke with a fifteen-year-old on the bus as she shared her two-six of rum on the way downtown. The crowded bus was a pre-party social. She sat with an older guy who slouched and wore his hat pulled low to the side. Their two friends sat behind them. This girl was going to give him head tonight, even though she told me she thinks he's boring and kind of a dick.

"I don't want to, but I kind of have to, you know?"

I told her what I wanted to hear at sixteen: I told her to do what she wants.

There was a time when everything I knew rested on who would take me home. Everything I believed about myself was the reiteration of someone else's affections. But eventually the words became just that—*beautiful, sexy, fuckable*—words. For a while, I dated virgins and stole the label from them. If I was their first, they would never forget me and that made me important. That too grew stale.

Years later, a new boyfriend asked me to describe what it felt like when I came. There was an unsexy pause; I didn't know how to answer. I hadn't noticed because my attentions were focused on someone else. Each orgasm was a byproduct—an accident or afterthought. I recognized the lightness in my head or my pulse beating through my fingertips, but those were the sensitivities that followed. I was always a moment too late to capture the feeling that swelled big enough to catch in my throat. He smiled, touched me, and told me he would stay under the sheets until I could put the sensation into words.

I imagine my own baby girl when she's eleven. She will be sprawled out on the pavement, the sunshine freckling her arms, like mine. I will lie down next to her and trace her outline in chalk. I'll tell her my stories. Tell her to love who she wants. Tell her she doesn't need another body to feel desired. I'll tell her my stories and let them shape her world.



“S-21” by Aaron Lam, Cambodia 2010.



“Sandy & Lou, Business People” by Maegan Rose Mehler, 2010. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches.



“Up Nup” by Maegan Rose Mehler, 2010. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches.



"M & J" by Maegan Rose Mehler, 2010. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches.

# Heike Lettrari

## *Home: I Am Coming*

Heading home from the May Days shindig at the Old Dump, I shake my head to get the rush of the Kaslo River out. I'm a doddering fly against a chestnut wall in the dark, fist pressed against ragged bark watching the cops pull over the kids on the corner of fifth street and B Ave. Silent red, white, and blue, mixing with star and street light; two cars parked mid-street. They could have turned off those revolving lights. I lift a leg to massage my aching shin, where the memory of my mistake in the mines has embedded itself in my bones. I grin into my armpit at the cops across the road. I'm a dealer, metres from them uniformed nuggets, and they don't know it. My pocket crinkles with bills from tonight's party. Well, at least I can laugh at them. Ellie would hate me right now.

The ghost car crept past my sidewalk shuffle five minutes ago, speeding on after a clear "he's harmless" decision. Might have been my limp, might have been my amble. I watched the navy sedan U-ie in front of the Anglican church at the end of the street. We probably both heard the kids laughing before they popped out of C Ave: forward crawl in Ma's borrowed van, me coming from the treat I afforded myself at the new bar—you know, four million bucks went into that Main Street eyesore, and what'd they get? Balcony beams that look good but don't do any actual supporting. Should have hired the local design so they spent less money on wood that works, but what the heck, it's not my place to run. She'd hate that, too, my Ellie.

My shin's pain reminds me to move my butt. Get home and to sleep. Under my hand the pain disappears like a ghost. My trailer is docked under a couple Doug firs on a property five K out of town. My sweet South Fork dock. Home: I am coming. Soon I'll be in, my shin and my body at rest in my corner cot. Hugging my arms I pretend to wrap myself in Ellie's hand-sewn comforter, her touch left in a blanket under my cheek, around my core before I fall asleep. Cop One raps on the van's driver-side window. Down the sidewalk I can see the glint of my Schwinn's frame, my passage home: the pedal bike that outlasted my wife.

Indiscernible murmurs from the cops reach me. Yeah, those kids screwed themselves when half way up the block they stopped to let one of them out of the van. Interiors ON, five heads for viewing, the poor suckers. May Days festival to start the summer—of course *they'd* be out. I'm surprised the buggers didn't roadblock Railroad Ave, knowing an Old Dump party was in the books. My bladder suddenly pulses fierce. A Löwenbräu haze in my eyes, bass of the midnight fire from the kids among the firs still ringing my ears, I was partying with the twenty-odds, and now need to pee.

Cop One looks busy as he taps on the driver-side window again, so I tug down my fly, tilt my hips forward and release into the dogbane at trunk base. A few piss drips glisten on my Garamond rubbers, and I watch from on sly under the five-fingered spread of broad chestnut leaves, my own chest bellows, expanding and contracting with light wheezes as Cop Two strides from the nose of the blue ghost car to Front Passenger. Flashlight tap on the window. Driver talking to Cop One, nervous female pitch crossing the road to me.

Scuffing my boots in the grass, I lean on the chestnut, waiting to hit the road after the action.

Holy cats, the coppers have got the booze. Copper One scribbles a ticket for Driver, ultimatum on his tongue, and a couple hundred loonie toons out the window. Ah, a hundred bucks won't kill you. I started with nothing, coming from New York, war evading. Nothing, kids. I tried my hand at carpentry under Henry Poole, but after putting knots into the plumb bob a time too many, I suckered myself into the Rossland Mining School, one of the last times they put on the courses: drilling and blasting. I was in Trail still, waiting for the school bus, twenty-one and sharp, when we got the dregs of lady St. Helen dusting her fetters and letting the ash fly. At the end of the day, the happy idiot I was traced smiles in the quarter-inch soot on the hoods of all reachable cars.

Too bad, kids, that you don't have Stuckie, Stuck Bill, the old law from town, now. I remember when he stopped me out at South Fork coming from Sandon into town, totally shittered, no seat belt when I still had a car twenty years back, two cigs between my fingers, and he'd said, Taker easy now, Willy. You get on safe to town, in his soft voice. And that was that! Those were the days! My friend, Policeman Bill, I should have said: I will buy you a beer next time you're off, and we will chat about the fishing on the Lake, on the Kootenay. I'll lay a couple bucks out for a pitcher, and we'll down it for another.

And then I met Ellie. Nineteen-eighty-four, Orwell year, and my Cig year, when I had my last toke because of her, Dear Ellie, Deerellie, my fawn-eyed doe. She came into my life manning the on tap, loggers and hippies both at peace under her fingertips. She hollered in the din like a right miss from the hay. What a different town we were then, no tourism, no advertising for strangers, no dumping pucks of chlorine in the water cause we all had the bacteria in our veins anyway. Yeah. I dropped my pack of smokes in the trash for her that day, her refusing me a date otherwise. She was from Ainsworth, her pop one of the last knife crafters around. Her pa was the best. He gave me a personalized pocketknife on our wedding day. Barrels and stickits, as he'd say, meaning guns and knives. They're all that matter. Well, he's gone. And my wife's gone. All I have left is a grave under the Pink Palace up Zwicky Road, four years warmed in sun and chilled under snow, and I can pedal my Schwinn past every day on the way into town.

Copper Two with a beer box and two-six in hand, shuffles to the daffodils and starts cracking the tops off, bottoms up to the greens. Cop One finishes writing the ticket with a corked wine bottle under his arm. On a chilly May night, when Justice in paper comes tapping on your window shield, you give a short greet, and observe the verdict: intoxicated flowers. Cop One and Two head back to their car. Ghostie pulls past me and the kids, onto the thirty-one A, and heads up the hill. I'm surprised to feel the mood lift. The van just sits there. What'd they ding you? I want to make light of the ticket with the kids so they don't feel too bad. Bit of hard work won't hurt them, to pay it off. I scratch the itch below my belly button, snaking a finger between the flannel buttonholes, but realize kids don't work hard any more. They don't know what work means. I pulled long days in the dirt of the Silvana. Start at four thousand six hundred twenty-five feet, straight in for a mile then down, down until we hit the Silversmith. Sling up your nametag—let the boys know you're in business. Foreman Perry checking in with a quick hello in the morning, Johnny Mack for powder later in the day, then one-two-three, shovel, shovel, muck out the ore, muck out the ore, come on, move it, Nipper! Before three sharp, Blastoff, fish a ten-foot fuse from the barrel, fill the holes with dynamite, hopes high for the right cut angle, and settle on a rock outside for a ten minute lunch break before BOOM. Pack up the drill bit

sling and pass it to Peter, the Bitch-For-All, god of my tools. Collect the nametag, and head to the showers. We stood eight men in the shower room, ass facing ass, no one looking down, joking over shoulders about the day's shit: stoppers jammed in the rock, bootlegs of powder sparking from yesterday's blow, dropping a drill bit, battery dead in the lamp, etc. And we did it all for the bonus, for the move ahead, pulling the three sisters—lead, silver, zinc—from the gut of a mountain, Mt. Payne our weathering god, wearing us down with grit and sweat.

I walk up the sidewalk to my bike and pass a small spray of wilted dandelions fanned in a circle. I can almost see the careless kid that picked them earlier in the day, the forgetful hand that let them drop to the concrete, excitement for the picking no longer in the fingers.

Schwinn is locked to the telephone post, and I pull his key from my chest pocket to unlock the bike, as well as the leftover baggie of weed. I stuff it in my front wicker basket and flip on his headlight and stuff my headlamp over my grey grizzle. Onwards and upwards, to cabin and nightcap. I hike my leg over the bike seat, push and go, following Ghostie's track up the highway through this town at night.

Only a fifth of the way up the hill, my thighs burn like my lungs and I brake to stop from rolling backwards. Leaning forward on the handlebars, I push a few steps up, my shin frowning at the hill, which looks long in lamplight. Headlights flicker on the steel in my hands. Over my shoulder, the beams approach. I lean to a side, scooting my bike with me, but the vehicle passes close, an inch from my handlebar. Dickhead, I shout, but my words bounce off the van's dead glass like a dumb birdie.

Plodding the hill upwards, three more cars pass, but each gives me wider berth than the first. Hilltop and onwards, I pedal up the highway.

I park Schwinn by one of the posts of the Community Garden, not bothering to lock up. First one gentle lift and drop, then another as my feet make it over the fence, me leaning on the top split-cedar rail for support. I break off a couple baby lettuce leaves and marvel how they melt in my mouth. I pick a few more, but then the plot at my feet looks empty, so I stop. My light shining over the other raised beds, I meet two red eyes peering at my chest. Doe, doe, Dodo, I call. Ellie Mellie Mo-Deli. God I miss her, that old bitch, leaving me on account of bad lungs. We would have a little garden plot of our own if she were here. I know we would. The deer flicks its ears and swings its head gracefully down. That's right, get your grub, I say, and watch its ears flick at me. I got a head full of beer, veins in my noggin tightening in an ache. Almost, but not as bad as a powder head—even dynamite gets old: the nitro-glycerine leaking in pearls on the outside of the stick, diluting blood, sifting through skin cells, and aching my thinker. My brain, and others', too. Lay the air straight, lay the line straight. Ventilation is key. Lay the pipe. Lay the ties, spike them down, get the muck cart in and move move move. Pop an aspirin and keep drilling, limbs shuddering, loud even through earplugs. Blast at three, watch the clock. A rustle behind me directs my light, and I find another pair of eyes, a skinny buck, head reared, batting long lashes at me from two metres away. Stepping back, my galoshes bump into the two-by-six sideboard. Buckie jumps, and within two steps and a leap is on the highway. I do the same, over the fence and back on Schwinn, back on the road. I veer left at Blinking Red Light Two, only the pair in town, the other down the hill. A truck rudders up the midnight highway passing me before the Mill's house. I am not afraid, on the other side of the yellow. Weeeooooo. Pedal, pedal, legs pumping me to my cabin home under the stars.

The shoulder near the Kaslo Sign looks welcome in desertion and I pause for a moment. Schwinn gets a pit stop on the dog poop bag dispenser pole, and by moonlight and stars I pick my way to the edge of the River Trail, stooping in the dark down the path. On the big purple bridge, I hear beats from the party downstream bounce the waterway up into my eardrums, soft pound across the distance. God I can deal, I am so good, hey Ellie? So good. I finger my pocket full of bills. Eyes closed, hands on the bridge rail, I flash back to the party: bottle in my hand, green light of the Christmas bulbs strung in the trees in my eyes and the boys and girls around me. Hair tossed in big swings from the girl in front of me, boobs jiggling under a white tank top, glowing three steps away. Tinkle from the glass shattering in the fire and a short yell, but I'm having a blast, stepping with the music, with the techno beat. My shin sparks again, firecrackers in the old wound. My nose wrinkles with the chilled air of the river below. I limp back up to the highway, back onto Schwinn, and head for the Quonset, head for the potato patch I tend for my bread-baking landlord who's settled his fingers in the fields of South Fork, head for my trailer home.

Two corners along the highway and snaking high beams reach me before the cat-purr of a car. Shift gears on the straight stretch, steer closer to the shoulder. *Stop your bike*, a PA voice tells me, me pedalling alone in the dark, heading to bed. *Hey old man, stop*. Ghostie pulling me over in the dark.

I am four thousand six hundred twenty-three metres from where I start at daybreak, high on my green joy for breakfast. All I want is to get home, sink onto my bed and cuddle in with my comforter. That's it. My boot kicks a few rocks into my tire as I swing my leg forward, connect to land. I rest my balls on the crossbar. Beside me stops the navy car: Cop One and Two, Grin and Grimace in uniform. Grimace waves his hand at me. *Turn off your headlight*, he says sharp. I shake a hand to my forehead, switch off the headlamp. *Why were you hiding under the tree?* I squint. *Did you think there was something to see?* I was taking a leak. *And it took you fifteen minutes?* says Grin, leaning over a laptop propped on a stand between them, face glowing cyan. I shake my head, my heartbeat low and slowing. This is what they have time to bug me for? I'm on my way home. *If I'm not being detained, officers, I think I'll keep going*, I say, and prod my foot onto Schwinn's propeller. *You got a helmet for that masterpiece of yours, there?* Grimace says. I tighten my hands on the handle bar, aware of the dents and scrapes on my bike's frame, but don't look to Ghostie's interior as I flick on my headlamp again. *I'm saving up for one*, I say. Stuckie, why'd you have to retire? You should tell these numbskulls to get a grip on the Kaslo law. I've been biking out here for years already, no trouble from the cops. Paper rattles because Grin has got a pad in his palm, pen whisking at the page. My beam wobbles in the watery ditch and up to the rocky cliff that lines my highway side, my antenna of light, feeling me along the road. *Hey*. Behind me Grimace opens his car door but I'm already three pedals away and going faster. My beam on the early chicory that slots itself between galosh and bike. My beam on the asphalt. My beam on my handle bars, my beam in the Kootenay dark like in my drift. My beam in the heart of the ore, in the twinkle of silver, in the shine of the Three Sisters in front of me like a South Fork sky-full of stars. The car door shuts and the gas revs behind me. I re-live the mine, my accident, my hands tight on the handlebars, on the bar of the stope-drill, swivel-less. Boom. My ears ring and my breath stings like they rang and stung before the bootleg blew, spitting the drill into my shin, racing air from the trigger clamped in my hand.

My shin sparks at me in starlight, like lit dynamite in my trousers, but I pedal harder. My hands glowed, I remember, hot blood in my fingers as I dragged myself from the stope after the explosion, from the sub drift, from my channel. The other guys so far away. Help over a hundred meters away.

The car purrs beside me, Grimace at my elbow. *Stop and get off the bike.* My legs moving, my armpits streaming, my headlamp on the road, on the white line, Ghostie a foot away. Ellie, Mellie Mo-deli. *Stop your bike!* Grimace yells.

I race a cop car in the dark. My shin flames as I am silly for a minute and boot the car door, foot slipping off the pedal like soap out of sudsed hands. The cliffs appear and disappear beside me in my headlight, ditch and waterweeds suddenly in the light. I go down, snake grass slapping my cheek. Whump. Breath escapes my lungs as my chest hits Schwinn's crossbar. The wicker lid pops open and my baggie, some bills, and a shirt spill. Game over, Ellie Mo-melli. I just want you.

A cold creeps through my trousers as my lungs continue to empty in the starlight, Cassiopeia in a broad W ahead through the highway gap that splices the trees. Warmth spreads from my bones, from my shin upwards. Up, after the old wars, dirt wars in those mines. Up, Ellie. I am coming home.

# Heike Lettrari

## *On Fiction: An Interview Conducted by Megan Welsh*

British Columbia's Kootenay region, historically home to draft-dodgers, artists, miners, and more, has also given us Heike Lettrari, a fifth-year creative writing and environmental studies student and the author of "Home: I am Coming." Her academic interests merge in her fiction to showcase through vibrant, ferocious language and striking narration the landscapes and people of her hometown of Kaslo.

Heike's primary focus is fiction, though she confesses to a "terrified interest" in poetry. She is currently revising a series of seven or eight stories, each of which connect to the Kootenays, and she's ready to polish them until they "feel good." This semester, she'll be buckling down on a new project: a novel-writing workshop with Bill Gaston. A self-titled "small fry" in the writing world, Heike appreciates the support and inspiration available in Victoria's writing community, particularly when—as she says—so much time is spent alone, writing and revising. "Home: I am Coming" is Heike's second piece with *The Warren Undergraduate Review*.

WARREN: Both "Home: I am Coming" and "Boom Town, Sandon Town" tell stories of British Columbia's Kootenay region. Where does the drive come from to set your fiction there? Can you describe your favourite Kootenay locale?

LETTARI: Having grown up in Kaslo, and having left the town for only short spans of time, I feel most comfortable and most safe in between the Selkirks and the Purcells—the two mountain ranges that border Kootenay Lake. Kaslo is found on its shores. I suppose returning (if only in imagination) to the place that I am so often homesick for is what comes easiest when I'm away.

My favourite place? The cliffs that an old abandoned road leads to. I trespass through a small lumber mill's property to get to them, but once there, you look out across Kootenay Lake, across downtown Kaslo, and across a beach, whose access is also available only by trespass and the Purcells. It's beautiful there in the afternoon: shimmering water below, sometimes a passing canoeist, the mountains ahead, though the pinecones, needles, and dry mosses that poke your bottom while sitting are a constant reminder not to romanticize the setting too much.

WARREN: In the construction of setting, what makes a story set in a particular place more than one that could take place anywhere?

LETTARI: Honestly, my biggest advantage is having lived and visited the locations that I've written about: Sandon, Kaslo, South Fork, Shutty Bench (different story, unpublished), New Denver, True Blue (by Kaslo)... If I have to say anything about piggy-backing off pre-existing landscapes, especially in staging a story, it's doing the research to make it feel like the characters, the speakers, convince the reader that they know what they're talking about. Or they should be upfront about it when they don't know, but on the writer's

part, half-fasting it usually doesn't work. I think that's usually where the holes and fractures start to appear: if the details aren't right, or authentic, or convincing enough, or there are some missing. For me, it has begun several times with "place," though that, admittedly, is one of many elements of access to a story.

WARREN: What advice would you give to young writers striving to document their own place, their own hometown?

LETTERRARI: Probably creating distance. For the same reason that I can make the Kootenays come alive for me in imagination in an absence from the place, I find it incredibly difficult to write about home (if even obliquely) while I am home. I want to live when I'm here, and writing removes me from that. But maybe that's an immature way of reasoning through it—a lack of discipline for sitting at a laptop while the world so wonderful around me calls me out of house and home. Still, I'd recommend a bit of distance from the subject. Perhaps some can do that in a study or an office space used for the same reason; I have difficulty making that work for me. In a way, it's as simple as respecting the spaces and the storied landscapes that were already there and incorporating the parts as were necessary to making the characters come alive, so they could tell their story with a kind of authenticity that a reader will be drawn to.

WARREN: The Kootenay region has a diverse and complex history, full of story-writing potential, from Doukhobors to draft-dodgers. How do you settle on an idea for your fiction?

LETTERRARI: I settle on what's important to me, on what has meaning for me, and what also has an attractive potential for play in language. I love sound play. Honestly, though, part of starting a story is usually an image, or a situation, a moment, or a character. It's a small slice of something that I find interesting. I'll stew on it a little bit, and then a deadline starts approaching, so I think "Okay, get going on some research so you have some body to work with."

WARREN: On a similar note, how do people and places from your own experience in, say, Kaslo or New Denver, figure in your fiction?

LETTERRARI: I have a hard time figuring people out, so when someone says something particularly interesting, or wears something neatly, or has a unique phrase, or physical feature, then I try to incorporate that in my fiction. Admittedly, I often forget many of the details that fascinate me from real life, to the point that if I have had the good fortune of remembering to write it down, or remembering it (I have a bad memory), I'm very conscious of when I stick to the "real" details I pick up. I'm always worried someone will come and say, "Hey! That was...that I said/did/had." Which wouldn't be the end of the world, but it would be a bit awkward for me. I'm a worrier—too much so, sometimes, because another part of me says, "Well, I do have some experience with x, or did observe y, so why shouldn't it be put down in writing?"

WARREN: Both "Boom Town" and "Home" draw very much, if differently, on the history of the Kootenay region. What kind of resources did you favour in your research and preparation?

LETTERRARI: Well, admittedly much of my perspective comes from living here so long. That brings out a kind of knowing that I've been able to apply to the stories I've set here.

But resources have been my parents, especially my dad, who also knows and has experienced much of the places and spaces of which I've written about, as well as historical books on the region itself.

Much of the preparation has been figuring out much of the story, and layering in those bits of reality, the history, the language, as was appropriate.

WARREN: Both stories also address the effects of the economical, political, and environmental changes that have swept through these mountain communities over the last fifty years. Alec laments the lost vitality of Sandon and Willy decries changes in Kaslo's social fabric, as well as the changes in his own life since the death of his wife. How does nostalgia figure in your work? How "good," so to speak, is change?

LETTERRARI: Time and how people perceive it have been interesting to me recently. Nostalgia, history, memory—they are all related, and each affect a person differently. Part of me wanted to explore these relationships, as well as locations, that mean something to me, because, as the old adage goes, "Change is the only constant." Whether it's good or bad is in a way irrelevant, because it's going to happen, whether we like it or not, whether it's wanted or not.

Now, we could talk about particular kinds of change. Say, a change in perspective: a more environmentally conscious way of living and appreciating a landscape like one found in the Kootenays, the strength of the natural spaces that awe and inspire people, a will to live sustainably and within "reasonable" bounds for self and planet, and a respect for the natural world, all of which have been infiltrating consciousnesses not only here, but across the globe. Or, the all-too-prevalent capitalist-driven developmental kinds of change, for which I have little patience or tolerance, and which are in the process of destroying the lifestyle that is so meaningful to me when I return home. Maybe this, too, is part of the drive that takes me back here: trying to depict this place as it is now, or as it has been, because if (ahem) Big Money gets its way, then we'll have all sorts of new condos and marinas in places they don't belong, and the quiet little town that I grew up in will no longer be a quiet little town.

But many people don't realize that, especially those wanting to attract more and more people. Our [Kaslo's] fall, winter, and spring are a respite from the nutsy gogogo, grow-growgrow efficiency drive that in the summer hits us, though that is exactly what our current economic/political system encourages and, in frustrating and suicidal ways, claims to need. In that regard, we have a system-wide failure of imagination to change. Indeed, our system is predicated in many ways on continuing down its current path because of its foundation—its need to grow. Markets (and the people under them) need to dominate all aspects of the social sphere to succeed, to get ahead, to have that buck, that advantage over the next person, no matter the "cost," which is usually environmental, social, and cultural, though is by no means limited to those spheres. Many other writers have broached this and similar topics much more eloquently than I can.

I would love to write about these issues more, or more directly, but I haven't figured out a way to express these ideas well in fiction, yet. I hesitate for fear of being didactic, which I associate with turning readers off. If nostalgia figures into my work, it's likely some skewed form of my own, for places I love, that have left me with their memories.

Note: I do not intend to ostracize these people in the slightest, or really pursue an "us/them" dichotomy. They are products of the current system just as well as I am and others who follow different ideas are. If they come with respect, good will, and good intentions

for this community, then they belong here as well as I do.

WARREN: Can you describe your working environment for me? Pen and paper or laptop keyboard?

LETTERRARI: My working environment is typically my rented room, with a glass of water and a very neat and tidy desk around me. It's typically late at night, though I've found myself starting to enjoy revising during mornings. I'm poor at revising. I feel like I put so much energy into first drafts that it takes me a bit to overcome my disappointment in the shortcomings I find when I look back at my work. But—I will admit I so often forget what I've written shortly after I've written it that I sometimes pleasantly surprise myself on returning.

With my laptop I can keep up with how quickly my thoughts come out. Already years ago I got frustrated with pen and paper writing because I couldn't keep up with myself.

WARREN: What's next? Will you write again about the Kootenays?

LETTERRARI: I am in the process of revisiting a number of older pieces, while also being daunted and excited by the prospect of starting a novel for the Spring novel workshop. I've taken great pleasure from visiting the Kootenays in imagination, [and] I would maybe surprise myself if I didn't write about or in one of its gems again.

# Jordan Munteer

## *Exegesis*

*Gesang ist Dasein*  
 “Singing is Being”  
 –Rilke

The Takaka bridge underslung  
 with campfires. Battered mussels  
 browning on a skillet. And the sound  
 of water moving every task.

Moths flicker two-dimensional  
 on the membrane of my tent, the half-moon’s  
 slender light a lamp for this  
 blue game of shadows.

Messages always arrive  
 on wings. Think of Apollo, evenness  
 in stride, conduit between gods.  
 To exist and to have meaning  
 are the same, then the moths are singing.

Between their brown pages  
 a frequency dedicated to the small  
 urgencies of the day; the dangers of being  
 alone too long; what plants are edible;  
 innumerable hatchings of things,  
 each following its own poetics.  
 Morning’s bitten-light struggles  
 out over the hills.

I am listening. Dark trees surrender.  
 Mist among the fences, a slowly loping carriage,  
 has come to reclaim little wings.

Still shivering in long johns I open  
 the zipper of the tent. Green pastures  
 face me like a window breathed upon,  
 glyphs once traced on the pane with a finger  
 showing through again

## *Girl Sleeping*

i. White sheets, the delineation of her body  
as if the fabric had carefully fallen in a thousand pieces.

If it snowed here, she would be snow.

I imagine it is January and snowflakes descend  
from the ceiling, their quiet competition  
fills the room, each vying for that dark well  
of her navel. Thoughtless in their one thought.

It is the moment before  
they melt, when they are still  
aware of what they are,  
alert to their passing

and each dreams of the simple grief.  
The kind my imagination holds  
as the space between a hummingbird's wings.

Sunlight washes through the window  
and reminds me it isn't winter. Lilacs laid  
on the windowsill to dry. A leftover moth  
asleep on the glass, black and white sumie  
dusted onto its wings.

ii. Her hair splayed like a thousand spilled scrolls,  
you, the surviving scribe  
and myth reader.

The first time you are close  
with someone you've always known.

She lies white, amniotic, every angle snug  
in its own component, tight in its place.  
The pinecone of her body,  
waiting to stretch.

Sap. Her smell  
collects on her lips, the part  
between them something dangerous.

Reach toward her like a ghost. This  
is imperative.

Fingertip's slur  
over her scapula, brief tension that touch is,  
like ducks worrying the surface of their ponds.

How she stiffens, then.  
And then, the slow tentative reception of water,  
skin held against itself.

Cilia in the mind flashing  
like orange fish, not merely sensation.

Between these things, she develops  
new verbs. The delay between breaths  
while she dreams beside you.

The agility of a sigh when it encounters  
the numerous incubus of sleep.

Nightmares.

Monster-tails, green-tiled,  
wriggling under her eye-lids.

# Robyn Cadamia

## *An Observer's Guide to Birds*

“Little is said, but much is meant...”

—Gilbert White, on the language of birds.

### INCUBATION

The doctors cracked open my mother's belly in the first week of April and took me out. They swiftly placed me behind glass and kept me warm. If my mother hadn't been so ragged, she would have protested their taking me. She stayed in the hospital with me for over a week, until I was strong enough to go. There are pictures of her next to my incubator, holding my hand. I am covered in tubes, held to me with tape. It looks like the tape is holding me together. My body, hardly beginning to unfurl, still doesn't know how big, or small, it is.

### BIRDSONG

I was nine and picking bait worms from a styrofoam container when my cousin skipped up behind me and began to sing. I recognized the song, and his mocking tone. My body became hot. I remembered myself crouching next to the big yellow stereo with my cheek to the speaker, singing into the microphone, low enough that no one outside my bedroom could hear. My cousin had found it in the closet, the cassette tape of my recorded voice. It felt good when I had been singing it, it felt full and lovely, but it was never meant to be heard. I was never supposed to find out that it wasn't any good. I never believed that I would be a singer, but I wanted to believe that I could have been one.

And so I continued to endeavour in secret. My parents gave me a blue guitar for graduation, and I played it late into the night while they were asleep. Concealed by my bedroom walls, I learned to hold the thin picks between my fingertips, to pull and drag them across the strings. If I heard anything outside my door, I would stop and listen like a creature of prey. Sometimes, I would wake and play before doing anything else.

It didn't occur to me that my bedroom was right above their bedroom. I wasn't aware of how early they woke up each day, of how wide open the morning was.

### FLIGHT

When I was young we had a cabin and I'd play in the woods. There was a tree fort a hundred metres back, behind the outhouse, and I'd catch frogs and haul them in buckets up the ladder. Some months I would collect caterpillars, and in the autumn I would keep jars of worms. I made posters of squirrels and rabbits for the walls as if it was a pet shop, as if I could have caught squirrels and rabbits.

One day, while on a walk with my mother, a small grouse flew into a window. It was injured, so I picked it up and cradled it in the front of my sweatshirt. I carried it home that way. I nursed it for a week, nesting it in baskets around the cottage, trying to keep it warm with old socks and towels. I don't recall my parents saying anything about the bird in the

house, lying sick on the kitchen table.

I buried it beneath the tree fort when it never came back to life. It was wrapped in a baggie with an orange twist tie. My father helped me dig the hole after dinner. He made me hurry because the mosquitoes were so bad that summer and it was getting dark. I dug it up the next year, but the baggie was empty. No feather or bone. The orange tie was still wrapped around the opening, the little note I'd written still inside, as if there never was a bird to begin with.

#### BEHAVIOUR

The hues were greyish and purple as we drove to the church, the air was somehow both cool and warm. The sky was low and dark for midday, and everything shone though we never felt it rain. My bouquet was heavy as an oak branch in my hand. It was plush with mauve and green berries that shivered when I shivered, and white wax flowers small enough to fit between a sparrow's beak.

The room hushed as I entered and they watched me, removed, through the lenses of their cameras. They had come to observe me, my dress, my veil, my bridal mannerisms. They'd come to see me blush, although I had always been blushing. Perhaps modesty had been my way of preparing for my wedding day. The way other children pranced around in gossamer veils, I treaded the ground, shy and nervous, looking up and out at the world, my cheeks always warm and red, my heart always aflutter. But this day was different. I felt as safe as if I were asleep. It all felt airy, as though I wasn't really there.

#### MIGRATION

The dock was long and wide and ended right above a forest of lake weed. Each summer someone would spend a day diving down and uprooting all the slime they could from the bottom and tossing it onto the dock, so the children could swim there unbothered. I learned to jump from that dock into the water. Each summer I would gain confidence and attempt something new until eventually I could jump from boats, from cliffs, and from swings strung from trees. I daydream now of rising early and walking to the end of that dock with a blanket falling over my shoulders, and standing there, just me, just standing. The lake, filled anew with weeds, would not recognize me.

We moved almost as far west as we could get when I was ten, and I haven't found a dock or lake since like the one we left in Manitoba, covered in snow. The road here, the road back, any tracks I made—all of it, disappeared beneath a drift. But my parents yearned for the coast. They were following friends, and leading others, toward the sea.

#### NESTING HABITS

Now I wonder where I belong. I collect little things from the places my husband and I have been to, the places we always come back from. I keep small pieces of paper or beads or broken wristbands to remind me. I gather nuts from Oahu and a paper hat from Chiang Mai, an artificial flower from a wedding in Mexico, an elephant marionette we never meant to buy in Thailand. It is all proof of where I've been and defines where I am. I build our home out of it in a small second story apartment on Vancouver Island.

In Cambodia we acquired a shadow puppet of a bird, carved ornately from brittle wood. It is small, but if you hold it at the right angle to the light, its shadow spreads and all of its complex markings cover the wall and everything on it.

REPRODUCTION

I imagine my grandma's kitchen in Saskatchewan smelling like cooked sugar and butter the day I was born. Her forearms, always deep in floured bread dough or dish water, would have still been strong then. Her hair still rich with colour. I imagine her hands around a worn plaid tea towel as she saw it from the window above the sink. As the story goes, it stopped just outside on the railing of her porch: that first red-breasted robin of spring, perched just for a moment before it up and flew away.

“Fly, bird, fly away; teach me to disappear.”

—Alberto Caeiro, on the birds passing and leaving no trace.

# Jesse Cowell

## *Zanziger*

*Lights rise. CANTOR, a big man, lies dead on a mortuary slab. ZANZIGER, a worn-out mortician, enters and sits on a stool. She wears gloves and an apron. Her hair is done up so that it doesn't fall in front of her face. She lights a cigarette.*

ZANZIGER: They went and took my house. Struck it to the ground. They wrenched it out a' this earth and broke its timbre like it was kindling. I watched 'em do it. I shouted, and I cursed them who was doin' the wreakin'. But they couldn't hear me. They got their jobs, and the money's too loud. And I had to marshal up every teaspoon a'mercy I got not to pray. By god, I wanted to. I wanted to clasp my hands together tight and ask all them shades listenin' in the night, all them gods a' the grave maggot, to wreak vengeance on those...desecrators. Defilers. I wanted to beg for a curse to put on their heads: May you never feel a shiver a' happiness in all your life. May every love you have spoil and rot, may you die screamin' for someone, anyone, to lie with you on you on your deathbed, and may no one answer your call. May your children be born misbegotten and lame. So that when they lay to sleep in their cradles, wheezin' and gaspin', the only thing that stops you from smotherin' the life out of 'em in the dark is the thought that you might have to touch 'em. And may you live a long, long, miserable life. But...them men from the bank, they just doin' their jobs. They don't deserve nothin' like that. I'm sure them quiet gods woulda done it for me, I got a lot a favours due. Years a checkin' things, givin' some folk second tries, you build up a trust or two. But none of them wreckers deserved that kind a' justice. But...you Cantor.

*ZANZIGER puts out her cigarette on CANTOR's neck.*

ZANZIGER: You...Bobby Benton, died two years past, bullet to the head. They found him out in the woods. Wolves had gotten all at his face, and someone'd swiped his wallet, couldn't figure out who he was for days. Had to have his widow confirm the body. His rot-tin', half-eaten body, ain't no way to see your husband...Clarence Dallow, died a year and eight months ago. Gunshots to the chest. Found him lyin' in Mather's wheat fields. Joey Corbett, died a year and a half ago. Shot to the head. Francis Mainfield, eleven months back, bullet again, Desmond Foulter, five months. Billy Reynolds. Four weeks since he been missin'. But I'm bettin' he'll show up soon. Face in the mud. Well, Cantor. Remind me, would ya. What were those names you done knifed into the side of your desk drawer? Why'd you bother whittlin' dead man's names? Now, don't you lie to me, Cantor. Don't you lie because I know they's dead and buried 'cause I'm the one who fuckin' buried them! Pause. You a tapeworm, you know that? A leech suckin' us dry. You stick to our gutters like the insides of our guts, latch on with your teeth and...you don't deserve this. You don't deserve no second chances, you hear me. But I am better than you. I am a fuckin' saint. You have one chance, that's it. One. You'd better make it worth my time.

*ZANZIGER hits CANTOR on the chest. His eyes open.*

ZANZIGER: Get up. I said get up. I ain't got all day.

# Contributors

**Karen Campbell** is a fourth-year Visual Arts student. Her passion for digital arts drives her dream to create concept and character art for video games and movies.

**Alina Cerminara** was born and raised in Alberta, but moved to the West Coast as soon as she got her sea legs. Though short in stature, she double majors in third-year awesome (Theatre and Creative Writing).

**Brittany Bates**, originally from the Kootenays, is a fourth-year Creative Writing student, focusing on poetry.

**Dani Proteau**, a Visual Arts student, does not work within a specific medium. She is more interested in the concept—the medium is chosen accordingly.

**Hilary Smith** is a fourth-year Creative Writing and Women's Studies student. She is currently interning for *The Malahat Review* and editing the creative nonfiction section for *This Side of West*.

**Aaron Lam** is a Victoria-based photographer.

**Maegan Rose Mehler** is a fourth-year Fine Arts student. She spends the majority of her time with a coffee in one hand and a paint brush in the other.

Born and raised a Kootenay kid, **Heike Lettrari** loves many things leaved and breathing. She is currently completing her fifth and final year of a double major in Creative Writing and Environmental Studies. "Home: I Am Coming" is Heike's second piece published in *The Warren*.

**Jordan Munteer** describes himself as a victim of wanderlust and coffee, which has produced a rather unstable effect. He is currently taking language courses.

**Robyn Cadamia** is a fourth-year Creative Writing student. She took to writing at an early age and in recent years has begun appearing in various publications like *EAT Magazine* and *Monday Magazine*, as well as *The Martlet* and *This Side of West*.

**Jesse Cowell** is in his final year at UVic, and is a Writing/Theatre major. "Zanziger" is Jesse's second piece published in *The Warren*.



