

Camille Martin, a Toronto poet and collage artist, is the author of *Codes of Public Sleep* (Toronto: BookThug, 2007). She was born in El Dorado, Arkansas, and spend her childhood in Lafayette, Louisiana. A classical musician from an early age, she earned graduate degrees in both music and English literature. After residing in New Orleans for fourteen years, following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 she moved to Toronto, where she teaches writing and literature at Ryerson University. Her current work-in-progress is a long poem entitled 'The Evangeline Papers,' based on her Cajun/Acadian heritage and drawing on her recent visit to Nova Scotia to participate in an archaeological dig at Beaubassin and to research Acadian and Mik'maq history and culture. Her website is www.camillemartin.ca.

Also by Camille Martin

Codes of Public Sleep

Sonnets

CAMILLE MARTIN

Shearsman Books
Exeter

Published in the United Kingdom in 2010 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-070-5

First Edition

Copyright © Camille Martin, 2010

The right of Camille Martin to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the editors of the following journals and presses, who published some of the sonnets in this collection, in some cases in earlier versions:

5_ Trope, American Letters & Commentary, Angel House Press, Brown Box, Eleven Eleven, e.ratio, experiment-o, Fell Swoop, Fiera Lingua, Hamilton Stone Review, Jacket, Literary Review of Canada, moria, Stride, Tammy, This, unarmed, Walrus, West Coast Line, White Wall Review

Thanks to Jiří Novak, Jordan Scott and Stuart Ross for their perceptive and helpful readings of the manuscript.

The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council.



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

Cover: 'Harvest' (collage),
copyright © Camille Martin, 2009

for Jiří

☪

comatose in paradise, but happy, happy
feet! is this where i want to go? thrust
into an age unfavourable to being
a guest in one's own home? the guest
so evolved its dying smile causes
offspring to birth on the spot? progeny
doomed to fail superbly, like houdini's
fetters? is this what i want? am i lucky to think
i am? these twittering birds have nothing
on the silence of magicians from the grave. someday
paradise will be thought savage. did rain fall
because i wanted to write a poem about love,
causing significant damage to blameless paper?
here comes the bus, fool. is that it?



i gave you all my sense, blind homunculus,
a sea in a sea. but i'm far from broke.
do you love me, zombie? your main products
are indigo, figments, tricks of cardiac debt,
and a defiant sponge. sometimes your vision,
fluorescent and copious, undershines the diamonds
of your rods and cones and you have to wriggle
your way back, salmon-like, up the information
spillage to the enchanted vapour. you preen
your molecules, all the while scorning the witness
of your deposed gleam. and on your own
little hillside, your own fraudulent
elsewhere, flashing your mirrors into the sun,
you grow roots of endless delay.

œ

like tattered orisons at the end
of a leash, tiny threads of dna flutter
at the bottom of a lake, fragments
betraying the scent of an era, gnomish
figments noticed by none, dispersed
in the murky water breathed by all.
native lumens draft the next
weave, coaxed by drifts of thought
under a sun snoozing off its revels.
a wandering arsonist randomly
sets fire to leaves. moves her hand to write
her lonely fiction. holds her pressure
to the heft. outs her story
for good.



dear incisions: you've amassed a stockpile
of blunders that it was already too late to start
amassing. your fallen muse jars your trance
into a stupor as soon as you start to quench
the gloom of your fragments with a comforting
plot. or maybe not, but there it is, the machine
of your lonely attention constantly initiating shreds
of gratuitous otherness. hazards trapped
in your diced time wail their winged alarms.
and so, dear incisions, enthrall in turn
your testy fool ahead of its grasp. stave in
the hull and shed your muscly garb before
the fossil moon arrives once more
to botch the conning jolt to richer air.



suppose flatness. what then? suppose even surface
is made up. what then? what if i dent itty bitty
identities and remember to smithereens heroic saps
going all the way to town to purchase the certainty
of a certainty, inevitable as a holiday's colours,
sucking along the way for an unconditional bruise,
superior equilibrium undone? lottery glitch. what
then? depending on the deep ending of the handmaiden
to deep identity, the moral of this tale's a little too
complacent, says the sweat of a flea. not enough,
says itinerant dust drifting into a beggar's eyes.
a good enough catalyst comes along once per
flash. no big deal, but here's just enough straw
to make my little nest. what then?



poor souls 1

you already know how i came home.
i saw a yellow wooden house.
i'm always blundering into difficulties.
the case drags on and on.
and this mood comes over me more and more often.
i finally grow contemptuous of myself.
i must change the ribbon on my hat.
then what would i do with my boots?
i'm afraid something will happen if i go on like this.
it's a tangled affair.
yes, anything may happen.
but the last moments are the worst.
there can be no further discussion of it.
let us finish these ripe plums.



coma, amok

whatever i think to ask sinks into a coma
and will not surface for air. “what is it?” whispered
naively is my madeleine, and i’m unable
to enter stage right because the prompter has eaten
the little cake that would’ve clarified everything. whatever
words i write—pub, subway, home—chill
into the numbness of replicas. i’m not
home yet. i’d like to be, but the train keeps
halting, blindly following its route.
whatever i think to do blossoms into
catatonia. the train glides into shifting
terrains. my birthplace recedes into a blank page.
whatever i think to say—casual greeting or rant—
heads home and runs amok.



i dissipate when you need
me most—what am i?
i dig in when you
most need to be alone
with your regret—what
am i? maybe you won't mind
if i just leave you
clawing the air—what am
i? what if i settle
in for a while, your
worst memory—what am i?
or else i'll morph into
you—but what if there's
no you? what am *i*?

parroted weeds

i

so many melodies are lost in the time it takes
to sing. to sing is to quote a slice of lore's
flashy highlights. into light's lonely dwelling
is born a blundering fool. the fool's entranced
lion roars a raw, mystic language. in the language
of its brand new country, "honey" means "hamlet."
hamlet is lost in a labyrinth, at the heart of which,
a velvety orange. orange is the fervour of the foreign blue
night. in the night the bees buzz. they buzz and buzz
just as birds know bird things. thing is, you just can't kiss
life the way you used to. i used to rock the boat like i now
court the lapsed muse of dust. dust motes and sky's pressure
are beautiful if not terribly important to them.
they can't get you for that, can they?

if only memory held the key. if traces were the key to grammar
not yet grammar. if the brute sound waves of jackhammers
were a way to witness. the memory of brutes is brutes
remembering or something remembering brutes. cleaving
or cleaving to. typical, like photographs imagining they capture
perfect moods. just perfect, think the photographs
as they capture brute space. they feel limited. if only they had
perfect readers to rescue them, though readers are unreliable
witnesses. they limit, they garble. they cannot rescue all
their moments. at best, they rescue typical
memories of random jackhammers in crowds. at best,
moments emerge and disintegrate, like babbling crowds
at their not-yet grammar. at best, the crowds are random.
if random, then rescue. if rescue, then witness.

katrina, tundra

i make up paths that end without warning
in the eye of the storm. i know which path to take,
but once i start thinking, deciding becomes
impossible. on the tundra, old juniper bushes were once
juniper berries. i gaze at the news on tv, old enough
to bury childish nostalgia but not too old to cultivate
obsessive watching. a child in the public library,
i gazed at the yellowing pages of sapphire tundra
lakes. i learn of the yellowish waters
of the flood. i learned that ptarmigans
turn white in winter and gazed at an island afloat
in the middle of water shimmering
in the wintry sun. in my neighbourhood,
islands of red ants float in filthy water.

it is the winter of our maudlin logic. logically,
sadness over spilt clouds includes the drained
colour of snow. crying a puddle
of water, the queen reads the sad story
of her voyage through barren woods. weather
reports expire in yesterday's puddled
footprints. the queen, painting herself
into a corner, instructs her mournful scribe to write
footprints into the plan. scribbling we go, treading
down the wheat. the wheat belongs to the queen,
who banishes us to a land of barren furrows.
our furrowed brows point to winter's
orion, toward which the blue queen sails
on a sea of spilt milk.