

er dieu les deux  
 mains jointes dans une  
 même voix la langue tressée à  
 ses gestes c'est le par-  
 ler bas des  
 plus pauvres qui manquent de mots pour  
 dire  
 chaque chose et ce qu'ils sont l'un  
 pour l'autre les pos-  
 sédés de la vie que dé-  
 possède leur langue ap-  
 pauvrie

« [J]e n'é- / çris pas, » peut-on encore lire,  
 « j'in- / terprète une / à une les données  
 é- / crasées de la / boîte noire du monde :  
 le crâne a- / trophié d'une humanité tom- /  
 bée bas. »

*Les Verbes majeurs* et *Trombes* sont deux  
 recueils majeurs qui révèlent chacun à leur  
 façon quelques mots essentiels écrits à voix  
 basse, en mode mineur chez Nepveu, ou  
 emportés par une belle puissance lyrique  
 chez Ouellet.

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## Tasting this Place

### Sasenarine Persaud

*In a Boston Night*. TSAR \$16.95

### Fred Wah

*Is a Door*. Talonbooks \$17.95

### E.D. Blodgett

*Poems for a Small Park*. AU \$19.95

### Gillian Jerome

*Red Nest*. Nightwood \$17.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall

These four books give us the rich and  
 complex tastes of particular places: Persaud  
 gives us a Boston suburb juxtaposed with  
 a South American homeland; Wah offers  
 slices of Mexico, Vancouver, Thailand, and  
 Laos; Blodgett sketches the outlines of a  
 city park in Alberta; Jerome gives us the  
 East Side of Vancouver with its condoms  
 and dragons. All four poets strive to give us  
 the rich flavors of these places, and explore  
 what the idea of place means in terms of  
 self-location.

Persaud's poems are delicious on the  
 tongue. He gives us "honeyed milk"  
 ("XVI: The Flame of Shiva—a Phallus?")  
 and "Galub jamuns soaked in red wine"  
 ("Boston Cheek"). There is an under-tongue  
 taste of native language that the speaker—  
 and now the reader—longs to hold in the  
 mouth. On the plate, we have Brookline.  
 This town/suburb becomes a strange land  
 he helps us taste in its strangeness—the way  
 the trees bud, the way snow compacts to ice.  
 The speaker is living in exile and the poems  
 are poems of displacement. Persaud avoids  
 the typical ex-pat approaches of nostalgia  
 for homeland or gratefulness for the new  
 home. One of the greatest strengths of these  
 poems, especially as a book of exile, is that  
 Persaud shows us what's not there—no  
 mother, no sweet cookie to end the meal, no  
 satiety for the speaker. As we read through  
 the book there is a growing tension in the  
 spaces between the images. This is longing  
 without nostalgia. The poet is also adept  
 at balancing—the dryness of daily life, the  
 bitterness of exile, and the sweetness of  
 memory: "turmeric corn, lime peas, flaky  
 roti, curried Yukon, / Basmati—she went  
 to London—rice, baked turkey— / enough,  
 enough, you ass, shut down the computer"  
 ("Thanksgiving"). Each poem, held on the  
 tongue, tastes true—he's one of those rare  
 poets who gets the recipe of humanness  
 exactly right.

Fred Wah's poem "Mr. In-Between" ends  
 "how to find the door / to stand in the way /  
 just be there Mr. In-Between" and this gives  
 us a feel for the poems in the book. While  
 the other three books are rooted in place,  
 Wah's book is about standing in the door-  
 way of many places. We press our ear to the  
 door and hear a cacophony of languages, of  
 songs, of voices coming through from the  
 other side. Both the gift and the frustration  
 of this book is our inability to walk through  
 that door. Like Persaud, Wah explores the  
 landscape of the exile: "From the summit /  
 of myself I was on the other side, / part of

the exclusion act" ("Count"). Wah avoids the temptation to simplify the complex nature of this dislocation, but in dislocating the reader, he also keeps us outside. He counters that, perhaps, with sound: Wah's poems sing: "Being where / overwhelming scars / screams and frogs / attention to the mud / of mind embroidered shy" ("Evening before 30 quiet"). But while there is a pleasure in this sound, there is a dizziness to it too. These poems spin—we want to put our finger out and stop the record, just for a moment. Ultimately we are tantalized, but in the end Wah doesn't give us anything that rings in the ears for days after reading.

E.D. Blodgett's poems strive for stillness. The book reads like a meditation—a quiet moment in a yoga studio, or a walk through the park at sunrise—refreshing, but also temporal. What the poems are missing is dialogue—we have no real sense of a conversation with the poet, or of a conversation with the self. The poems are almost pure image, but unlike many contemporary haiku, which they resemble in other ways, they don't take surprising turns or use the final line to snap us awake. Instead, they lull us: "reaching with longing for / the other bank that rose / forever beyond their grasp" ("Gifts of a River"). Lines like this make us pause, but ultimately move on again, looking for the next plaque, the next poem. The best moments are the metaphorical surprises: "generations of / the sun standing in sheaves" ("Dreams of a City"). These small moments of perfection resonate in our ears. The rest of the poems provide a moment of quiet, but nothing we'd remember after leaving the park and returning to the world.

Gillian Jerome's poems are a visual feast. A reader could stay on one page of the book for hours at a time, tasting the flavours of the images: "People pluck banjos and guitars, drink beer in brown bottles / That turn yellow when they hold them up to the sun" ("Untitled"). Like Blodgett's and Persaud's,

hers is a book of place. One of Jerome's gifts is image juxtaposing while crafting the landscape of East Vancouver. We have a constant shifting of sand, and a hundred surprising leaps and connections: "The song of our liturgy, the song of the answering machine" ("Tenement Song"). Another notable technique is her ability to spin a poem out into the dream world, even into the surreal, and then know exactly when to reel it back in. "Constellation" does this perfectly—we inhabit the real world of the poem enough to plant our feet, and then can follow our dream selves into the landscape of the heart without getting lost.

Reading these poets together is like sitting down to a feast of the newest Canadian poetry. Each gives us a taste of these landscapes, and while some dishes are more satisfying than others, it's delightful to sit at this richly laden table.

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## Souvenirs inédits

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**Anthony Phelps**

*Une phrase lente de violoncelle*. Noroît 17,95 \$

**Gilles Lacombe**

*Trafiquante de lumière*. L'Interligne 11,95 \$

*Les Plages à la laine de chevreau*. L'Interligne 12,95 \$

Compte rendu par Natasha Dagenais

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L'auteur de plus d'une dizaine d'œuvres poétiques, Anthony Phelps, à la fois poète, romancier et diseur, commence son recueil *Une phrase lente de violoncelle* (2005) par « Il était une fois », des mots d'une simplicité trompeuse qui se trouvent dans la première section donnant son titre au recueil. Ces paroles narrent une histoire de rites de passage que reflètent les oscillations entre le passé et le présent. Alors que l'espace du passé exprime le regard d'un enfant ayant vécu dans « le temps de l'insouciance » et d'un adolescent habité par l'allégresse du « pas à pas de la vie », c'est l'homme « aujourd'hui » habitant un présent dans lequel c'est « la vieillesse qui s'installe »