

## Naramata Road

Rishma Dunlop

You know this is a landscape that tends to unfasten  
you, brings you again and again to the brink of weeping.

No matter how many departures and disappearances,  
you are marked by this beauty, astonishment that depends on loss.

As the bitter edges of things slide into memory and flesh, you  
claim the meaning of your days on this frayed loveliness.

You sign your name to it.

At these moments something is given back to you, panic  
dusted off, calmed by desert heat in the summer, vineyards

heavy with grapes. The body is set to music, carried by rain in  
the spring resurrection of orchards. In the fall, the road swells with

harvest, the ripe comfort of apples. Even in winter, the skeletons of  
trees dangle gifts, Golden Delicious earrings abandoned to the wind.

The ghosts of dead teenagers and drunks live here, their  
voices echo along the curves and bends, in the rocky incisions of

graves, haunted by memories of prom dresses, cigarettes smoked in  
the Seven Eleven parking lot and behind the high school.

There is a soft spot in everything.

You drive that road, move into a sky like a late Turner painting, gold  
and amber, white canvas dreaming colors of Venice. It makes you believe

there is tenderness in every geography. And this has the power to change you,  
unweight your eyelids every morning, as the sky leans towards the absolute.

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## Notes on the Cover

“Naramata Road” is part of an ongoing body of work between poet Rishma Dunlop and artist Suzanne Northcott. Beginning with *The Body of My Garden*, (Northcott’s exhibition at the Landa Lando Fine Art Gallery in 2002, after publication of Dunlop’s book of poems by this title), Dunlop and Northcott have continued to work in response to each other’s genres. Sometimes, in Dunlop’s case, the work produced is *ekphrasis* (writing about art). In the case of “Naramata Road,” Northcott’s visual art was produced in response to Dunlop’s poem and to a visit to the geographical location of the road in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. The particular beauty and ecosystems of this region of Canada, a continuation of the Sonoran Desert, with its fruit orchards, lakes, and vineyards, fertile, yet arid, have been an inspiration to both artists. Recent fires to this region in 2003 had a devastating effect on ecology, affecting wildlife, plantlife, and forestation. The area is still recovering from the destruction of homes and neighbourhoods.

## Artist Biographies

**Rishma Dunlop** is an award-winning Canadian poet, playwright, essayist, and fiction writer. She is the author of four books of poetry: *White Album* (art by Suzanne Northcott), *Metropolis*, *Reading Like a Girl*, and *The Body of My Garden*. Books as editor include: *White Ink: Poems on Mothers and Motherhood* and *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets*. She received the Emily Dickinson Prize for Poetry in 2003 and has been a finalist for the CBC Literary Prize in Poetry. She is a professor in the Faculty of Education and the Department of English at York University, Toronto, where she is Coordinator of the Creative Writing Program. Her research and artistic work have included collaborations with visual artists and musicians. Her works with artist Suzanne Northcott have included collaborative publications, exhibitions, performances, and conference presentations. Dunlop is editor of the international poetry journal *Studio*.

**Suzanne Northcott** is an interdisciplinary artist working with installation, video, painting, and drawing. She is interested in the shifting place where one thing becomes another, studying dreams and meditation and themes of transformation, decay, metamorphosis, and migration. These interests are manifested in her continuing history of collaborative work with poets, scientists, and artists in other genres. Northcott’s work is collected and published internationally. She lives in Fort Langley, British Columbia.