

Manifesto

Meredith Quartermain

Out of the blue or even pink or yellow, a magazine asked her to write a manifesto—a well-known, highly regarded magazine in which she had always wanted to be printed. She was more than a little dubious of the certainty of manifestos, which could be spelled—toes—this little piggy went to market and this little piggy cried all the way home. *Manifestations en français* waving placards. Boxifications of thought she'd rather seep and leak, divide into streamlets or runnels, soak out to unthought swirls at hard little word-edges. The space between spoken and heard her showing toes would evoke, engage, enact, create. She hurled herself to forming worlds, what unshows itself—the manifesto of erasure and abeyance. The impulsive manifesto shoots rapid fire the least thought—the least considered—tips from her mind's dumpster: bed springs, televisions, one-eyed Eeyores, toaster ovens, hockey sticks. To dither the puck. Say and unsay. I want it all she thought, shilly shallying. A chord instead of a note. A symphony instead of a chord. A universe instead of a symphony. Closing it down in a word: universe. 'Or' or 'a'—it made no difference. It wasn't a pause button, a light switch, a phone hook. A column of battalions from several empires waited. Would it be the onion or the peppermint? The shark or Mack the Knife?

Had manifestoes become a bourgeois project? Was she jaded? To dither. To angst. Would it be the lion throttling a doe? Or the president shooting students? A woman stoned to death, or a woman suckling her child? Down another alley in the maze, why not a manifesto of the sentence? Crossbreed every kind with every other kind—twist and turn the thought shapes—so many butterfly nets. *Une manifestation of*

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clamouring motifs. Unsentencing the sentence. Smashing the piñata of complete thought to clouds of recombining viruses.

She paused on the trail and took a breath. Don't look back. Don't look down. Don't look up at the fire tower on top of the mountain where she'd scattered the ashes of her mother—reaching her hand into the plastic bag inside the pottery urn Mom had kept on her shelf. Scooping up in her fingers grey dust and small pieces of bone. To fling out over the heads of fire weed and lupine and daisies as Mom had said she wanted, not feeling, when she said it, this nothingness of self as dust—the dust that had been her mother clinging to her jeans and boots. Breathing the dust that had been her, had made her.

Meredith Quartermain is a poet of the city. Critics have called her a “spellbinding phrasemaker” whose poetry is “daring,” “cinematic in scope,” and “fearlessly droll.” Her books include *Vancouver Walking* (2005), winner of a BC Book Award for poetry, *Recipes from the Red Planet* (2010), a BC Book Award finalist, and *Nightmarker* (2008), a Vancouver Book Award finalist. During fall 2012, she served as the Vancouver Public Library Writer in Residence, leading workshops in songwriting, and writing about place. Her first novel *Rupert's Land* was published in September 2013.