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Elegy for water and ourselves

gillian harding-russell
University of Saskatchewan

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Elegy for water and ourselves

Water the colour of the sky
on a kind day

we celebrate. Water the rose opaque
of smoke when there are forest fires

we regard with caution
and may secretly admire.

Water the hue of puce clouds
in the gloom of wet weather;

water the colour of the raw earth
it travels through in river arteries

and veins visited by the green populations
that make it their summer home

we might ignore. Water travelling our arteries
past rocks and waterfalls

or back up the blue estuaries to enter
the heart's valves and its chambers. Water is

our medium: without it
there is no life, no movement towards

or away. Water is our source
crystal as first lakes; ammonia tasting

today in silver taps or at its most elemental
drinking through the long throat of a cool

well on a hot day: but water
is all colours and every well

has its own taste and darkness, and
each district's weakness reflects our own

sewage effluent or agricultural
run off, pesticides or Roundup

iron or mercury, arsenic slurry or PCB tailings
from the mines, a rainbow slick

on the water's mirror from the metal shunt
carrying black blood under a major river

artery. All we have consumed, antibiotics last
Wednesday or estrogen in pills a decade

ago, insulin daily or ephedrine
seasonally, Prozac or Red Bull

that have travelled through our bodies,
and been rejected

subsumed in the lagoon of liver
and kidney, returns to

the water that feeds us, muddying
or complicating

altering its essence: our essence. And
so water that is our life

may be our destruction, and we are
our own destroyers.

GILLIAN HARDING-RUSSELL has written three poetry collections and five chapbooks. In the fall of 2016, a sequence of her poems entitled *Making sense* won *Exile's* Gwendolyn MacEwen chapbook award, and her chapbook *Foxlove* came out in the Alfred Gustav chapbook series.