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excerpts from The Names

Tim Lilburn

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excerpts from *The Names*

by

Tim Lilburn



Sara Riel, the Convent, Île-à-la-Crosse, 1874

A one storey poplar pole building stands on a sandy point that juts into a large lake, canoes pulled up near. Two or three islands are visible in the distance, but not the other shore. She sits, enclouded in grey cloth, before a piano and speaks to her absent brother, who is in hiding, pursued by police in eastern Canada.

I

This north takes me into its mouth, its lack

of individuation a mouth, the unscrolling a mouth --

rivers, lakes, pines, tundra.

Pines, infinite lakes.

In the singing, children of Cree shale-

slipping up their voices' sides, I see fresh possibility,

fields growing edible bulbs, roads, creatures gnawing leaves,

the books of a new country, curled like baby mice inside the sound.

We could live there.

The plateau slightly below the peaks of what comes from their mouths.

My lungs first poured at that

particular hour winters back, two sloughs

slumped in me and I pooled in my bed,

upper parts of me dry enough

for elation-flares, conducting delivery of extreme unction. The priest said *pray*

to Marguerite-Marie Alacoque

I did and forced the return of my clothes

which the sisters had ferociously hidden.

I bled and I lived and doubled my soul.

I returned to potato hills and the seeping mudroom.

I ought to bury my name
with my life under cemetery snow.
We eat only the lettuce
from mother's seeds,
the bed alive just inside the back door.

II

My eye falls
from the second world, smoking, but held
by a wire of loving is saved from water.
In this mobile, this monad with retractable green, paned wings
I have my own homunculous equipment.
I smell the action of chlorophyll
and it noses me
and thus I see the skeleton of language
inside deers' bodies and inside pike's
swim paths. I read it
meaning it hums at me and around me.
Oratio pro lacrimis. I would
be the food of my tears.
I did not make a bid on Rupert's Land.
I was not a signatory to Treaty 6.
I gather voices escaping
from all things produced as matter,
harvesting them as I would wild rice,
gently tapping along their sides.

End of August

Queen Anne's lace, lurk
of vetch in forests, white
clover shaken in a fist of final bees,
dust chalks everywhere.

And the gloom of fireweed
in abandoned quarries,
autumn's vampiric looks;
a leaf falls from oceanspray,
this is thinking.

A dog barks,
cold pours its slag
 in a scoop through sky.

The hoard of neglect
is in the beauty-vault of things.
Fewer than eight red pear leaves
among sodden pine needles on my low shed roof.

Swan Plain

I've found the place.

This is what I've decided.

Couple of trailers, a store

From the party days in the early Fifties at the crossroads,

Some chocolate bars inside, whitening, four

Or five packs of cigarettes, Export A, devices for dehorning cattle.

I fall to pieces, Patsy Cline.

You can feel it, soaked into everything,

Palatial entropy.

I'd move the Vatican here

Or something like Pythagoras's camp.

A few aluminum lawnchairs on the grassy carpet

Between the units: the curia.

Lovely place for it. Juan, the Card, (aka primo

Cardinale) in one of the singlewides. Marcel, holographic

Archbishop of Axel Heiburg Island also there. If you needed more

Shopping, there's always the town

Of Plenty near. We'd quietly lay down

The *anathema* sits over a few beers after supper, waving away mosquitos

Taking turns tipping poplar chunks into the fire pit.

The beckoning of this is heading in our direction.

Allan Stanley moved the puck behind the net and looked up.

The moment clicking, engine shedding heat.

This is how it works out.

Everything will be padded in and fine.

Oh

Living in the truck west
of Lake Cowichan, past the Youbou turn,
almost at the coast,
in the bloom of sleeping
bag and charcoal, back quiet in thin valleys,
walking, poking around with a stick, in clearcut, in slash,
I am one of the first to meet winter coming
off the great water
and give it my name which disappears
inside.

Etienne Gilson on Bernard's mystical theology,
book of lips and breath,
top maps, I soft-mouthed exegete, parking receipts, one
black banana on the dash, another on the passenger side floor.
Coho just beginning to taste
the fresh water fan
at the tip of the creeks,
eagles slide three hundred miles toward rivers' emptying mouths.
I slot whatever else I have to say into reed-shuffle at Lizard Lake.
Cold flows off the morning moon,
oak leaves turning purple-black
at the foot of southern mountains.

TIM LILBURN His poetry has been translated into Chinese, Spanish, Polish, French, German and Serbian. His most recent book is *Assiniboia* (2012), an opera for chant in three parts, sections of which have been choreographed and performed by contemporary dance companies in Canada, notably Regina's New Dance Horizons. He recently collaborated with Edward Poitras and Robin Poitras of New Dance to produce the opera/dance "House of Charlemagne" on the life of Honoré Jaxon. A new poetry collection, *The Names*, from which these excerpts come, will appear spring, 2016. He teaches at the University of Victoria. He was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 2014.

To read an excerpt from Lilburn's *Assiniboia* go to http://www.alecc.ca/uploads/goose/THE_GOOSE_ISSUE_8_FALL_2010.pdf

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