

# In Search of Tawny Grammar: Poetics, Landscape, and Embodied Ways of Knowing

Rishma Dunlop, York University, Canada

## **Abstract**

*In this article, the researcher explores Thoreau's notion of *gramatica parda*, a dark and dusky knowledge inspired by the natural world as the concept relates to embodied knowing, alternative, artistic forms of research representation, and education. The approaches are interdisciplinary, drawing from perspectives of feminist geography, literary and aesthetic theories, theories of embodiment, perception, and ecology. Through these multiple lenses, poetry, fiction, and narrative forms are introduced as possibilities for epistemologies and ontologies. In this work, the researcher draws on her own work as poet/fiction-writer/researcher and teacher. The narrative explorations are sites that envision ecology, landscape, and poetic "story-telling" as sites of pedagogical possibilities.*

## **Résumé**

*Dans cet article, la chercheuse sonde la notion thoreauiste de *gramatica parda* (savoir énigmatique et obscur insufflé à l'individu par le monde naturel), concept lié à la connaissance infuse, à l'éducation et à l'interprétation-représentation de la recherche sous des formes artistiques parallèles. La question est abordée sous l'angle de l'interdisciplinarité, inspirée des optiques de la géographie féministe, des théories littéraires et esthétiques, des concepts d'incarnation, de perception et d'écologie. Par cette lorgnette plurielle, la poésie, la fiction et les formes diverses du récit sont présentées comme une épistémologie et une ontologie possibles. Dans ce travail, Rishma Dunlop puise dans son parcours de poète, d'écrivaine, de chercheuse et de professeure. Les explorations narratives constituent un espace où l'écologie, le paysage et la « narration » poétique seraient porteurs de possibilités pédagogiques.*

## Telling Our Stories: A Primal Affair

Who will speak these days

If not I

If not you?

(Rukeyser, 1968, p. 113)

As a researcher, university professor, poet, writer, teller of stories, I believe that our landscape, our natural world stretches us, inspires us, moves us to new places of understanding and knowing the world, of interpreting experiences, of new ontologies, new epistemologies. By exploring landscape in artistic, aesthetic forms, in academic institutions, for me, a feminist invocation is born and sustained, one that challenges the patriarchal forms of discursive practices that have long been ingrained in academia. My quest is to seek forms of representation for our work that embody a tawny grammar, Thoreau's notion of the term translated from the Spanish *gramatica parda*, a dark and dusky knowledge, inspired by the natural world, a language that is semiotic, deep below the surface of words, below the surface of our skins. It is a primal affair, as naturalist Terry Tempest Williams (1994) writes in *An Unspoken Hunger*:

It is time to take off our masks, to step out from behind our personas—whatever they might be: educators, activists, biologists, geologists, writers, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats—and admit we are lovers, engaged in an erotics of place. Loving the land. Honoring its mysteries. Acknowledging, embracing the spirit of place—there is nothing more legitimate and there is nothing more true.

That is why we are here. It is why we do what we do. There is nothing intellectual about it. We love the land. It is a primal affair. (p. 84)

As I think about research and what is particularly central to me, I am increasingly convinced that I must engage in a resistance to the fear of the open heart that pervades academic life. As academics and as artists, we must be able to tell our stories with honesty, emotion, conviction, the art and intellect and compassion of individuals flowing through our landscapes like water. It is this creation of an empathic human geography that will effect change in the academy. I want to encourage generations of researchers to speak to each other and to their communities with open hearts, to be eye/witnesses to the world, to speak in our own voices, not the third person impersonal historically sanctioned as the proper voice of academic research.

### Gifts: Land of Enchantment

In April 2001 I was invited to do a keynote speech at a graduate research conference at the University of New Mexico. I fell in love with the New Mexico landscape, *Tierra Encantada* as it is called, enchanted land—impossibly blue skies, Ave Maria blue skies, the pink adobe, the sagebrush, the desert heat.

After I returned to Toronto, Carol Brandt, an organizer of the conference, and a Graduate Student at the University of New Mexico, sent me a gift of a beautiful card with an image by Georgia O'Keeffe and two books by naturalist Terry Tempest Williams. I devoured these books the night I received them and they have been beautiful gifts that I have read again and again. Carol's gifts have moved me at every reading and the Graduate students and faculty at the University of New Mexico have a special place in my heart.

Terry Tempest Williams writes about Utah and the Nevada Desert and the Bear River Bird Refuge and she writes about women and landscape and vision, rewriting genealogy. Her narratives have so many resonances to my feelings of embodiment in the landscape of Boundary Bay in Tsawassen, British Columbia and the Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Ladner, British Columbia. I wept over these books. One is titled *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1992). Much of this is about Williams' mother's death from cancer, the legacy of cancer for all the women in Williams' family, interwoven with essays on landscape and the consequences of growing up around the fallout of atomic bomb detonation in the Nevada desert. It is a spiritual, poetic book, about women, nature, and grieving. It is about a horrifying legacy of cancer in women who were exposed to nuclear detonations in their environments. The other book sent to me is titled *An Unspoken Hunger* (Tempest Williams, 1994). It is also eloquent, moving, a strong voice that speaks about the lack of intimacy with the natural world as having initiated a lack of intimacy between humans. These narratives are about feminist activism, a push at the existing order of things.

Stories have led to activism, to bearing witness. We have only to remember the letter of Olga Owens Huckins describing the horrifying effects of pesticides on birds that led to Rachel Carson's writing of *Silent Spring* in 1962. Stories can push at the existing order of things. This is what research is about, from the French *recherche*, to search again, to see anew. The word narrative comes from the Latin root *gnarus*, to know; the act of narration becomes a way of knowing.

In 1996, I moved to the landscape of Boundary Bay with my two daughters at a time when I was leaving a 17 year marriage and struggling to complete my doctorate. I suppose my encounter with the landscape of Boundary Bay was an encounter where this landscape witnessed my places of deepest grieving, a letting go of the girl, the young woman I had been, a letting go of an entire story I thought I would live out, a realization that I would have to rewrite the script, resisting the myth of normalcy.

Grief dares us to love once more. Finding Boundary Bay was also a beginning of a new way of knowing the world for me, acknowledging that there are ways of knowing that lie deep beneath the surface of words, beneath the carefully planned curricula of our schooling. To really teach and to learn, we must honour those deeply felt parts of our selves. It was this place of ocean, estuary, tidal rhythms, ecosystems of wetlands, multitudes of birds

migrating on the Pacific Flyway, this wild place that taught me the healing lessons that will shape the rest of my life, a geography of hope.

## Reading/Writing Boundary Bay as Tawny Grammar

Language is the very voice of the trees, the waves, the forest. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 155)

In 1999, my novel titled *Boundary Bay* became the first novel to be accepted as a doctoral dissertation in a Faculty of Education in Canada. The novel is about poetry, landscape, ecology, education, feminist theory, art, and aesthetics as ways of knowing. The main character is Evelyn, a new faculty member in a Faculty of Education, a poet, a teacher of literature. Her story becomes intertwined with my story, our stories.

In my novel I wrote about the landscape of Boundary Bay, about primal ways of knowing. I was inspired by readings of Rachel Carson's (1968) *The Sea Around Us*, by the narratives of painters: Helen Frankenthaler's huge abstract landscapes, Mark Rothko's vibrant color fields, Richard Diebenkorn's landscapes that reminded me of farm fields in Ladner.

In the introduction to the novel, the genre of story, of fictional narrative is called upon:

We intertwine our fictions through an assemblage of facts, tangled through the language of bones. The writer wants to write of men and women, real or invented, offering them open destinies. She wants her voice to be like a modern painting, voice and story like the colors of a Mark Rothko canvas. This is how she wants the story to be, written in the alphabet of bones and blood, trembling with light and vibrant hues, spiraling with winds, rooted in the earth, breathing with tides. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 22)

The story begins with the coyote:

The San Juan winds sweep across the bay, rippling the waters like blown ink. They are winds that make lovers restless, mothers wonder where their children are. Hot breezes spiral across the midsummer sky, peeling back layers of memory. On the shoreline, the spruce needles rustle underneath his stride as he emerges from the boundary line between the forest and the open sands. He climbs the clay cliffs to get a clear view of the schoolyard. The grounds are deserted, closed for the summer. The world of classrooms and hallways is quiet. There are no echoes of bells and talking and laughter and music that haunt the fragments of his dreams.

The familiar ones are there, standing in the cemetery, the wind fingering their faces. He moves silently down the hillside to the edge of the graveyard to watch the mourners, his stride cutting a path through wild grasses. He fixes his narrowed eyes on the young girl with the green eyes. His nostrils fill with the faint fresh scent of her. The crowd stares at the coyote and something turns in their hearts, a stirring, some ancient awakening. He sits on his haunches, raises his muzzle and

begins his wild singing, sharp and piercing unlike any human music. The raw howl clasps their throats with a call they cannot answer, a boundary they cannot cross. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 29)

\*

It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:  
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,  
drawn from the cold hard mouth  
of the world, derived from rocky breasts  
forever, flowing, and flown (Bishop, 1991, p. 72)

Evelyn names her daughter Mara, like the breath of the sea. Mara had sea secrets in her eyes. Evelyn always savored words, liked to dissect them, turn them over in her mind, taste them. She heard that in Hebrew *Marah* meant bitter. Sometimes when she touched the baby, she felt as if she was dipping her hand into the ocean. Her wrists would ache, her bones would ache and her hands would burn. As if water was a transmutation of fire, feeding on the stones and burning with dark flames. Evelyn nursed her child to the rhythms of tides. If you tasted this body of water, it would first taste bitter, then briny, then it would burn the tongue. . . .

Sometimes, after Jay and the baby were asleep she would sometimes slip out to walk the beach at night. She loved to see the ocean's offerings washed up by the tides. At night, she could inhale the scents of lilies in gardens and she could lose herself in the magical tangles of poppies that had seeded themselves on the beach. Tall pods and pink-fleshed, their stems rooted themselves in her. It was this time, this nocturnal time that belonged to her only. Here she was not mother, lover, wife. Here the night landscape teaches her to paint pictures in her mind, carrying them home in whispered songs to write poems into the light of early morning hours. The deep, sonorous rhythms of her body listening with every drop of blood to make speech out of silence. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 50)

Later in the novel, Evelyn finds a place/space to write in Boundary Bay.

Here she could write, supported in the belief that poetry is a natural upswelling of language in an awakened and interested heart—an irresistible and effortless answering within the individual to the continual calling of the Other, natural, supernatural or human. Poetry as possessing a virtually magic power to change and improve the external order of life, softening relations between people.

Sometimes in her imagined calligraphies, she writes the parchment scrolls of Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*. She writes her own *Pillow Book* . . . *A List of Things to Make the Heart Beat Faster* . . . anything indigo is splendid, wrapping your lover in indigo silk, marks on paper in indigo ink, the veins of your heart. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 70)

In the novel, human emotion finds its metaphors in nature:

She reads Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*: *grief is not the clear melancholy the young believe it. It is like a siege in a tropical city. The skin dries and the throat parches as though one were living in the heat of the desert; water and wine*

*taste warm in the mouth and food is the substance of sand; one snarls at one's company; thoughts prick one through sleep like mosquitoes.* (Dunlop, 1999, p. 78)

It is the light that moves her. The light in this landscape is like the spreading of honey, like the beginning of reading. Here, past words can be replaced, made shiny and new again, spreading honey over the page and the days become sweet with learning. Dusk over Boundary Bay is always indigo, edged in pink and gold and silver light. In these descending dusks she walks, her mind stroked by silvered fingers spreading the forms of words across the waves as the blue disappeared from the sea and daylight faded. In the lunge of night she begins to write again, her blood and imagination stirred by the sea. She dips into her mind, re-fashioning memory into art. She writes where dreams swirl between the boundaries of shadow and light. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 79)

Snippets of Nicole Brossard: *reading the text of your project, I become aware of the extent to which our fictions intersect . . . let us exit fiction via fiction. We will exist in a story of our own design.*

Evelyn makes notes for the next seminar on Women and Fiction. Their stories of reading intertwine in literary geography, an eternity mapped and embodied in words and books. Aritha van Herk calls it *Geografictione*; a neologism. An addition to language, to theory of literature—place, person, memory, fiction, resignifying language. As Adrienne Rich writes: *an atlas for a difficult world.*

They will read Brossard: *As I write, I think about my next novel. She will be a character, she will astonish me with every sentence. I will handle the sentences with care. I will be fierce in language. Uncompromising. She will be patient before the world, perfectly desirable as a heroine. She will be a poet. . . . I want this she alive.*

Evelyn thinks about Roland Barthes, imagines speaking to her students with his words: *étonne-moi, astonish me.*

Evelyn's mind wanders. She thinks about Boundary Bay, about holding that landscape in her arms, the contours of the mind like nature—thoughts flowing like water—knowledge, memory inextricably bound with the earth—the mind with its own ecology, inseparable from the body—remembrance of things past—not just the taste of things but the turning of the body in the bed—language inseparable from experience, from her skin. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 85)

\*

## Geography

I have stitched my skirts to continents  
danced on the equator  
dipped my hands into the Lesser Amazon  
the emerald mouths of rivers

I have opened up the Atlas with my bones  
found my own wild acres

I have loved places  
the azure of the Adriatic  
the salt and foam of the Atlantic  
the sun dissolving copper on city rooftops

but questions of travel are resolved  
in these wetlands  
my body an aviary  
for seabirds

now I see at the edges of darkness  
extremes of moonlight

in Boundary Bay  
the Pacific Ocean speaks my name  
reveals its voice  
and water becomes my mouth

I read this place  
mapped in my wet fingers  
thumbing me open (Dunlop, 2001, p. 13)

### Invocation

The coyote stands  
in a grainy sea  
the fields oceans of heat  
crops sucking the air dry

I am surprised to see him  
watching me at midday  
I thought him a nocturnal creature  
his eyes burn into me  
becoming me  
becoming the falcon circling  
the bees droning in meadows of wild flowers  
the children's voices  
as they pluck blackberries  
from the brambles

becoming the lanes of magnolia  
between fading tangerine roses and purple irises  
becoming my poems  
my inky letters fading  
words and stories fragile  
on papers slightly yellowed

in a few months they will dream themselves  
reborn into the heart of an arbutus tree  
spreading roots in beds of coastal rock  
in rainforests near the clay cliffs

and I have the wind and sea  
in my voice  
I harness the crescent moon  
dragging it through unfurrowed fields  
whispering a ragged prayer  
to heron-priested skies. (Dunlop, 2001, p. 14-15)

Her new book of poetry is writing itself. This writing is a haunting, something that does not call out to all others, but beckons Evelyn with its crooked fingers to enter through doorways slightly ajar. In the strange shadows, things she has never seen before become familiar. She believes writing poetry is a physical act, dangerous, excessive, necessary. She likes it this way, this inquest, slightly fearful, a journey into the melt of the world, this labyrinth of chants and fluid words and fractal glimpses revealing all.

Catherine, the next door neighbour, is an elderly woman with steel grey hair. She peers over the hedge through her thick glasses. She has taken to coming out to her backyard garden in the late afternoons when she knows Evelyn will have returned from work. As the sun fades, Evelyn sits with her coffee on an old garden bench with her writing. Finally, one day, Catherine asks, "What are you writing? Is it a diary?"

"No. I write poetry." *The words are purposes, the words are maps to lost places, new places. Evelyn thinks of novelist Katherine Mansfield saying that it took "terrific hard gardening" to produce inspiration . . . the hard gardening of knowing, the pen the ink of the mind.* (Dunlop, 1999, p. 106)

As Evelyn's daughter grows, the narratives about Mara become stories about the mother/poet/academic, about mother-child relations in the world. These narratives collide with my own as a mother of two teenage daughters. This poem, written for my oldest daughter when she was sixteen, became part of the novel, the tangling of fact and fiction:

### If the Heart Asks for Pleasure First

My daughter emerges from  
the pastel cocoon  
of her room  
through the ticking  
of the hallway clock  
floats down the stairs  
into the dusk  
as the stream of possible lovers begins

I still imagine her slender bones  
need cradling  
her body light as a dragonfly  
skeletal recesses like a soft-shelled crab  
an easy mark  
for crushing

her face mine, ours  
the tendrils of youth  
still visible  
her separateness a gift  
tied with the full weight  
of my heart-salt

as she enters the night sky  
orchid and indigo  
the evening news tells stories  
of clipped wings, small coffins  
the earth scarred with grief  
hearts opened and closed

and I am reminded of what I know  
that there is nothing stronger  
than to be helpless before desire  
knowing that moment when  
the heart must answer yes  
when there is no longer  
any choice but assent

tonight at my desk  
covered with papers  
scraps of poems  
every alphabet my child  
my heart stops and starts in the dark  
until the sound of her key in the lock  
my necessary lullaby

(Dunlop, 2000, p. 16-17)

\*

Toward the end of the novel a real incident with a seal finds itself embedded in my fictional story:

The tide has receded leaving a seal pup beached far out into the bay. Someone called the SPCA and was told that if the tide didn't wash the seal back in within a few hours it would die.

The residents knew that the tide would not come in for another eight hours or so. They have been told that they have to keep the animal wet. *We have to be careful not to get too close, not to touch it with human hands, or it will be rejected by its mother*, a woman tells them.

The moon is high and the wind whips the trees. Evelyn, Grace, Sam, Catherine and Mara join the group of neighbours and children, about fifty people. They walk out almost half a mile to the seal, out across the sand, grooved and furrowed by the tides. They take turns, one by one, walking out, a human chain carrying buckets of water out to the baby seal. They take turns bringing hot coffee out to each other as the cold chills their skins. Into the darkening sky, grief and pain and love are poured out, ragged prayers in silence. As they toil late into the night hours, Evelyn knows that the ocean would reveal its voice, speak her name. . . . *this same silence is become speech, with the speed of darkness*. They watch the tide wash in, slowly embracing the seal; its mother is there, her slick head and the velvet orbs of her eyes gleaming in the moonlit tides, waiting as her child is returned to her. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 185-186)

\*

In the final chapter of the novel:

Evelyn looks out over the bay. She reads the letters from Sam and Grace, their words softening in her hands. She holds them to her like flowers gathered from the perfumed sky. She hears Jordan's voice . . . *bravery creates new flowers*. Slips the letters into the endpapers of her copy of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, which she is re-reading for her fall semester of teaching. She closes the book and thinks about how she will approach the novel in new ways with her students this year. From the angle of risk, perhaps . . . new readings, to the lighthouse and back again. In the novel, the act of thinking, the act of giving human love, the act of dipping a brush in shades of blue and green, trying to convey what is seen on paper, the act of making something enduring and permanent—these are acts made at great risk. In the novel, the word risk is the repeated refrain, the response to the question: What does it all mean?

Summer swells and ripens her garden in a deep green fuse of light. Lupins and poppies, Japanese irises, sunflowers and deep pink damask roses fill the beds with color and fragrance. She is beginning a new book of poems.

Classes will be beginning soon in the fall of a new year at the Academy. Her course recommendations for the Interdisciplinary programs in Arts and Education have been accepted and The Novel and Education course will begin in September. She has recommended to the Interdisciplinary committee that the mentorship program continue, merging Arts and Education programs.

Past the point, beyond the clay cliffs, the alpine meadow is in full bloom, a carpet of wild flowers, fragrant and humming with the velvet symphonies of bees. Down by the craggy edges of wild grasses are enormous, red poppies, as if transplanted from some mystical realm. Evelyn has these poppies in her garden. *Papaver orientale*, grown from the seeds Catherine has given her. These will be Catherine's legacy in Evelyn's garden, continuously reseeding themselves into profusion, their vivid red petals like layers of crinkly, transparent silk centered in deep stains of black and purple velvet. *The poppies whisper Catherine's stories . . . ancient Greeks used poppies to decorate shrines to Demeter, goddess of agriculture and fertility. Cleopatra's contemporaries believed that poppies assured life after death. Romans used poppies in witchcraft. Poppies are magic, their language will make you a gardener and every season, your hands in the earth, you will feel their joy. You will stand barefoot on the grass and it will seem miraculous to have grown something so beautiful.*

In the distance, Evelyn hears the seabirds calling her name. The white cranes stilt across the mudflats, herons, steeple-stemmed, ankling the wetlands. The morning with its smile of light embraces her and the blue waters shine without a stain, the sea stretched like silk across the bay.

She sits in her garden, a woman writing in a citrus drizzle of petals, clematis opening, the belled-tongues of fuschia whispering stories, words that wrap her like towels after a bath, words to die in, a grammar of sighs and history. Catherine's voice . . . *grow rosemary for remembrance. Remember the Satukei, the early manual of garden design written by a court noble in eleventh century Japan. . . . recall the places of beauty you know. And then, on your chosen site, let memory speak.* A woman writing, the art on white sheets like love. Sometimes, if she listens hard enough, she can hear her father's voice over the waters, singing lullabies in her mother tongue, the words unspooling a string of saffron lights around her heart. *Soja, raj kumari, soja, sleep princess, sleep.*

This is how she wants the story to be, trembling with light and vibrant hues, filled with the earth, spilling through waters, dancing in the cathedrals of the wind. (Dunlop, 1999, p.192-193)

## Synesthaesia: A River Runs Through Her Heart

I tell my students to write through the veins of their hearts, as if rivers ran through them. Write with the impulse of synesthaesia, every sense colliding . . . there are other ways to hear, to see. In the movie “The Five Senses,” one of the characters believes that you can smell love. A man who is going deaf learns he can feel music through his hands and his body through the wood in church pews.

I am reminded of summers when I was 15 and 16 years old, when I worked as a camp counsellor at a camp for deaf and disabled children. On Friday nights we had the best dances, the kids kicking off their shoes, feeling the vibrations of the music through the wooden floors of the old school gymnasium. The veins of their bodies hearing, pulsing with the notes of Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven,” Eric Clapton’s “Layla,” Chicago’s “Color My World.” These children taught me new ways to hear, sensual, embodied ways to be in the world. These were important stories, important theories shaping my life.

Today, as a poet, as a professor, I reject my former professors who criticized “mixed” metaphors, who told me in Honours English that if one was to write literary criticism as a scholar, one could not be a creative writer, one would have to choose. I refuse to choose. I challenge my students and colleagues not to accept these limitations. I sense things in synesthaesic ways, colours and images have a scent, a taste. I know the scents and tastes and feel of oil paints . . . alizarin crimson, sap green . . . I know the scent of the ocean, the taste of it, even if I am thousands of miles away.

Stories are theories, I tell my students, they are theories, opening up the scars of history, geography. Stories map us. Every work of research is in some sense a narrative, a fiction. Tell me your story and I will tell my own in new ways. I will read you, reread you, see myself anew, retell our stories intertwined, tangled and the hallways of our ivory towers will breathe and pulse with the beating of hearts and wings and blood and apertures of hope. *Hope is a feathered thing* (Dickinson, 1981).

Last September, I moved from Boundary Bay to take a position at York University in Toronto. This move engendered new stories, new poems, a new landscape, a teaching and research life in an urban landscape within which I am creating new narratives that still hold the Pacific coast in the imagination. I mourn the loss of stars in an urban sky full of light pollution, the stars are invisible in the night skies of Toronto. Yet, I am learning to love my new geography, my room of my own at the university. As Marcel Proust wrote (in Kraft, 1999): “The voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes

but in having new eyes” (p. 7). Perhaps I will learn to love this new urban place with the sensibility of poet Pierre Unik who felt the names of Paris metro stops spelled out on the station walls as words of love, landscape as beloved. I am learning to think of Toronto this way, the names of the subway stations forming a poetics of place: Eglinton, Bloor, St. Clair, Spadina, Museum, the words on my tongue becoming collective history, memory, music, humming like chords, tawny grammar of the heart.

I write new poems, located in new geography, and yet, the ocean remains part of my tawny grammar, ingrained in memories that are always a coming home.

### The Language of Water

I am standing without you  
on these city streets  
in a new climate of ice and snow,  
the lights on Bloor shining with promise

such absurd courage—this leavetaking  
my solo-flight to the other side of the country.

Most days I am content,  
my abstract longings soothed  
in seductions of ivory hallways,  
conversations with scholars and students,  
breathing flames into my manuscripts.  
I draw all this around me,  
the scent of smoke in my nostrils.  
I dream a perfect vision,  
crystalline images  
of the poet’s life.

But there are the hours  
when I hold your name  
under my tongue  
until it bleeds  
and memory insists on another map,  
a dark and dusky knowledge,  
the tawny grammar that speaks  
the language of water.

And I remember a place  
where the rivers empty into the bay,  
the clay cliffs rising  
on the edges of the Pacific Coast,  
where the winds whisper secrets and  
starlings fill the sky in a bolt of black silk,  
where arbutus trees,

their sea-stripped limbs gleaming red  
reach out for me and  
the word *holy* forms in my mouth.

And I remember a time  
when our bodies sang  
on stormbeds  
the music of wingbeats,  
when you would take my hair  
in your hands,  
pour it down the length of my spine.

The valves of my heart  
open and close  
and the scent of the ocean  
breaks me open  
drives me to my knees. (Dunlop, in press)

### Terra Incognita

She moves to meet the centuries, her feet  
All shod with emerald, and her light robe  
Fringed with leaves singing in the jazel air.  
(Valancy Crawford, 1972, p. 238)

This is a city of dreams. Of carved stone and brick buildings, copper rooftops turned green with age, a labyrinth of subway tunnels, the steel gleam of streetcar tracks and office towers, the lights of 24 hour pharmacies. These are new maps carving themselves upon my skin. Underneath, the faint tracings of other geographies, other journeys.

I am hoping there is room for me here, close to the harbour, on this new edge of the world. Your scent is tangled in my sheets. And the past is a book trying to close itself. For this is a dark season. Ice demanding heat. The body remembering in the blackened wicks of winter streets. I am haunted by dreams of summer gardens, wild irises and tea roses. And it is the touch of your hands I remember, your hands on my body speaking, and in the night sky, sparks flying.

I have heard that in dark times, the eyes begin to see. If I had my way, I would hold you up to the light until I could read you, your skin transparent, steeped in memory. I would have you here, your body my compass. Every scar and vein a cartography, a lover's code. Your mouth in the darkness the point where light enters me, an estuary, where the sea loosens my blood, and a river runs through my heart. (Dunlop, in press)

\*

## Rush Hour at Bloor Subway Station

The bodies crush  
through sliding doors  
adrenalin pumping  
through the underground veins of the city.

I stand with them,  
briefcase in hand and in this hour  
I ache for those wetlands  
on the Western coast  
where I was made new.  
I long for springtime there,  
among newborn birds  
nested among the reeds  
preparing for flight.

I dream of you now,  
of how your salt bed  
changed me forever.  
My tongue remembers  
cutting itself  
on the line of your hipbone,  
the sheets of fragrant smoke,  
your arms holding me against  
the stormglass of the world.

In the subway station,  
something rises at the edges of my vision.  
An old man plays his violin,  
the strings vibrating Mozart,  
adagio above the steel thunder  
of the approaching train.

And I smile,  
my eyes suddenly flooding,  
because I know  
you are here with me now,  
I carry your salt with me always,  
you are my *white light still and moving*  
*my still point of the turning world,*  
and the air pulses hot and alive  
with the beating of wings. (Dunlop, in press)

\*

In telling our stories, we must push at the existing order of things. In the geologies and anthropologies and genealogies of our landscapes, in these histories and memories of place, we find our human stories. By sharing stories, journals, poems, narratives of lived experiences, we expose ourselves to many kinds of dread and many kinds of desire. We expose our open hearts, engage in open-hearted scholarship, in a curriculum that encompasses the

emotional. And at the fundamental root of scholarship is eros, a passionate desire to connect with others and with the natural world, a desire to deepen our understandings of ourselves and others, the passion to transform or preserve the world as we understand it deeply.

An erotics of place is necessary. An erotics of place engages us in thinking about how we know the world in sensual, primal ways. In academia, it is fear of the open heart that controls academic institutions and modes of writing research. To combat this fear, we need eros, a deep, loving connection to ourselves, to others, and to place. And within this eros, narrative scholarship becomes a way of loving ourselves, others, and the world more deeply. Scholarship becomes *floreCIMIENTO*, a flowering, or opening of the heart, a tawny grammar.

### Notes on Contributor

**Rishma Dunlop** is a professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, Toronto. Her research interests include literary studies, aesthetics, feminist theory, environmental studies, theories of difference, and fine arts and narrative based research methodologies. She is a poet and fiction writer.

### References

- Bishop, E. (1969). At the fishhouses. In *Elizabeth Bishop: The complete poems 1927-1979* (p. 72). New York: Noonday Press, Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux.
- Carson, R. (1962). *Silent spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Carson, R. (1968). *The sea around us*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Dickinson, E. (1981). #254 "Hope" is the thing with feathers. In R.W. Franklin (Ed.), *Original text, The manuscript books of Emily Dickinson in volumes* (I, 264 [fascicle 13]). Cambridge, Mass and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. First publication date 1891.
- Dunlop, R. (1999). *Boundary Bay: A novel as educational research*. Doctoral dissertation. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia.
- Dunlop, R. (2000). *Boundary Bay*. Winnipeg: Staccato Chapbooks/Turnstone Press.
- Dunlop, R. (2001). *The art of writing inquiry*. Halifax: Backalong Books.
- Dunlop, R. (in press). *The body of my garden*. Toronto: The Mansfield Press.
- Kraft, J. (1999). *Literary Paris*. New York: Watson:Guptill Publications.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The visible and the invisible* (Alphonso Lingis, Trans.). Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
- Rukeyser, M. (1968). *The speed of darkness*. New York: Random House.
- Tempest Williams, T. (1992). *Refuge: An unnatural history of family and place*. New York: Vintage.
- Tempest Williams, T. (1994). *An unspoken hunger: Stories from the field*. New York: Pantheon.
- Valancy Crawford, I. (1972). *Isabella Valency Crawford: Collected poems*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

